

1981

HIGHLIGHTS
CHUMASH VAYYIKRA

The name of the third Chumash (the third of the Five Books of the Torah), as also of its first Sedrah, comes from the opening word, Vayyikra ("And (G-d) called").

The Latin name of this Book is Leviticus, referring to the Levites - the members of the tribe of Levi, the Kohanim and Leviim, who were chosen by G-d to conduct the Divine services in the Sanctuary and Beis Hamikdash. The origin of this name is ^{similar to} the Hebrew Toras Kohanim, also known as Sifra - a Halachic ^{Book} ~~Midrash~~, which is a collection of laws and commentaries ~~from the~~ Talmud on the Book of Vayyikra.

Chumash Vayyikra follows Chumash Shemos^{os}, which concluded^s with the erection of the Mishkan (Sanctuary) in the desert, ^{The Mishkan} which was in the form of a tent, called Ohel Mo'ed ("Tent of the Meeting"), that could be taken apart and reassembled as the children of Israel wandered through the ~~desert~~^d on the way to the Promised Land. In the last section of Shemos we read that when the Mishkan was completed a Divine cloud descended and covered it, and the Glory of G-d filled it ~~inside, so that even Mosheh was afraid to enter it.~~ Then G-d called (Vayyikra) unto Mosheh to enter the ~~Sanctuary~~ Ohel Mo'ed, where he received from G-d the laws and precepts connected with the Mishkan, the holy services conducted there, and special laws connected with the holy character and functions of the Kohanim.

But these are not the only laws in the Book of Vayyikra. As will be mentioned later, ~~this~~ this Chumash contains many, ~~indeed most,~~ of the Divine laws and precepts that make ~~this~~ our entire Jewish people "A Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation," as G-d designated it when ~~He~~ He gave us the Torah at Sinai.

Thus, the central theme of Vayyikra is holiness and purity of Jewish life. What makes our Jewish people a "Holy Nation" is a life regulated in every detail by the Divine laws of the Torah. It is not the kind of "holiness" that is reserved for one day in the week, or for certain occasions, but one that permeates the everyday life, and is reflected in action, and in speech, and in thought. Nor is this holiness ~~dis~~connected only with the soul, but also with the body and the ordinary needs of the body, like eating and drinking, ^{such} as are our dietary laws and the laws of family purity, and many others. It is through the fulfilment of all the Mitzvos that we live up to G-d's expectation: "You shall be holy, for I, G-d your G-d, am holy" (19:2).

Here is a brief summary of the highlights of the Book of Vayyikra:

The first part (chapters 1-7) deals with the laws of sacrifices. These include voluntary sacrifices brought by individuals to express, in a tangible way, their devotion to G-d, or, as the case may be, to express gratitude to G-d for special favors. There were also obligatory sacrifices, such as "sin offerings" and "guilt offerings" to atone for a sin or transgression committed unknowingly. In cases where a person was wronged, the wrongdoer had to make restitution first, and express his repentance, before the sacrifice could be accepted. With very few exceptions, no sacrificial offering could atone for a sin committed knowingly and willfully. Elsewhere in this Chumash we find the congregational sacrifices offered in behalf of all the Jewish people. These included the daily sacrifices and additional sacrifices on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, and Festivals.

The Hebrew word for sacrifice, korban, means "bringing closer." The purpose of the korbonos was to bring Jews closer to G-d. The animal sacrifice (only kosher domestic animals - cattle, sheep and goats; and ^{of} ~~of~~ fowl - only

turtle-doves and pigeons, were acceptable) symbolized the surrender of the nature "animal" ~~spirit~~ in man to the Will of G-d. The Divine soul is always ready and willing to submit to G-d's Will, but the "animal" soul, being concerned with the needs of the body, may inadvertently (and sometimes even willfully) stray from the way of G-d. The animal soul, therefore, must be kept in check, controlled and overruled - "sacrificed," so to speak, to G-d. This is what the korban was all about in the days of the Beis Hamikdosh. After the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed, and until such time as it will be restored, prayers substitute for korbonos to bring us closer to G-d; these are our daily prayers and the additional prayers on Shabbos and Festivals.

The next ~~four~~ ^{three} chapters of Vayyikra (8-10) are devoted to the consecration and installation of Aharon, the Kohen Godol, and his sons, the Kohanim, who were to conduct the Divine service in the Mishkan^a.

Having dealt with the holy duties of the Kohanim, the Torah continues with the holy duties of all the Jewish people, whom G-d designated as a "Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation," as mentioned earlier. In order to be so, not just in name but in actual fact, our Jewish people has been given a very special code of conduct, unlike ~~anything~~ any other nation in the world. First among these special laws are the so-called dietary laws, the ~~law~~ laws of ^Klashrus. The Torah (chapt. 11) prescribes which animals are "clean," or kosher, for Jews, and which are unfit and forbidden for Jews. These include animals, birds, fishes, and insects. In this connection, too, at the conclusion of the chapter, the Torah emphasizes the ~~holiness~~ aspect of holiness, so that we should not make the mistake that they are simply "health laws": You shall be holy, for I am holy (11:45). Like all G-d's commandments, the purpose of which is to sanctify

our life and make us holy in both body and soul, so are our Dietary Laws, *all the more so* especially, ~~in fact,~~ because the food we eat becomes ~~our~~ flesh ~~and bone~~ of our flesh and bone of our bones.

