

Shalom Rav
Insights on the Weekly *Parasha*





Rabbi Shalom Rosner

SHALOM
RAV
INSIGHTS ON THE WEEKLY PARASHA

VAYIKRA • BEMIDBAR • DEVARIM

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
Marc Lesnick

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Shalom Rav
Insights on the Weekly Parasha
Vayikra, Bemidbar, Devarim

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This book is dedicated to our dear parents

***Rabbi David and Eileen Lesnick
Shaya and Rhona Bar-Chama***

*Each of whom has served as a role model
for us and our children as individuals dedicated
to Torah, Avoda and Gemilut Hasadim.*

And to our dear children

***Ariel and Rinat, Ori and Noam
Adena
Sarit and Yonatan
Rami and Achinoam
Amichai***

*Each of whom has brought us tremendous naht,
by following in the path established by their grandparents.*

Tamar and Marc Lesnick

אשר זעליג וייס

כגן 8

פעיה"ק ירושלים ת"ו

בס"ד

ידיד נפשי הרה"ג ר' שלום רזנר שליט"א רב קהילת נופי השמש בבית שמש ידוע ומפורסם בשערי תורה בשיעוריו הנפלאים והמרתקים, ואלפים הם שומעי לקחו תמידין כסדרן. אך עד עתה ידענו רק את תורתו שבע"פ, ועתה זכה יקיר לבבי איש תורה דעת וחסד ר' שי לזניק נ"י ללקט, לכתוב, ואף לערוך לקט פנינים יקרים מפז ומפנינים מדרשותיו של הרב על פרשיות השבוע ולהגיש אותם לפני ציבור שוחרי התורה בלשון צחה ונקיה, ערוך בטוב טעם ודעת השוה לכל נפש.

בטוחני שרבים יתענגו על ספר יקר זה ויפיקו ממנו תועלת רבה.

ברכתי להרה"ג הרב רזנר שליט"א ואתו עמו ר' שי שזכות התורה תעמוד להם להתברך בכל משאלות לבם, ויזכו תמיד להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה בבריות גופא ונהורא מעליא.

באהבה יתירה

אשר וייס



ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
RAV ASHER WEISS'S LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

My dear friend, HaRav HaGaon Rav Shalom Rosner *shlit"a*, the Rav of Kehillat Nofei HaShemesh in Beit Shemesh, is well-known in the Torah world for his wonderful and fascinating *shiurim*, with thousands of loyal followers who listen to his *shiurim*. Until now, we were familiar with his *Torah Shebe'al Peh*, and now, my dear friend Rav Shai (Marc) Lesnick, a man of Torah, wisdom and *hesed*, was privileged with writing down and editing the pearls of wisdom from the *derashot* of Rav Rosner, given weekly on *parashat hashavua*, and making them available to the Torah community in a clear and concise style, and edited in a judicious and accessible manner.

I am certain that all will enjoy this valuable book and will derive much benefit from it.

I express my best wishes to HaGaon HaRav Rosner and Rav Shai (Marc) Lesnick, that the *zekhut* of the Torah shall protect them, and may they be blessed with health and the ability to continue to spread and encourage the study and observance of Torah.

With great love,
Asher Weiss

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הרה"צ' ש"כט
ראש ישיבה וראש כולל
ישיבת רבינו יצחק אלהון

מכתב ברכה

עברתי על כמה מהמאמרים שבספרו של כב' יקירי הר"ר שלו' נ"י על
הפרשיות ונהייתי מאוד מהרעיונות וגם מאופן סידור הדברים,
וברכתי להרב המחבר שימצא הספר חן בעיני התלמידים וילמדו בו.
ויפה עשה ידידי הר"ר שלו' שהמתין מלהדפיס ספרו זה בעיני
השקפה עד לאחר שי"א שמו והתפרסם בעולם התורה כבעל הלכה,
ואשר ממילא דבריו בעיני השקפה יתקבלו ביותר.

בכבוד,
צ"י שכטר

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF RAV HERSHEL SCHACHTER'S LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

I reviewed several of the *divrei Torah* that appear in the book of my dear friend Rav Shalom Rosner on the *parshiyot*, and I very much enjoyed the thoughts and the manner of presentation. My warmest wishes to the author that the book will be enjoyed and studied by his students. My friend Rav Shalom acted wisely and waited to publish a work on *hashkafa* until after he became well known as a halakhic scholar, so that his words of *hashkafa* would be accepted more readily.

With respect,
Tzvi (Hershel) Schachter

Contents

Preface by Marc Lesnick xvii

Introduction xxi

VAYIKRA

Parashat Vayikra

- The Purpose of the *Korbanot* 3
Reconnecting to Hashem through *Korbanot* 7
Be Humble When You Are at Your Greatest 10
Recognizing the Calling 12
Rei'ah Niho'ah 14
Why Add Salt to *Korbanot*? 16
The Sensitivity of Burning Feathers 19

Parashat Tzav

- Appreciating the Everyday 21
The Fire of Teaching Torah 25
Korban Toda: A Celebratory Public
Admission and Thanks 27
Terumat HaDeshen: The Future Built on the Past 29

ix

Lighting the Fire in Every Jew 31
The Inside Story 33

Parashat Shemini

It's about the Journey, Not Just the Destination 36
The Implicit Transgression of Nadav and Avihu 39
It Is Likely My Fault 44
A Torah Peace 47
The Lesson of Fins and Scales 50

