



Parashat Vayikra – March 19, 2021 – 6 Nisan, 5781

Dear TBE Family and Friends,

For more than a month, our weekly Torah readings have documented our forebears' obsessive efforts to access that which seemed ever to elude them. Building both elaborate spaces of gathering and glittering objects of worship, our ancestors displayed concretely their longing, their need to connect with the transcendent. It is a sentiment we experience in our own lives, though we tend to express it (if we express it at all) in ways that are less demonstrative and more inchoate.

While structures of linen, gold and acacia wood have, in our day, given way to florid tributes, often voiced in a language reserved expressly for the issuance of such appeals, our motives and goal remains unchanged from those of our ancestors: We desire to be in tangible relationship with God. But is this desire reciprocated?

This unspoken doubt has come to the fore in every generation since that initial encounter at Sinai (if not before). Is our obsession with the Divine an unrequited love? Does God "hear"? Does God care?

This week the Torah responds to our angst with a single, unambiguous verb: *Vayikra* ("And God called out"). The word that opens the central book of the Chumash (Five Books of Moses) is as profound as it is concise. It asserts that God, unbidden, comes to deliver a message to us, comes to engage in a relationship.

For some of us this relationship will take the form of prayer, successor to the Biblical sacrifices that are the focus of this week's parashah (and the next ...). For some, a relationship with God will be forged around an unwavering commitment to bring about a "rebuilt" world, a *brit* (covenant) as steadfast as that forged at Sinai. For some, a relationship with God will be played out through a loving relationship with those in whose faces we see God's image, which manifests in infinite guises once we are attuned to see it. These pursuits are not mutually exclusive, but rather, seen in the Jewish tradition as mutually reinforcing.

Whatever the path you follow, whatever avenue you pursue, the message of this week's portion (Vayikra) is that our outreach towards God is reciprocal. As the medieval poet and pietist Yehuda HaLevy summed up brilliantly in the *piyyut* (liturgical poem) "Where Will I Find You?" :

I sought your nearness.

With all my heart I called you.



And in my going out to meet you,

I found you coming toward me.

In this spirit I invite everyone to join us this evening (Fri, 3/19) for a special Kabbalat Shabbat service led by the members of our Bet/Gimmel (2nd and 3rd grade) class and their families, beginning – earlier this week - at **6:15 p.m.**

The intergenerational joy of our gathering continues on Saturday morning, when our Dalet (4th grade) class will lead us in prayer (beginning at 10 a.m.).

Join both services using this [link](#).

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Rachel Safman