

## Spotlight on....Vayikra for Vegetarians!

### Background:

This week we start a new sefer - Vayikra! Vayikra only has 2 narratives in it. The rest is laws, and a lot of the laws - including in our parsha - are about the korbanot, or sacrifices. Especially as a vegetarian, the detailed different kinds of korbanot can be hard to wrap my head around. Why does an expression of love or gratitude, or a correction of committing a sin, all center around slaughtering an animal to please God and feed the kohanim? What is the connection? And how can I as a vegetarian who loves animals relate to this idea today?

When addressing this question, the two sources that we often turn to are the Rambam and the Ramban. *Side note: Anyone who has said these two names aloud or tried to type them knows that they are very easy to confuse! The way we distinguish them when speaking about them is by emphasizing different syllables. So the Rambam is pronounced RAHM-bam whereas the Ramban is pronounced ram-BAHN.*

The Rambam answers this first question of why we have sacrifices, in Moreh Nevuchim, the Guide for the Perplexed. He explains that the reason that we have korbanot is that at the time of the Torah, we were surrounded by pagan communities that constantly performed sacrifices. God knew that to go from a sacrifice-oriented world to being the sole community devoted to worshipping God would be too dramatic a shift for the Israelites. So, God gave us sacrifices in order to soften the blow of the transition. In other words, korbanot are basically a concession that God made to us so that we would be able to relate to worshipping God through the context of how the pagans around us worshipped their gods.

The Ramban takes a much different approach. He sees the korbanot as having a holy, eternal message. He tells us that the reason that we are obligated to bring a sacrifice when we commit a sin is because this process helps us understand that WE are the ones who are supposed to be punished. The reason that we go through a detailed process of bringing a korban, of laying our hands on the animal in an act of semikha, of confessing our sins, and of burning specific sections of the animal, is to correspond to our own sins. It is to see ourselves in the animal and recognize that we are the ones worthy of punishment. Ultimately, according to the Ramban, the process of bringing a korban forces us to confront our actions, and enables us to be grateful to God for creating a system so that the animal could serve in our stead and save us from suffering a terrible punishment.

### Questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to the korbanot when you read about them in this week's parsha?
2. What about the Rambam's perspective resonates with you? Why?
3. What about the Ramban's perspective resonates with you? Why?
4. Using these two approaches, and your own thoughts, can you develop a meaning of the korbanot to you today? Email your answer to [MaharatRuth@ostns.org](mailto:MaharatRuth@ostns.org) to win a free BBQ (KIDDING!!!!)