Parashat Tazria

Understanding the Impurity Caused by Childbirth 52
Kashrut: The Prerequisite of Life 55
Circumcision on the Eighth Day 58
The Source of Transgression Is External 61
The Elixir of Life 64

Parashat Metzora

Tzaraat HaBayit: Punishment or Reward? 67
The Significance of the Unique Elements
of the *Metzora*'s Offering 69
Calling Out Impurity 72
Salvation through *Metzora'im* 75

Parashat Aharei Mot

The Goat That Wins the Lottery 78
Lighting the Flame from Within 81
The Symbolism of the Yom Kippur Service 83
Achieving Full Potential 86
Refrain from Two Prohibitions 89

Parashat Kedoshim

A Holy Nation Comprised of Holy Individuals 91
The Nature of Giving 94
Thought, Not Just Action 96
Man as Subject and Object 98

x

Bring Out the Inner Goodness	101
Critique Yourself before You Critique Others	106
Slavery Shaped Our Perspective on Liberty	108

Parashat Emor

Shabbat or <i>Mo'adim</i> ?	111
In the Midst of That Very Day	114
Making <i>Sefira</i> Count	117
The Significance of the <i>Omer</i>	119
No <i>Sheheyanu</i> on <i>Sefirat HaOmer</i>	122
The National Implications of the Acts of Individuals	124
Sukkot in the Desert vs. Sukkot for Generations	127

Parashat Behar

What's the Connection?	130
Ethical Behavior Transmitted from Sinai	133
Exile as Punishment for Violating <i>Shemitta</i>	136
The Lesson of <i>Bi'ur Peirot</i>	139
Lessons of <i>Shemitta</i>	141
Window Shopping and the Prohibition of <i>Ona'a</i>	143
The Rationale Behind a <i>Heter Iska</i>	145

Parashat Behukkotai

Diligence in Learning Torah	148
Extinction or Change of Nature?	151
Close Yet Distant	154
In the Merit of the Land of Israel	157
The Significance of the Order of the <i>Avot</i>	160

BEMIDBAR

Parashat Bemidbar

Why Was the Torah Given in the Desert?	165
The Significance of <i>Sefer HaPekudim</i>	167

Twelve Different Flags to Unite a People	170
Thinking with Your Head	174
Dan's Protection	176
Surprising Numbers in the Book of Numbers	178
Moshe's Sacrifice for Klal Yisrael	181

Parashat Naso

The Importance of <i>Shalom Bayit</i>	184
The <i>Nazir</i> and Gaining Self-Control	187
The <i>Nazir's</i> Youthful Attitude	190
The <i>Nazir</i> "Brings" Himself	193
The Triple Blessing	195
A Receptacle for <i>Berakha</i>	197
A Lesson from Manoah	199

Parashat Behaalotekha

One Solid Foundation	201
Maintaining the Excitement	203
The <i>Pesah Sheni</i> Jew	205
Moshe's Swiftness in Obtaining a Reply	208
The Undertone of the Trumpets	210
A Challenging Journey	213
A Truly Humble Man	216

Parashat Shelah

A Pedagogical Lesson from Hashem's Handling of the Spies	218
Our Enemy Is Like Our Bread	221
The <i>Maapilim</i> : What Was So Wrong?	223
The Uniqueness of <i>Halla</i>	227
<i>Tzitzit</i> as a Symbol of Our Servitude to Hashem	230
Serving as a Receptacle	234

Parashat Korah

Naming a <i>Parasha</i> for <i>Korah</i>	236
Dispute That Is Not for the Sake of Heaven	238
Korah's Common-Sense Rebellion	242

A Dual Aspect of <i>Tzitzit</i> : Belief and Performance	245
Silence Is Golden	247
A Deeper Understanding of the Word “ <i>Mahloket</i> ”	250

Parashat Hukat

The <i>Para Aduma</i> : Why Here and Not in <i>Vayikra</i> ?	252
The Dual Meaning of <i>Hukat</i>	255
What Was Moshe and Aharon’s Transgression at <i>Mei Meriva</i> ?	258
Making an Accounting	263

Parashat Balak

What Do the Letters of the Word “ <i>Balak</i> ” Represent?	265
What Does Going “With” Mean?	266
The Gift of Time	268
Past, Present, and Future	270
Wonder of Wonders – Miracle of Miracles	272
Lessons Learned from Bilam	274
Bilam Compared and Contrasted	278

Parashat Pinhas

Constancy and Consistency	281
Separation Anxiety	284
Purity of Heart	287
Preparation for Departure	290
Characteristics of a Leader	294

Parashat Matot

The Importance of Keeping a Promise	297
Whose Revenge – Hashem’s or Bnei Yisrael’s?	299
Lessons from Omissions	302
Important Tip from a Dip	306
Moshe’s Concern with the Requests of the Tribes of Reuven and Gad	308
The Excuse of the Tribes of Gad and Reuven	311

xiii

A Lesson in Conflict Resolution 314
Everlasting Effects 316

Parashat Masei

The Significance of Listing all the Journeys 319
The Mitzva of Settling *Eretz Yisrael* 322
The Purpose of the Cities of Refuge 325
Environmentalism and Its Limitations 328
Disclosure of the Date of Aharon HaKohen's Death 330
Is the Mitzva a Transgression in Disguise? 333
The Relevance of the Death of the *Kohen Gadol* 335

