



## VaYikra

VaYikra (Leviticus) 1:1 – 5:26

This week we begin the book of *VaYikra* (Leviticus), the third and surely the most misunderstood book of the Torah. Even the name is confusing. The word Leviticus, derived from the Greek, would seem to describe the laws that pertain to the Levites. The Rabbis, however, called this book *Torat HaCohanim* (literally, the laws of the *Cohanim*), because of the content of its first half. The first half describes the special rules and observances that the Priests had to discharge to maintain the *kedusha* (holiness) of the Community and its sacred institutions. Although Leviticus is a type of priestly manual, most of its laws are addressed to all Israel. This is most fitting for a people that was declared to be a "kingdom of priests." (Exodus 19:5-6)

It is easy to get lost in details in *VaYikra* without realizing the amazing theology that is contained within it. *VaYikra* teaches that G-d is beyond the reach of all the forces of the world except one ... humanity. Only humans have the power to expel G-d from the sanctuary by defiling it morally or ritually. Understanding this helps explain the emphasis placed on the role of the priests in the initial chapters of *VaYikra*. They are constantly engaged in either purging the sanctuary of its impurities or getting the people to atone for their wrongs. *VaYikra* states that the Jewish people have the power through the morality of our behavior to draw G-d near, or to drive him from our midst.

*VaYikra* begins with G-d instructing Moses regarding five types of sacrifices:

- The burnt offering (*olah*)
- The meal offering (*minchah*)
- The sacrifice of well-being (*zevach shelamim*)
- The sin offering (*chatat*)
- The guilt offering (*asham*)

It then goes on to describe the procedures for the people and the priests to follow for each of these sacrifices.



Jewish Community Center of Paramus  
E. 304 Midland Ave., Paramus NJ 07652  
Phone: (201) 262-7691 Fax: (201) 262-6516  
© 2007 Jewish Community Center of Paramus