

## From the High School

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Yet the *Talmud* teaches us that in fact it is *parshat* Vayikra that contains one of the two *pesukim* that would cause Rabbi Akiva to break down crying whenever he would read it (*Kiddushin* 81a).

When introducing the *korban* asham, the guilt offering, the Torah declares that one who unknowingly violates an *aveirah* must bring this sacrifice. The *passuk* states that in a situation that "he does not know about [the sin], and he is guilty, and he shall carry his sin" (5:17). It is this *passuk* that elicited tears from Rabbi Akiva. After all, if the Torah believes that a sin done accidentally, with no ill intent but with a lack of adequate carefulness, necessitates the bringing of a *korban* for atonement, how much more so does one who violates an *aveirah* with ill intent need to atone in the most serious of ways? And so, Rabbi Akiva questioned: How often do we fall prey to our own poor judgment and act in ways against Torah values and laws? If the Torah required even one who sinned by accident to atone, how much more so must we consider those *aveirot* that we do intentionally.

This idea forces us to ask ourselves some uncomfortable questions: Are we more troubled by the bad grade that we got on a history test, or by the hurtful insult that we said to a friend? Are we more troubled by the breach in our relationship with Hashem that a missed *tefilah* brings, or by the fear of being caught and getting a lunch detention?

Perhaps one can go as far as to say that it was Rabbi Akiva's personal experiences that brought him to this great recognition. The *Talmud* that Rabbi Akiva did not engage in Torah learning until he was forty years old (*Nedarim* 50a). It took a great deal of time, energy, and sacrifice for him to "catch up" and become the great leader that he eventually became. He thus recognized the damage that every sin brings, as a missed opportunity to come closer to Hashem. Indeed, even if such a sin comes about by accident, it does damage. We, who are blessed to be surrounded by Torah and *mitzvot* constantly, must never forget the tears of Rabbi Akiva, and we must remember the power of each and every one of our actions.

- Rabbi Yaakov Mintz — HS, Talmud Chair

## Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) The alef is small
- (2) Two
- (3) The kohanim
- (4) *Bedikat chametz*
- (5) They burn the *chametz*

# Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School KushnerComments

## Parshat Vayikra

Friday, March 31, 2017

ד ניסן תשע"ז

## From the High School

1. What is unique about the way the word Vayikra is written in the Torah?
2. How many daily *korbanot* were offered?
3. Which group of Jews offered the *korbanot*?
4. What *mitzah* is performed the night before Pesach?
5. What do people do with their chametz on the morning of erev Pesach?

— Rabbi David Schlusberg, HS, Judaic Faculty  
Answers can be found on the last page.

## From the Middle School

### What Happened to the Alef?

At first glance, the small *alef* in the first word in this week's *parsha*, Vayikra, seems like a typo. However, upon further analysis there is much to learn from this small letter.

The Ohr HaChaim (Shemot 34:29) quotes a peculiar Medrash which says that when Moshe finished writing the Torah, there was a drop of ink left over in his inkwell. Moshe placed the ink on his face which led to the glow on his face described in Shemot. The Ohr HaChaim comments that Moshe, the most humble of all people on the face of the Earth, was uncomfortable describing himself as such and so when commanded to write that he was an עניו, or humble, he wrote ענו without a *yud*, to minimize Hashem's praise. That missing *yud* accounted for the extra ink.

The Baal Haturim, writes similarly, that at the start of our *parsha*, Moshe was commanded to write ויקרא, and He called, a phrase which connotes love honor and respect. Moshe wanted to write ויקר which connoted impurity and that Hashem merely "happened" upon him. In

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order to acquiesce to Hashem's command Moshe compromised and wrote a small *alef*. This too can account for the ink left over in Moshe's inkwell.

The true meaning of the cited Medrash and commentary is hard to comprehend. Its lesson, however, is obvious. Moshe, who came closer to Hashem than any other Jew and reached unparalleled heights in his mastery of Torah, was the most humble of all. Not only did he not desire honor; he ran away from it and avoided it at all costs. Moshe teaches us that in order to learn, we need to be humble. Only with humility can one learn from others, see things from a different perspective, and recognize mistakes and the need for self-improvement. Focus on humility can put us on a path to greatness.

— Rabbi Yaacov Feit — MS, Director of Judaic Studies

## From the High School

### Pass The Salt, Please

I try not to venture into the kitchen too often, in the spirit of “knowing my place.” Inevitably, however, I occasionally find myself drawn to the spice cabinet, opening it up and reaching for - that's right, you guessed it - the salt. Have you ever stopped to consider why the salt container is usually significantly larger than the other spice bottles? Most likely because it is used far more often than the rest of the cabinet's contents. Why is that? What is so unique about salt?

This week's *parsha*, *Vayikra*, sets forth many of the intricacies involved in the *korbanot* that were brought in the *Mishkan*, and later in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The details are indeed myriad, with each *korban* consisting of its own ingredients and ceremony. One's head can spin from trying to make sense out of the particulars of the *korbanot*. Although, as a practical matter, we don't bring *korbanot* today, there are still lessons that one can glean from the details that are very relevant to life in the twenty-first century.

The Torah describes the ingredients of *korban mincha*, the meal-offering, which was made up of flour and offered by the poor who could not afford to purchase animals for offerings. The Torah states, “Any *mincha* that you offer to God shall not be prepared leavened...or [with] any honey” (*Vayikra* 2:11). This limitation on ingredients means that the *korban mincha* was pretty simple. However, two verses later, the Torah states, “You shall salt your every *mincha* with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your God's covenant from upon your *mincha* - on

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all your offerings shall you offer salt” (13). Now, the Torah is telling us that the *korban mincha*, as well as any other *korban*, **must** contain salt. This seems a bit puzzling. What is it about salt that causes the Torah to take such a strong stand, demanding its inclusion, as opposed to any leavening agent or honey, which the Torah forbids?

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, one of the greatest rabbis and thinkers of our time, offered a profound understanding of this concept. The difference between salt and honey or leavening agents is that the latter are outside factors that change the nature of the food to which they are added. Salt, on the other hand, not only doesn't alter, but enhances and brings out the food's natural flavor. This difference, explains the Rabbi, is underscored in the context of a *korban* to teach us a great lesson in spiritual growth. The basic purpose of a *korban* is to help one become spiritually closer to Hashem. The word for *korban*, has in its root meaning the word *karov*, which means to come close. The ingredients of the *korban mincha* reinforce this concept. In striving to come close to God, one needs to apply the “salt” approach rather than the “honey” approach. Just like salt brings out a food's natural flavor, so too should one look to bring out one's own capabilities, seeking to grow spiritually based on the unique traits of one's own nature. Honey, in contrast, makes something sweet that is not naturally sweet. So too, one should not try to be someone he or she is not. One should focus on his or her natural strong points and not to try to imitate others. One should not think, “If only I had that person's intellect or that person's assets...” Rather, our very innate characteristics are what Hashem expects us to use to come closer to Him and to reach our fullest spiritual potential.

So the next time you say, “Pass the salt, please,” think to yourself, “Let me take the lesson of the salt, and may Hashem grant me the divine wisdom to realize the potential that I naturally possess, and may I merit to grow spiritually in the greatest way that I can, with the natural capabilities that He put within me.”

- Rabbi Mayer Erps — HS, Judaic Faculty

### The Power of Every Act

When we think of the most emotionally resonant ideas in the Torah, generally *parshat Vayikra* is not the first subject that would come to mind. While the laws of various *korbanot*, sacrifices, and the circumstances in which they are brought may teach us valuable lessons, one does not generally imagine that they would elicit strong emotions.

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