DEVARIM

Parashat Devarim

Introduction to *Devarim* 339
Eikha and *Ayeka* 343
Success Is Best Kept Hidden 346
Accusing or Excusing? 348
The Power of a Mitzva 350
It's My Fault 352

Parashat Va'ethanan

Every Little Bit Counts 355
Two Covenants of Torah 358
Knowing Our Creator 360
Honoring Parents: Not Just Gratitude 364
Transmitting the Tradition 366
The Fifth Section of *Shulhan Arukh* 369
Affixing a Mezuza 371
The Significance of the Letter *Vav* 373

Parashat Ekev

Inappropriate Threshing 375
Mitzvot Are a Package Deal 378

xiv

<i>Birkat HaMazon</i>	380
Transmission of Torah to Children	384
Treating the Convert Properly	386

Parashat Re'eh

A Blessing or a Curse?	388
From Singular to Plural	390
The Way to Achieve Closeness to Hashem	396
Open Your Hand	398
Location, Location, Location ...	400
True Happiness	402

Parashat Shofetim

Guard Our Gateways	406
The Danger of Bribery	408
A Monumental Lesson	411
Neighborly Feelings	413
Sustainability in the Torah	416
<i>Tamim</i> = Innocent? Naïve?	418
Respecting Rabbinic Authority	421

Parashat Ki Tetze

The <i>Eshet Yefat To'ar</i>	424
Returning Lost Souls	427
The Promise of <i>Shiluah Hakan</i>	431
One Step at a Time	434
<i>Matza</i> or <i>Motzei</i>	436
Weighing In on <i>Emuna</i>	438
Lack of Memory Due to Arrogance	441

Parashat Ki Tavo

All In	443
The Significance of Bowing	445
<i>Yirat Shamayim</i> Is Key	448
Forget a Blessing?	451
True Blessings	453

Just for Not Being Happy?	455
<i>Merov Kol</i>	457
Happy Ending?	459
<i>Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelekh</i>	
<i>Nitzavim-Vayelekh: Standing Firm or Moving Onward</i>	462
We Are All Guarantors	464
Is <i>Teshuva</i> a Mitzva?	466
A Blessing and a Curse	469
<i>Hak'hel: Bring the Children</i>	471
The Mitzva to Write a <i>Sefer Torah</i>	474
Recognizing God in Good Times as Well as Bad Times	477
Writing a New Chapter Based on a Column	480
The Three Who Cried	482
<i>Parashat Haazinu</i>	
Taking the Inspiration with Us	484
Like Rain and Dew	487
Blessing before Studying Torah	489
God's Fear	493
<i>Parashat Vezot Haberakha</i>	
Man of Blessings, Man of God	496
Inheritance vs. Heritage	498
Who Wrote the Last Eight <i>Pesukim</i> of the Torah?	500
Breaking the <i>Luhot: Moshe's Greatest Achievement?</i>	503

Preface

Sheheyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu lazeman hazeh!

I have been listening to Rav Rosner's *parasha shiurim* for years. Each morning I would download a *shiur* and listen to it during my drive to work. It felt like Rav Rosner was sitting in my passenger seat. From these *shiurim* I would always find inspirational words that I could share at our Shabbat table. I believe that these *divrei Torah* truly inspired my family, and on several occasions, I have heard my children repeat these thoughts, which to me is the greatest testimony that their message is pertinent.

Several years ago, I was approached by a group of young adults in Beit Shemesh who had just entered the army after learning in *yeshivot hesder* and *mekhinot*, and they requested a Shabbat *shiur*. I began delivering a weekly class on the *parasha*, and many of the sources that I used were from Rav Rosner's *shiurim*. After witnessing how people were so inspired by these *divrei Torah*, I decided that these pearls of wisdom had to be written and shared with Klal Yisrael. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the amazing boys and girls in that weekly *shiur* that continues even after many of the participants have completed their army service and some have even married. They were one of the main catalysts for this *sefer*.

Rav Rosner's style is unique. He usually references ten to fifteen thoughts on each *parasha* cited from a wide spectrum of *hashkafot*, including Hassidic Rebbes, Rav Yosef Soloveitchik, Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch, Nechama Leibowitz, classic *Rishonim* like the Ramban and Rambam, and modern commentaries such as Rav Asher Weiss and Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl.¹ Rav Rosner provides a clear and concise synopsis of various commentaries highlighting inspirational messages throughout each *parasha*. His classes are given each Wednesday night. They began in his community in Woodmere, and after Rav Rosner moved to Beit Shemesh they were given at his home until the shul for his *kehilla* was completed, where the weekly *shiur* is currently held.

In preparing this *sefer*, I reviewed every *shiur* that Rav Rosner gave in his weekly *parasha* series from 5769 through 5778 (ten years). In total there are approximately 150 *divrei Torah* per *parasha*. First, I would listen to each recording and then review the actual written sources.² I then selected what I felt were the most inspirational *divrei Torah* from each *shiur*, seeking to incorporate only a few *divrei Torah* from each *parasha*. There is much material that is included in Rav Rosner's *shiurim* that do not appear in this book. I apologize if I left out material that others feel should have been included, and I welcome constructive criticism so that we can improve future volumes and publications. Rav Rosner reviewed all of the *divrei Torah* included in this *sefer*.

