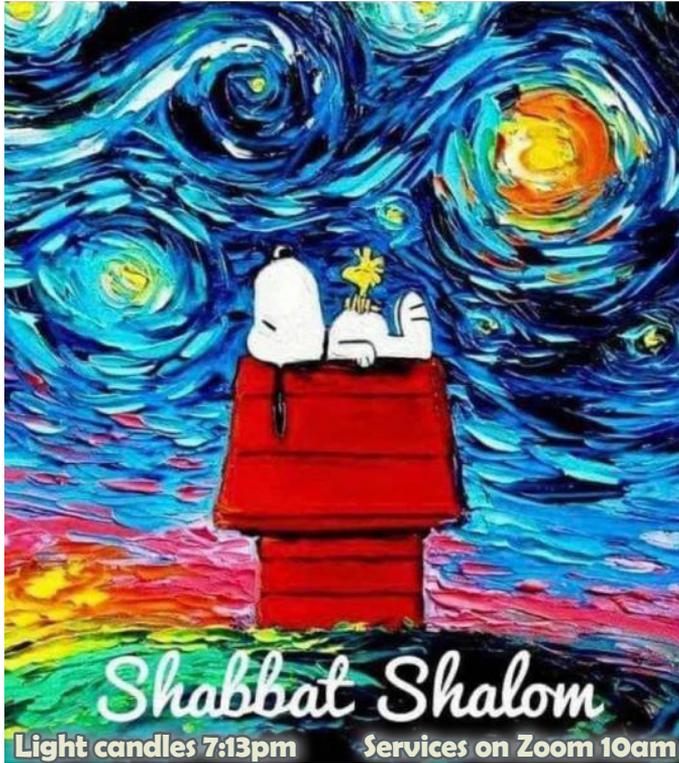




# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## March 17, 2021



## Zoom in for Services

Our abbreviated Shabbos service begins at 10 am and lasts approximately an hour. Click here to join:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83523256164?pwd=SkNXMm0vc0JsQ3h5VmIFSEExCM2NYQT09>

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/hasiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

### Is it really a sacrifice?

The concept of sacrifice is an intriguing one. Sometimes we sacrifice something that is important to us in order to get something else in return. Is this really a sacrifice, or is it merely a trade?

Sometimes we sacrifice something that we don't really need in order to help someone else. Is that really a sacrifice? It's always nice to help others, but if we are giving up something that we don't really need, are we in fact really sacrificing anything?

What about sacrificing a bodily organ, like a kidney, to save someone else? Yes, we can live with only one kidney, but if our remaining kidney fails, then we have not just sacrificed our kidney but our life as well.

And then there is the ultimate sacrifice, giving our life in combat for your country. It's great to love your country and to insure its survival, but if you sacrifice your own life you are no longer around to reap any of the benefits of your sacrifice. Wow, that is a real biggy.

And then there is sacrificing something in order to come closer to God, as we are instructed to do in Vayikra. Certainly a worthy form of sacrifice, because what can be more worthy than coming closer to God? But as we now use prayer in lieu of sacrifice to come closer to God, why were we not instructed to use prayer in the first place?

Sacrifice. Such a very interesting concept.

Below is this week's Parshah in a Nutshell from [chabad.org](http://chabad.org).

# Vayikra in a Nutshell

## Leviticus 1:1–5:26

G-d calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the korbanot, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

- ◆ The “ascending offering” (olah) that is wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the altar;
- ◆ Five varieties of “meal offering” (minchah) prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense;
- ◆ The “peace offering” (shelamim), whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the altar and parts are given to the kohanim (priests);
- ◆ The different types of “sin offering” (chatat) brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the high priest, the entire community, the king or the ordinary Jew;
- ◆ The “guilt offering” (asham) brought by one who has misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a “betrayal against G-d” by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow man.



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*This week we begin the Book of Leviticus, a book that is full of laws, including the laws of sacrifices, dietary laws, and the laws of sexual purity. The very first parshah in Leviticus, Vayikra, includes the laws of korbanot, the laws concerning animal and meal sacrifices in the Sanctuary.*

*Many people in modern times question why we were commanded to perform sacrifices in Biblical times. Here is a very good explanation from [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com):*

## Understanding Biblical Sacrifice (Korbanot)

**What sacrifice is, where it comes from, and what it can mean for us today.**

*By Rabbi Daniel Kirzane*

What are sacrifices? “Sacrifice” means giving up something for someone else. In general, there are three kinds of sacrifice:

1. “Sacrifice for yourself.” Think about sports training – you work hard in order to improve your strength and skill. In the Bible, Joseph suggests that the Egyptian Pharaoh make this kind of sacrifice: The king should store food during years of plenty so that there will be enough to eat during years of famine. He gives up enjoying the harvest now so that he and his people will have enough food later. (Genesis, Chapter 41)

2. “Sacrifice for others.” Think about doing chores – you give up your free time in order to help out your family. In the Bible, Yocheved makes this kind of sacrifice: She sends away her baby, Moses, and agrees to have him be raised in the Pharaoh’s palace in order to protect him. She gives up being close to her son in order to keep him safe (Exodus, Chapter 2).
3. “Sacrifice to come close to God.” Think about donating money – you give up buying something for yourself so that other people can have a better life. You may not know the people you’re helping, but you still feel happy anyway; this is because donating money is tzedakah (which means “righteousness”), and it is a holy act. In the Bible, we find this kind of sacrifice in the laws about the priests and their service in the mishkan or Tabernacle. People give up their animals, grain, and money as a way of being holy.

