

PARSHAT VAYIKRA
LEVITICUS 1:1-5:26
HAFTARAH ISAIAH 43:21-44:23
30 ADAR 5783/23 MARCH 2023



The Turning Road, L'Estaque
Oil on canvass by Andre Derain

WHERE IS THIS JOURNEY GOING?

Is Vayikra/Leviticus just archaic rules and rituals about bloody stone altars, functionaries, and/or concepts that no longer have a role in Jewish life? Or is it a text that extends our journey to dimensions that we all carry with us?

1. Vayikra 1:1 “And God *called* to Moses, and YHWH spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting,” Every other time in Torah it says, “And God *spoke* to Moses.” Except, when God *called* Moses up to Mount Sinai. This time God *calls* to Moses from the Tent of Meeting. Sinai has moved to the *Mishkan*. A similar journey happens when a person approaches and enters the Tabernacle as when Moses approached and ascended Mount Sinai. (Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *Torah, a Women’s Commentary*)

2. Anthropologist Mary Douglas sees the mind of Leviticus as thinking in a non-linear language of analogy. For example, for her, the arrangement of the offerings on the altar described in these chapters recapitulates a movement from the outside (of the animal's body) to the center and toward greater holiness. (Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*).
3. “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When a person offers from you a sacrifice to Adonai of livestock, cattle or flocks, you shall offer your offering'” (Leviticus 1:2) In the *Tanya*, Schneur Zalman (The Alter Rebbe) asks why does it say "When a person *offers from you* a sacrifice..." instead of, "When a *person from you* (i.e., an Israelite) *offers* a sacrifice..." The Alter Rebbe Schneur Zalman explained that it is because the sacrificial offering truly is from you. That is, it is composed of an aspect of your being. *When you want to draw yourself closer to God, you have to offer something "from you," that is, from your very self. You are to bring the animal that is in you, your "evil inclination" (yetzer hara), which is called the "animal soul." That is what you are trying to sacrifice and elevate.* (RebJeff, <https://www.rebjeff.com/blog/i-gotshneur-zalman-of-liadi-which-rabbi-are-you>)
4. How do we move into our inside, holy core, which includes both our animal and higher impulses? Do we do that with trembling and fear sometimes? I do. That's what I imagine when I put my Israelite when she is about to cut the throat of a bull.