I considered publishing Rav Rosner's *shiurim* for many years, and I can't express the feeling of gratitude that I have to HaKadosh Barukh Hu now that the second volume is finally going to print. Rav Rosner's inspirational thoughts have had a tremendous impact on my life and my family and I hope that we are able to properly relay these messages in this *sefer* so that its readers can be inspired as well. Our hope is that these *divrei Torah* can be shared at the Shabbat table and at *semahot* so they can enlighten our children, family, and community.

1. A bibliography is included at the end of volume 1 so that the reader can identify each source quoted.
2. These *shiurim* are available on www.ou Torah.org. Some of the earlier *shiurim* (5769 and 5770) also appear on www.yutorah.org, and if a recording from one of those years is not downloadable on the OU site it can be retrieved at the YU site.

Preface

I want to take this opportunity to thank Rav Rosner for serving as a tremendous role model for my family and many families in the Beit Shemesh community and in the diaspora. May Hashem grant Rav Rosner many healthy years so he can continue to be *marbitz Torah*!

I also want to thank my father, from whom I learned and continue to learn not only *divrei Torah* but love and appreciation of Torah. As I mentioned above, on my way to work I listen to Rav Rosner's *shiurim*. However, on my way home from work, I speak with my father and we share *divrei Torah*. I now understand the meaning of *uvelekh tekha baderekh* – to try to be involved in Torah while on the road. My father is a true role model. He received *semiha* from Rav Gustman, and although he runs a business during the day, he learns each night and teaches several classes on Shabbat and during the week. My father taught me the meaning of *Torah veAvoda*. May Hashem grant my parents many healthy years so that they can continue to share their thoughts and insights with the family and with their community.

This work would not have been possible without the assistance of several individuals who assisted with transcribing many *shiurim*. In particular, Daliya Shapiro and Miriam Schlusel, who transcribed most of the selected lessons. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Rabbi Elli Fischer, who assisted with editing and did a tremendous job in helping me get the messages across in a clear and concise fashion. Yehoshua Paltiel contributed by preparing the biographies of various sources at the end of the first volume so that the reader can better understand the background of each source quoted. I am grateful for the support and assistance that the entire Maggid staff has provided, in particular, Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, Ita Olesker, Elisheva Ruffer, and Aryeh Grossman.

I want to thank each of my dear children (Ariel and Rinat; Adena; Sarit and Yonatan; Rami and Achinoam; and Amichai) for being the initial audience with whom I shared many of these thoughts on a weekly basis and for their insights that continuously enhance the discussions at our Shabbat table. It brings me tremendous *nahat* when they share these inspirational messages with their colleagues in the army, in yeshiva, in university, at *Bnei Akiva*, and at *semahot*. May they each be *zokhe* to the *nahat* that they bring to me and *Ima* from each of their own children.

Shalom Rav

Most importantly, I want to thank my dear wife Tamar. Without her patience and support I would not have been able to publish this *sefer*. Each night after returning from work, on Friday afternoons and Saturday nights, I would be preoccupied with preparing this *sefer*, and the precious time we spend together had to be compromised. I truly appreciate her support and understanding of the importance of this project. Tamar is a true *ezer kenegdo* – always encouraging me to accomplish what I consider impossible. Tamar continuously amazes and inspires our family with the many *hesed* projects she undertakes and her tremendous contribution to the community. May Hashem grant us many more happy and healthy years together.

I am forever indebted to Rav Rosner whose inspirational thoughts and *shiurim* have had an everlasting impact on my life and provided me with fascinating material to share with and inspire others.

We decided to name the *sefer* “Shalom Rav,” which is a play on the name Rav Shalom Rosner. It is also a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (119:165) that is quite appropriate: *Shalom rav le’ohavei Toratekha* – which means, “There is abundant peace to those who love Your Torah.” Many of the *divrei Torah* incorporated in this book highlight the importance of *shalom bayit*, Jewish unity, mutual respect, and acceptance.

For a list of the audio files on which these chapters are based, see <https://www.korenpub.com/media/productattachments/files/s/h/>

My hope is that the readers enjoy these *divrei Torah* as much as I do. May we be able to internalize Rav Rosner’s meaningful messages and share them with others so that we can enhance our spiritual lives and the lives of those around us. *Hazak ve’ematz!*

Marc (Shai) Lesnick
Beit Shemesh
Heshvan 5781

Introduction

We recite in the Haggada:

ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל, ברוך הוא. כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה
...תורה

Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is
He. The Torah is parallel to (*keneged*) four sons ...

The Torah is “*keneged*” the four sons. What does this word connote? How is the Torah “opposite” or “parallel” to the four sons? The Beit HaLevi suggests that there is a magic and uniqueness to Torah, unparalleled in the world of general wisdom. In biology or in mathematics, there are beginning, intermediate, and advanced textbooks. The novice child will not be studying the same material as the high school student, who in turn will not be sharing studied content with the doctoral level professor. Torah, by contrast, affords all levels of learners equal opportunity. The same Rashi that is studied by the first grader, is also studied by the *gadol hador*. Yes, each understands it on his own level, but the Torah is *keneged* all students, all types of sons and daughters, all colors of Jews. This, then, is the magical nature of Torah.

xxi

We also believe that each and every Jew has his or her special, unique connection to the Torah. *Tosafot* (Berakhot 11b) ask why is it that with mitzvot a *hefsek* breaks the effect of the *berakha*, with the exception of learning Torah, where it does not? For example, entering a *sukka* after an extended break demands a new *berakha*, while learning Torah on the same day, after a break, does not require another *berakha*. *Tosafot* answer: A Jew is always connected to Torah, even when he is not actively learning at that moment. Hashem places within each one of us a spark of holiness (Nidda 30b) that is in constant connection with Him and His Torah.

