

## Parshat Vayikra 5776

### The order of the Aleph

The parasha begins “וַיִּקְרָא” with a small Aleph. Ba’al HaTurim tells us that Moshe wanted to write “וַיִּקְרָא”, a chance encounter, used by the Torah to describe Bilaam’s prophecy. G-d ordered him to write “וַיִּקְרָא” in full. So Moshe wrote the word with a small Aleph, in conformance with both his own humility and the Almighty’s requirement to emphasise the Torah’s authority as His direct deliberate word.

R. Berel Wein suggests another aspect of the small Aleph. The first set of tablets, written with the finger of G-d following an awesome pyrotechnic display, did not survive their descent from the mountain, while the second set, written by Moshe in his third set of 40 days solitude on Sinai, survived for generations until hidden at the end of the first Temple era. Later in Tanakh (Kings I, 19, 11-12) G-d shows Elijah that He is not to be found in rock-shattering winds, nor tempests, nor fire, but in the still small voice that you have to strain to hear.

### The order of the korbanot

All of this parasha – and half of the next – details the laws of various categories of korban. The first three sacrifices are the voluntary offerings, which the Torah introduces us to as follows:

“אם-עלה קרבנו”  
 “וּנְפֹשׁ כִּי-תִקְרִיב קָרְבָּנוּ מִנְחָה לַשֵּׁם”  
 “וְאִם-זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים קָרְבָּנוּ”

If his offering is an olah (burnt-offering) (1, 3)

When a person presents a mincha (meal offering) to G-d (2, 1)

If his offering is a shelamim (peace-offering) (3, 1)

The language ‘if / when / if’, and the terms ‘olah / korban mincha / shelamim’, align with our intuition that there is a difference between animal sacrifices and grain sacrifices. We understand the idea that sacrificing an animal can symbolize the overcoming of bestial urges, taming and even elevating our baser instincts. The grain sacrifice rather pales by comparison. Which is why Rashi, based on Menchot 104b, says the mincha is offered by poor people and G-d considers it as if they have offered their very נַפְשׁ on the altar.

R. Mordechai Sabato suggests that while an animal sacrifice recognises G-d’s dominion over all living creatures, the meal offering represents His power of sustenance. Which is why the minimum quantity for a mincha is one-tenth of an ephah – one day’s food, as exemplified by the omer of manna that fell each day.

Still: ‘when’, not ‘if’, a person presents a grain offering, not an animal offering. Why does this interrupt the flow between the olah and the shelamim?

Because the mincha is itself an olah. While shelamim are consumed primarily by the offerer, and shared with G-d’s representatives, the mizbeach and the Cohen, the olah is wholly consumed by the mizbeach and the Cohen.

That leads us to the next question: what is the difference between the olah and shelamim that is expressed by their different treatment? It is the difference between serving G-d out of fear and serving Him out of love. Fear, or awe, is a sense of the distance between us and the Almighty. Love, in contrast, is a feeling of closeness. A person bringing an offering out of fear lays it at the altar (or its representatives) and withdraws, maintaining distance. A person bringing an offering out of love shares it with affection and celebration.

### The order of the service

On Shabbat afternoon we read the start of parshat Tsav, which tells us that the daily service in the Tabernacle or Temple begins with the removing of the ashes from the altar to a place outside the camp. The Mishna in Yoma (2, 1-2) relates how originally the Cohanim used to race against each other to earn this mitzvah but this led to injury so the race was replaced by a lottery. Some commentators see the competition as a smart move by the authorities to encourage people to get up early for a routine preparatory task that was less attractive than offering up sacrifices. R. Meir Goldwicht asks why the avodah could not start with something more active and positive, like lighting the Menorah. He suggests this is hinting that in order to build a relationship with Hashem, as exemplified by the avodah, we must first make room for Him in our lives, literally as well as figuratively.

Which he ties back to the beginning of our parasha: “אָדָם כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִמֶּם קָרְבָּנוּ לַשֵּׁם” “A person, when he sacrifices, from you, an offering to Hashem”. The words are in the wrong order, to tell us that a person sacrifices of himself. Sacrificing, letting go of, a part of oneself is what is required to make room for Hashem in one’s life.