Next (chapters 12-15) the Book of Vayyikra deals with laws of purity and purification which have to do with special situations, such as child-birth, "leprosy" of skin and "leprosy" of garment as well as "leprosy" of ^ahouse, wall, and certain body discharges. At first glance it may appear as if some of these laws have to do with hygiene and physical health, but it is quite obvious from the whole body of these laws that they have to do primarily with spiritual purity and holiness.

~~Finally~~ The next chapter (16) describes the holy service on the holiest day of the year (Yom Kippur), in the holiest place (Beis Hamikdosh), by the holiest person (Kohen Godol).

Next follow certain additional laws connected with sacrifices, such as the prohibition of offering sacrifices outside the Tent^t of Meeting (in the desert) or outside the Beis Hamikdosh when it was built, and ^tthe prohibition of eating any kind of blood. The latter prohibition is ~~is~~ repeated several times for special emphasis. (The laws connected with the preparation of meat: the manner in which a kosher animal is slaughtered (shechitah), the soaking, salting, and ~~washing~~ washing of fresh meat, ensure the maximum extraction of blood from the meat before it ~~is~~ goes into the pot.)

The next section (chapters 18-22) contain a series of laws and teachings to ensure the highest standards of morality, decency, honesty and all other good traits in the life of a Jew, as an individual, as a family man, and as a

member of the community. Here we find the laws about the sanctity and purity of Jewish family life, the prohibition of marriage between certain close relatives, the prohibition of immoral and indecent conduct. (Chap. 18); laws that are to be observed as our duties to ~~fix~~ fellow-man, such as consideration of the poor at harvest time; not to steal, lie, or cheat; not to take advantage of the weak or helpless; not to slander or bear tales; not to hate or take vengeance, ~~avodah~~ or carry a grievance. It is here that we find the Great Principle of the Torah, "Love your fellow as yourself" (19:18). Here we also find the prohibition of sorcery and ~~magic~~ magic and other pagan customs that the Jews had seen first in Egypt and were to see among the Canaanites. Again ~~we~~ there is the exhortation, "You shall be holy unto Me, for I, G-d, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations, that you should be Mine" (20:26). The section concludes with the law of Chilul Hashem and Kiddush Hashem - ~~חילול השם וקידוש השם~~ which, in a wider sense, means not to do anything that would ~~be~~ disgrace or dishonor G-d's Name, or the Jewish name, or the Torah, but to adhere faithfully to the way of the Torah and Mitzvos, thereby glorifying and sanctifying G-d's Name. Under certain circumstances a Jew is required to give his life "Al Kiddush Hashem" - "For the Sanctification of G-d's Name," and countless Jews throughout the generations did, in fact, choose death rather than deny G-d or His Torah and Mitzvos.

The rest of the Book of Vayyikra deals with the Holy Days ~~of~~ Shabbos and Yom Tov (chapt. 23); the Perpetual Light of the Menorah, and the ~~the~~ arrangement of the twelve loaves of the Shewbread, in the Sanctuary (24); the laws of the holy Sabbatical Year (Shemittah) and the Jubilee Year (Yovel), in connection with which we find the famous passage, "You shall proclaim

liberty throughout the land unto all its inhabitants" (25:10).

Finally there is the Admonition (Tochachah), beginning with the words, "If you will walk in ~~my~~ statutes and keep My commandments and do them..." then follow all the Divine blessings of peace and prosperity ~~mentioned~~ mentioned there, while warning of the dire consequences of disobeying G-d's commandments, which are also clearly spelled out in the last Sedrah of Vayyikra (B'chukosai, chapt. 26).

The very last section of Vayyikra deals with laws concerning sacred vows, as when one desires to consecrate part of his possessions to G-d, and with firstlings of cattle and sheep, as well as tithe (maaser b'hemah), already sacred ~~belonging~~ to G-d (to be given to the Kohanim), and related laws.

The final verse of Vayyikra reads: "These are the commandments which G-d commanded Mosheh for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai." It seems to emphasize, in summary, that while the Book of Vayyikra (Toras Kohanim) contains a variety of Mitzvos, some as simple and understandable as respect for parents, while others, like the laws of purity and holiness, which are beyond human understanding - all are G-d's commandments given to ~~us~~ us at Mount Sinai through Mosheh Rabbeinu. (, with complete obedience and self-surrender, It is the fulfilment of all the Mitzvos/which makes our Jewish people "A Kingdom of Kohanim (G-d's servants) and a Holy Nation."