Thus, not only does Torah have a magical mystique and relevance to it, but each Jew has that “*pintele yid*” that is yearning and thirsting for that connection with the Torah, the world of the Infinite.

This volume is a reflection of this ideal and thirst. It tries to cull inspirational nuggets from the vast world of Torah commentaries, from the *Rishonim* to the *Aharonim*, from the *pashtanim* to the *darshanim*, from the esoteric to the down-to-earth. Just as I tried to accomplish during the live *shiurim* themselves, I attempted to glean from the sources something for us to take with us into our lives, some *lemaase* spark that we can put into practice. The oral and written word are very different worlds, and committing ideas to writing runs the risk of losing the excitement, vitality, and energy of each of these offerings. My prayer, though, is that the reader allow themselves to be drawn into the source, as if the respective authors were orally transmitting their ideas in person, with all the vigor and excitement that each source engenders.

As I write these words of introduction, I am overcome by feelings of gratitude and the inability to properly express those feelings. Hashem has afforded me the opportunity to present the ideas of His holy Torah, through *shiurim* both to live audiences as well as to many virtual *talמיד* throughout the world. Be it through the *parasha shiur*, *daf yomi*, or the mitzva and *navi shiurim*, He has constantly given *siyata dishmaya* every step of the way. All I can pray for is the continued opportunity for spreading His Torah to so many of our thirsty brethren.

This *sefer* would not have become a reality had it not been for the diligence and superhuman effort of my friend Marc Lesnick. He single-handedly arranged all of the conversion from the oral to the

Introduction

written word, spent days and nights editing and rearranging the various thoughts, as well as keeping me up with all the deadlines. I am indebted to him for his help in this partnership to spread the *devar Hashem* to an even wider audience.

Rabbi Ziegler and Maggid Books have been a pleasure to work with, and I hope that our teamwork can continue for a very long time, in both the English and Hebrew realms.

To Rabbi Steven Weil and all the staff at the OU, I feel a deep sense of respect and gratitude for the opportunity to partner with you, in helping spread Torah to the four corners of the globe. You have created a platform for eager *lomdim* to access *shiurim* and elevate themselves in their *avodat Hashem*. May Hashem grant the entire organization great success in all of its endeavors on behalf of the Jewish people.

Hashem has allowed me to learn and teach in various illustrious rabbinic institutions, and I can truly state that all that I have gained is a tribute to my rebbeim and yeshivot. Mori VeRabi HaRav Michael Rosensweig, HaRav Herschel Schacter, HaRav Mordechai Willig, HaRav Yonasan Sacks, HaRav Asher Weiss, and HaRav Yechezkel Yacovsen have all shaped the Jew that I am, and I am merely a branch from their illustrious roots. May Hashem give them all many more years of spreading Torah throughout Am Yisrael.

My in-laws, Drs. Robert and Susan Schulman, have been a constant inspiration to me, both in deed and by example. They are known as pillars of Torah and hesed in their community, and we wish them many more years of tremendous contributions to Klal Yisrael, as well as to their family.

My father, Dr. Fred Rosner, was my first rebbi, learning Rambam with me on Friday nights at a very young age, as well as modeling what it means to be a public spreader of Torah, with the awesome opportunity of *kiddush Hashem* that that entails. He, along with my mother, have inculcated in me a love of Torah, a love of all Jews, and a love for the Land of Israel. May Hashem grant them many more years of health, nachas, and fulfillment in all their endeavors.

Finally, to my life-long partner, Tamar. You are behind each one of my accomplishments, and you are the greatest gift that Hashem has given me. May we be *zoche* together to continue to do His will to the

Shalom Rav

best of our abilities, and may our dear children, Yehoshua, Avigayil, Avraham, Naama, Michael, Eliyahu, and Chananya, always be excited to follow the illustrious legacy of Torah which we have tried to inculcate into our home.

Shalom Rosner
Beit Shemesh
Rosh Hodesh Tamuz 5779

BENEFACTORS

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear friend

Rabbi Yosef Azar, z"l

Susan and Robert Schulman

Tzippy and Josh Wolff and family

Tamar and Shalom Rosner and family

Andrea and Ari Schulman and family

~~~~~

*In honor of*

*Rabbi Shalom Rosner*

*For his devotion to Torah learning, invaluable advice and friendship*

*and*

*In memory of Elliot Goldberg – יצחק אייזיק בן הרב אליעזר*

*In memory of Irving Grunberg – יצחק בן זאב*

*The Goldberg Family*

~~~~~

Dedicated by

Moishe and Devora Smith

in honor of the wedding of their son

Mordechai to Karen Greenberg

~~~~~

*It is a privilege and honor to sponsor this sefer in honor of Rabbi Shalom Rosner. We greatly appreciate the Torah and inspiration that you share with us on the internet, via podcasts and in person. May Hashem bless you and your family so that you are able to continue to share your Torah learning with the community for many years to come.*

*The Saks Family*

*xxv*

## BENEFACTORS

*In memory of our parents*

Heinz Sondheim ז"ל – who always was קבע עתים לתורה

Ina Sondheim ז"ל – פיה פתחה בחכמה

*Together they lived a life of חסדים וגמילות חסדים, עבודה ותורה, setting an example for their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and all who knew them*

תהי זכרם ברוך

*They both enjoyed and were inspired by Rav Rosner's דברי תורה*

*Debby Sondheim and Fred Distenfeld ע"ה*

*their children and grandchildren*

*Carole and David Sondheim*

*Shmulie, Shelly and Layla*