Usually, it’s the third kind of sacrifice that surprises and confuses us the most. So let’s take a closer look.

## Korbanot – Sacrifices in the Desert

Throughout the Torah — especially in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers — we read many, many passages about sacrifices. Here’s a quick summary:

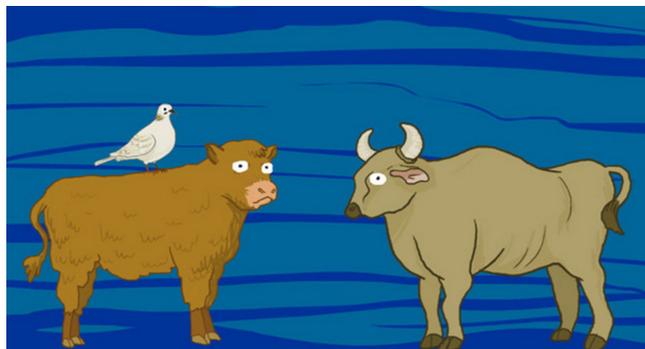
- ◆ A group of people called the kohanim (“priests”) were the only ones who were allowed to make sacrifices to bring people close to God. The first was Aaron, and his sons became kohanim after him.
- ◆ The kohanim would make sacrifices for themselves, for other individual Jews, or for the entire Jewish people.
- ◆ These sacrifices were called korbanot. The word korban means “something which draws close.” Their purpose was to bring people closer to God.
- ◆ The kohanim would offer korbanot every day during the evening, morning, and afternoon services. Additionally, they would offer korbanot on holidays and whenever someone else (who wasn’t a kohen) would want help making a sacrifice of their own.
- ◆ There were three basic kinds of korbanot: Animals, grain, and money. Animals would be



killed, grain would be burned, and money would be donated. Sometimes, when a person didn't have any animals to sacrifice, they would offer grain or money instead (see for example Leviticus 5:11, 5:18, and 14:21).

The kohanim were called "those who come close to the Eternal" (Exodus 19:22), showing that their job of offering korbanot involves closing the distance between human beings and God. Indeed, God tells Moses to build the sanctuary where the korbanot are offered so that God can "dwell among" the people of Israel (Exodus 25:8). So, offering korbanot was one way of bringing God and the Israelites closer together.

## Why Sacrifice Animals?



We often have questions about why animals were chosen to be killed so that human beings could get closer to God. Isn't that cruel? Maybe yes and maybe no. We can look at it both ways.

On the one hand, killing animals is wrong. The story of Creation teaches us that human beings are meant to protect life on earth, not destroy it (Genesis 2:15). So

even though the ancient sacrifices had a holy purpose, they were unnecessarily violent. Today, we know that there are many other ways we can draw close to God that don't involve killing animals. In particular, Judaism teaches that prayer is a replacement for animal sacrifices.

On the other hand, killing animals is not wrong, especially when human beings then eat the animals. The story of Noah's Ark teaches us that God understands people's desire to eat meat (Genesis 9:3). Humans have eaten animals for thousands of years and still do today. This is related to korbanot because every animal that was sacrificed was later eaten. In fact, the only time the Israelites ate meat in the desert was after a sacrifice (see Deuteronomy 12:20 and Rashi's comment). So, sacrificing animals in the ancient world was similar to killing animals today for food.

To summarize, the priests killed animals for some korbanot. Today, we can understand this practice as both "wrong" and "not wrong."

## What Does It All Mean?

Korbanot were used to draw people closer to God. Israelites brought offerings of animals, grain, or money to the kohanim, and the kohanim in turn offered them as sacrifices to God. This was the main process used to connect ancient Jews with God. People gave up their prized possessions as a symbol of their dedication to God, and this became the most important part of Jewish worship.

After the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE, Jews stopped offering korbanot. Instead, they began to offer prayers. The rabbis taught us that we can become closer to God with the words of our mouths rather than with physical sacrifices. Nevertheless, they still based the



Jewish evening, morning, and afternoon prayer services on the ancient rituals for offering korbantot.

Today, when we come together as a community to pray, we use the model of the korbantot to guide our prayer. The korbantot teach us that we have to give something of ourselves in order to draw nearer to God. They teach us that it can be easier to come close to God with the

help of other people rather than all by ourselves. And they teach us that prayer can be deeper when we use ancient rituals. In all these ways, the korbantot still lead us to holiness today.

Only each one of us can answer what sacrifice means for ourselves. As you think about sacrifices in the part of Torah you're studying, also think about what sacrifice means in your own life. You might find the following questions helpful:

1. What kinds of sacrifices are present in this Torah portion? (Sacrifice for yourself, for others, or to come closer to God?)
2. When have I made that kind of sacrifice in my own life? Or when could I make that kind of sacrifice in the future?
3. Sacrifices in the Torah required very specific rituals. What are some rituals that are important to me that help me to feel Jewish or holy?
4. What are some ways I can draw close to God?
5. What might I want to teach my friends and family about sacrifice from a Jewish perspective?

Let me put this in a language we both understand:  
You take me off the list of sacrificial animals, and I don't eat you.

