

# Vayikra

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The Torah was given to the Jewish People 3,338 years ago, and from the moment we received it, we have been elucidating it. Can you imagine how many commentaries have been written on the Torah alone over three millennia? And we're still doing it.

It's about more than just trying to better understand what God told us. It's like getting a gift and looking back into the box after you take it out to see if you left anything behind because you either expect or hope there's more...as limited as the gift actually is.

But Torah is a bottomless well of ideas and understanding that doesn't go deeper into the earth but higher up into Heaven. We don't just hope *there* is more to this "gift," we *know* there is, so we never stop looking back into the "box" for it, and generation after generation, we find it.

A lot of times, the insight isn't new, just understood differently. The Torah never changes, but time does. Science and technology have greatly advanced, giving us a better understanding of the world that the Torah was used to create. The

information was always there. It just took a new set of circumstances to bring it to the surface or to draw out attention to it.

It's similar with people. You can know a person for many years and come to think you know everything about them. And then, all of a sudden, one day you go through something new together, and it brings out a side of the person you never saw before. It makes you wonder how well you know them.

But some things are not like that. Some things don't change with the times. For example, there are many today who prefer not to eat meat because they feel that it is wrong to kill an animal for food unless you really have to. They think that the Torah's *heter* is archaic and inhumane and might even use it as an excuse to deny its Divine origin.

If that is true of food from animals, then what about sacrifices? Even some people who eat meat and other kinds of animal foods have a problem with animal sacrifices, and assume that they were only relevant at the time because the world offered them, and animal rights organizations had yet to show up on the international scene.

Furthermore, people at that time knew nothing about the world and how it worked. This made them feel vulnerable and pushed them to become superstitious. Offering sacrifices to imaginary gods at least gave them the impression they could influence the outcome of events by buying off their gods with their favorite barbecue meat.

But we have since peeked behind the veil and gotten a better understanding of how the world works. We can influence the outcome of events with the help of technology, and we're more successful than any idol worshipping sacrificer ever was. Life still has its mysteries, lots of them, but we feel a lot less vulnerable to the "natural" events of history than we did when

people never thought twice about killing an animal for personal needs, even ridiculous ones.

That would be enough reason to end the sacrifices of pagan cultures, but not those of the Torah. Many will cease to be “relevant” in the Messianic Era, but not because they were never real or important. They will cease, for example, because we will no longer sin, and therefore no longer need a sin offering. The sacrifices or their effectiveness will never change in essence, but the people who once needed them won’t any longer.

What’s the difference? The difference is the Torah has told us to bring the sacrifice, *when* to bring it, and *how* to bring it. It’s the difference between self-prescribing medication, and following a (trusted) doctor’s instructions. When you do it yourself you can miss the mark and maybe even cause damage. When you follow authoritative instructions, you can heal properly.

The bottom line is that sacrifices are extremely *kabbalistic*, even having their root in the sin of Adam HaRishon. His eating from the forbidden fruit blemished the four levels of reality: Mineral, Vegetation, Animal, and Human, and sacrifices were divinely ordained to rectify each one as necessary. And they took someone of great sanctity and Torah knowledge, a *kohen*, to make sure each part was carried out to precision.

The world didn’t outgrow sacrifices. If anything, it has taken thousands of years for the world to catch up to them. But like every well, they all look innocently the same from the top. It’s only after dropping a pail into one that you find out how deep it is, or in the case of Torah, endless.

Haggadah Shel Pesach, “The Wise Son Says,” available through Amazon.com and essential for an otherworldly Pesach experience.

Have a great Shabbos

Pinchas Winston