~~~~~

Dedicated in memory of

Dr. Saul G. Agus, ז"ל

*and in honor of our children,
and with gratitude to those who have been and continue to be
instrumental in their Jewish education and in fostering their love of Torah.*

Nicole and Raanan Agus

PILLARS

With appreciation to Rav Rosner from the Nofei Hashemesh community

~~~~~

*In loving memory of our grandparents, Pillars of Torah and Community*

*Rabbi and Mrs. Eliezer and Miriam Paley*

*Rabbi and Mrs. Marshall and Leah Miller*

*Mr. and Mrs. Philip and Ruth Fruchter*

*Mr. and Mrs. David and Mali Lew*

*Sarah and Jonathan Paley*

~~~~~

In honor of my wife and children

Lori, you epitomize the pasuk in Mishlei –

פיה פתחה בחכמה ותורת חסד על לשונה

And to our dear children Susan, Mira, Hannah, Esther, Leo, Rivka, and Avi

Continue to let the words of Tehillim ring true:

מה אהבתי תורתך כל היום היא שיחתי

Love you always and forever

PATRONS

*In honor of Rabbi Rosner for providing us with
a special Kehila in Eretz Yisrael.*

With heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to our parents and grandparents

Fred, a”h, and Suzanne Bodoff, and Jack and Phyllis Rubel

*for their unwavering love and support, guidance
and wisdom through the years.*

Daniel, Tova, Temima, Aliza, Yossi and Chana Rubel

~~~~~

*In appreciation of Rabbi and Tamar Rosner and in honor of*

*Miriam and Irv Klavan and Joelle and Bill Zimbalist*

*by their children, grandchildren, and great-granddaughter.*

*Sara and Simmy Zimbalist and Family*

xxvii

## PATRONS

*In appreciation of the hundreds of hours of Torah that Rabbi Rosner has  
shared with our family.*

*Michael and Karen Raskas*

~~~~~

*With gratitude to HaRav Shalom Rosner, shlita
Upon completion of the 13th Daf Yomi cycle – 7 Teves 5780*

Rachel and Gary Berger, New Rochelle, NY

~~~~~

*In memory of our parents*

*שמואל משה בן מאיר*

*חנה בת מאיר יצחק*

*of blessed memory*

*Sam and Helen Fuchs, Holocaust survivors who rebuilt a life of  
Torah and Emunah*

*By their children, Meir and Shandee Fuchs and family*

~~~~~

In honor of Rav Shalom and Rebbetzin Tamar Rosner

שתשרה ברכה והצלחה בכל מעשי ידיכם

ויהי ר"ר שדבריהם הקדושים יעשו רושם וכל הלומד

ספר זה יתעורר לכו לעלות ולהתעלות בתורה ויראת שמי ם

Shani and Baruch Dovid Schreiber

~~~~~

*We salute Rav Rosner and wish him continued הצלחה with his  
inspirational shiurim.*

*Family Wulwick, London, UK*

xxviii

## PATRONS

*In honor of our dear friends and neighbors Rabbi Shalom and  
Dr. Tamar Rosner whose kids we love as our own – as they do ours.*

*Wishing you years of continued הצלחה, ברכה, and friendship.*

~~~~~

Anonymous

~~~~~

לעילוי נשמת

שמואל בן ישראל צבי  
זיסל בת יצחק  
ישראל בן שמעון

## FRIENDS

*Amy and Shalom Schwartz and Family*

*Anonymous*

*Sara and Ben Taragin*

*Caroline and Morris Massel*

*Naomi and Zvi Nachman*

*Chanie and Mark Jacobs and Family*

*Fayge and Gedaliah Borvick*

*Bracha and Dovid Schreiber*

*Audrey and Dan Rosenstein*

*Bruria and Jason Rozen and Family*

*Moshe Schluskel*

*Yosefa and Marc Krauss and Family*

*Bayla and Gershon Tokayer and Family*

*Debbie and Michael Hamlin and Family*

*Alyssa and Mark Tenenbaum and Family*

*Ellen and Richard Gertler*

*Anonymous*

*Neeli and Eli Portal and family*

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*לד"נ עטא בת אלכסנדר זיסקינד*

*The Ellen Family*

*Susan and Michael Geller*

*Barbara and Eli A. Safieh*

*Alison and Chaim Basch*

xxix



# Vayikra





## Parashat Vayikra

# The Purpose of the *Korbanot*

There is a famous disagreement between the Rambam and Ramban with respect to the nature and message of animal sacrifices, the *korbanot*. The Rambam in *Moreh Nevukhim* (3:46) states:

כי טעם הקורבנות, בעבור שהמצרים והכשדים, אשר היו ישראל גרים ותושבים בארצם מעולם, היו עובדים לבקר ולצאן, כי המצרים עובדים לטלה והכשדים עובדים לשדים אשר יראו להם בדמות שעירים, ואנשי הודו עד היום לא ישחטו בקר לעולם. בעבור כן ציווה לשחוט אלה השלשה מינין לשם הנכבד כדי שיודע כי הדבר שהיו חושבים כי הם בתכלית העבירה הוא אשר יקריבו לבורא, ובו יתכפרו העונות. כי כן יתרפאו האמונות הרעות שהם מדווי הנפש, כי כל מדווה וכל חולי לא יתרפא כי אם בהפכו.

The reason for offering sacrifices is because the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, among whom the Israelites dwelled and settled, worshipped sheep and cattle: The Egyptians worshipped lamb, and the Chaldeans worshipped demons, whom they perceived as

having the form of goats. Indians, until today, do not slaughter cattle. Due to this, [God] commanded us to slaughter these animals to Him so that it is made known that the very things that are thought to be of the ultimate transgression are precisely what should be offered to the Creator, and with it [the offering], sins shall be atoned. This is how to heal wicked beliefs, for all sicknesses and illnesses cannot be cured, except with their opposite.

The Ramban suggests that the Egyptians and other ancient neighbors of Israel worshipped different types of animals (particularly cattle, sheep, and goats), so these animals were singled out to be used to worship Hashem. We offer to Hashem the animals that other nations offered to *avoda zara* (idolatry).

The Ramban rejects this explanation. How could it be, the Ramban asks, that all the greatness of the notion of *korbanot* is just to counteract *avoda zara* and disprove the other nations? *Avoda* is one of the pillars upon which the world stands,<sup>1</sup> and offering *korbanot* is the primary form of *avoda*. Could all of that be just to counteract *Avoda Zara*? After all, the Torah describes the offering of *korbanot* as “a beautiful, sweet-smelling aroma to Hashem” (*rei’ah niho’ah laShem*).<sup>2</sup>

The Ramban further posits that Noach offered an animal sacrifice upon leaving the ark after the Flood. This offering was made at a time when there was no one else in the world – no idolaters to disprove – and Hashem accepted the offering. Similarly, Hevel offered a *korban*, which was accepted, and according to the Ramban’s own chronology (presented in *Mishneh Torah* at the beginning of the Laws of *Avoda Zara*), there was no *avoda zara* in the world at that time. Additionally, Bilam built altars, and the Ramban assumes that he was not seeking to counteract *avoda zara*, nor was he commanded to do so.

Rather, the Ramban suggests, all these individuals brought *korbanot* in order to get close (from the root “*karov*”) to Hashem. In fact, the different elements of a *korban* correspond to the different components of atonement. Transgressions occur in deed, speech, and thought.

1. *Pirkei Avot* 1:2.

2. *Vayikra* 1:9.

## The Purpose of the Korbanot

*Korbanot* offered to Hashem in order to atone for sin (as many *korbanot* do) begin with an act (placing one's hands on the *korban*), continue with speech (the confession recited over the *korban*), and culminate with an atonement for one's desires and inner thoughts (the burning of the insides of the *korban*).<sup>3</sup>

The Meshekh Hokhma in his introduction to *Vayikra* seeks to reconcile the Rambam and the Ramban, suggesting that both approaches are significant and important in different circumstances: Some *korbanot* fit the Rambam's model of turning us away from *avoda zara*, and other *korbanot* bring us closer to Hashem.

Earlier in history, it was permissible to offer a *korban* outside the *Beit HaMikdash* on a private altar, even in one's own backyard. The Meshekh Hokhma explains that at times when idolatry was rampant, and people saw their neighbors worshipping their gods locally, HaKadosh Barukh Hu allowed the offering of *korbanot* on a private altar. The Rambam's approach can explain this concession. However, *korbanot* offered in the *Beit HaMikdash* were not merely offered to counteract *avoda zara*. Rather, they signify and strengthen the connection to the *Shekhina*. So, the Ramban's reasoning applies. In this context, the Meshekh Hokhma quotes a *gemara* (*Zevachim* 113) that *korbanot* offered on private altars lack the element of "*rei'ah niho'ah*." This makes sense according to the Rambam's approach: These offerings are required simply to wean people off of *avoda zara* and do not "smell sweet" to Hashem. Only *korbanot* offered to HaKadosh Barukh Hu in the *Beit HaMikdash*, which bring us closer to Him, are "*rei'ah niho'ah*."

Whether we accept the view of the Rambam or the Ramban, and due to all the symbolism of the *korbanot* throughout *Sefer Vayikra*, it is

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3. The *Darkhei Musar* expounds on the Ramban and explains that if one thinks about the message of a *korban*, namely, that the person making the offering deserves to have done to them that which was done to the animal, it will lead to humility. Perhaps that is why there is a small *alef* in the first word of *Sefer Vayikra* – to allude to the fact that we must feel very small when we bring a *korban*. The most basic principle of offering a *korban* is lowering oneself and acquiring humility. When we realize who we are in comparison to our Creator, we are humbled and embarrassed by our acts, and that will strengthen us to be more careful not to violate any prohibitions and instead to serve Him to the best of our ability.

## Parashat Vayikra

important to realize that commandments that are beyond our understanding are divine decrees – as the Rambam wrote. We must not have the attitude that what we cannot understand can be ignored, or that we need not study *korbanot* because we do not practice or relate to them. On the contrary, it means that we need to work harder to try to comprehend the intricacies of *Korbanot*.

The Rambam writes as the last halakha in *Sefer Avoda* of *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of *Me'ila* 8:8) that one should try to understand the meaning of the different commandments.<sup>4</sup> Along these lines, the *Beit HaLevi* writes that the rationales of the commandments are called *te'amim*, which means both “reasons” and “tastes,” because when one comprehends the underlying reason for something, it improves its “taste.” When one does something without knowing its reason, it is very dry and bland. As we study *Sefer Vayikra*, we must try to understand the symbolic meanings of the various forms of worshipping Hashem in such a way that they can enhance our lives, even if the actual *avoda* may seem less relevant to us today.

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4. See also the beautiful language of the Rambam at the end of the Laws of *Temura* (4:13): וְרוּב דִּינֵי הַתּוֹרָה אֵינָן אֶלָּא עֲצוֹת מֵרַחוּק מִגְדוֹל הָעֵצָה לְתַקֵּן הַדַּעוֹת וְלִישֵׁר כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים – “Most of the laws of the Torah are advice from afar, from the greatest Adviser [the Almighty], to correct our thoughts and actions.”

# Reconnecting to Hashem through *Korbanot*

Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch<sup>1</sup> observes that the words “*korban*” and “*korbanot*” are generally mistranslated as “offerings” or “sacrifices.” Rabbi Hirsch explains that a *korban* is not a sacrifice, as it does not entail forfeiting anything. Likewise, the word “offering” implies that the recipient is lacking what the person provides through the offering – clearly inappropriate in the case of *korbanot*, as our Master is not lacking anything. Rather, the word “*korban*” is derived from the root “*karov*” meaning “to come close” or “draw near.” A *korban* is a vehicle for coming closer to Hashem. This notion is also apparent in the terminology of the service of offering *korbanot*, which is called *hakrava* – “bringing near” or “coming close.”

Perhaps this is why, throughout the descriptions of the *korbanot*, the name of Hashem that is used is the Tetragrammaton, YKVK, and not Elokim.<sup>2</sup> The latter is connected with Hashem’s attribute of justice, as

1. *The Pentateuch, Translated and Explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra* (Gateshead: Judaica Press, 1989), 6.
2. See also *Meshekh Hokhma, Devarim* 16:21, where a similar idea is expressed in connection with the prohibition of planting trees in close proximity to the *mizbe’ah*.

if to say, “You sinned against Me, so you need to offer something to Me to make up for it.” YKVK, on the other hand, refers to the unchanging God – *haya, hoveh, veyihyeh*, “He is, was, and will be.” Hashem is saying, as it were, “This *korban* has nothing to do with Me, as I am unchanging. It has to do with you and your coming closer and reconnecting with Me.” When one transgresses, one distances himself from Hashem. A *korban* enables a person to reunite with God. Today, when prayer takes the place of *korbanot*, we should use our prayers to connect to Hashem.

Rabbi Shlomo Zevin<sup>3</sup> also addresses the fact that the word “*korban*” is related to “*karov*,” but his analysis focuses on what it means to be close. He explains that distance and proximity are not merely spatial, physical terms. Two people can remain very close even when separated by oceans, and two people can be near one another physically and yet remain distant from one another. This is because distance and closeness can be determined by internal, spiritual connections. If two souls are connected, then they are close, and if they are disconnected, they are far from one another. It is in this sense that we speak of being close or distant from HaKadosh Barukh Hu. He is omnipresent, and so, He is never “far away.” But when He removes His direct providence, we feel distant. We experience Him as being far away.

This is also the sense in which Am Yisrael are referred to as “the people He is close to” (*Tehillim* 148:14). A midrash explains that when the Torah is close to us, Hashem is close to us. That does not mean holding a Torah scroll close or being physically removed from one makes us closer or further from Hashem. Rather, if we are profoundly, spiritually connected to the Torah, then we are “the people He is close to.”<sup>4</sup>

3. Rabbi Shlomo Zevin, *LaTorah VeLaMo'adim* (Jerusalem: Kol Mevaser Publishers, 2002), 171.

4. Rav Soloveitchik (*Shiurei HaRav* [Hoboken: Ktav, 1984], 181) derives a similar idea from the view of *Tosafot* (Berakhot 11b, s.v. “*shekvar*”) that one need not recite *Birkhot HaTorah* anew whenever one sits down to learn, as the Torah is never truly out of mind for a Jew. He illustrates with a parable about a mother who sends her children to school. When the children are home, the mother is actively aware of her children, but when they are at school, she is still aware of them, but her awareness is latent. The bond between parent and child remains very strong, even if the child is in a different city, as their closeness is not geographic. The same applies to the connection of a Jew to Torah and to HaKadosh Barukh Hu.

## *Reconnecting to Hashem through Korbanot*

Rav Zevin then develops another interesting notion: that *korbanot* connect and elevate all four levels of existence – inanimate objects (*domem*), plants (*tzome'ah*), animals (*hai*), and human beings (*medaber*) – bringing them closer to Hashem. Human beings are obviously elevated through *korbanot*, as the one who offers the *korban* must be mindful of its messages and the atonement it brings. Next are the animals, who can achieve their ultimate destiny by serving as *korbanot*. From the plant world come meal-offerings, libations, loaves, and oils. Finally, every *korban* contains salt, which is a mineral and represents the world of inanimate objects. Thus, through *korbanot*, we bring not only ourselves but also the whole world closer to Hashem.