



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF TORAH

Overview of the weekly portion
March 21, 2026



“Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates
correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality”

Michael Fishbane (1943-), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּדָה הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

Parashat-haShavu'a Stats



walking through together

Weekly Portion: *vaYiqra*

Consists of: Leviticus 1:1-5:26

Sequence—

in Leviticus: 1st of 10

in annual Torah cycle: 25th of 54



Books of the Torah - ranked by number of...

...chapters:	...verses:	...weekly portions:
Genesis 50	Genesis 1,534	Genesis 12
Exodus 40	Numbers 1,288	Exodus 11
Numbers 36	Exodus 1,209	Deuteronomy 11
Deuteronomy 34	Deuteronomy 955	Numbers 10
Leviticus 27	Leviticus 859	Leviticus 10

number of chapters devoted to it in Midrash Rabbah:

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
100	52	37	23	11

Structural name: *vaYiqra* ויקרא “then He called”

After its opening word: וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו
“The Eternal One **then called** to Moses, saying to him...”

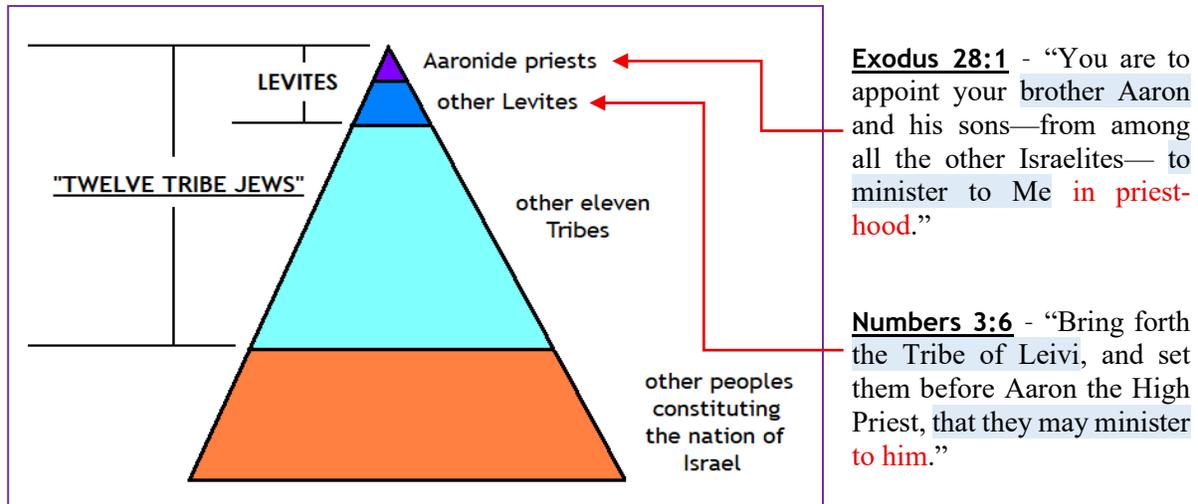
Conceptual name: *Torat Cohanim* תורת כהנים “the Torah of the priests”

In recognition of its ritual and sacerdotal content.

Derived name: *Leviticus* [Latin] ← Septuagint *Levitikon* Λευιτικὸν “of the Levites”

In recognition of the Tribe dedicated to ritual service in God's Shrine.

- more over



ה' פעמים כתיב כאן אורה

A) Midrash Genesis Rabbah 3:5 - The five occasions [the Creation account in Genesis 1] mentions “light”

כנגד חמשה חומשי תורה correspond to the five Books of the Torah.

ויאמר אלהים יהי אור כנגד ספר בראשית שבו נתעסק הקב"ה וברא את עולמו

“God declared ‘let light be’” [Genesis 1:3a] corresponds to the Book of Genesis, in which The Holy And Blessed One is involved in forming His world;

ויהי אור כנגד ספר ואלה שמות שבו יצאו ישראל מאפילה לאורה

“whereupon light came into being” [Genesis 1:3b] corresponds to the Book of Exodus, in which the Israelites came out from darkness into light;

וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב כנגד ספר ויקרא שהוא מלא הלכות רבות

“then God saw the light, that it was good” [Genesis 1:4a], corresponds to the Book of **Leviticus**, which is filled with numerous procedural rules;

ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך כנגד ספר במדבר שהוא מבדיל בין יוצאי מצרים לבאי הארץ

“whereupon God made a distinction between the light and the darkness” [Genesis 1:4b] corresponds to the Book of Numbers, in which God separated out those who had gone out of Egypt from those who would be coming into the Promised Land;

ויקרא אלהים לאור יום כנגד ספר משנה תורה שהוא מלא הלכות רבות מתיבין

and “at which God called the light ‘day’” [Genesis 1:5] corresponds to the Book of Deuteronomy, which is filled with numerous procedural rules reprised.

Midrash Genesis Rabbah 7:3 -

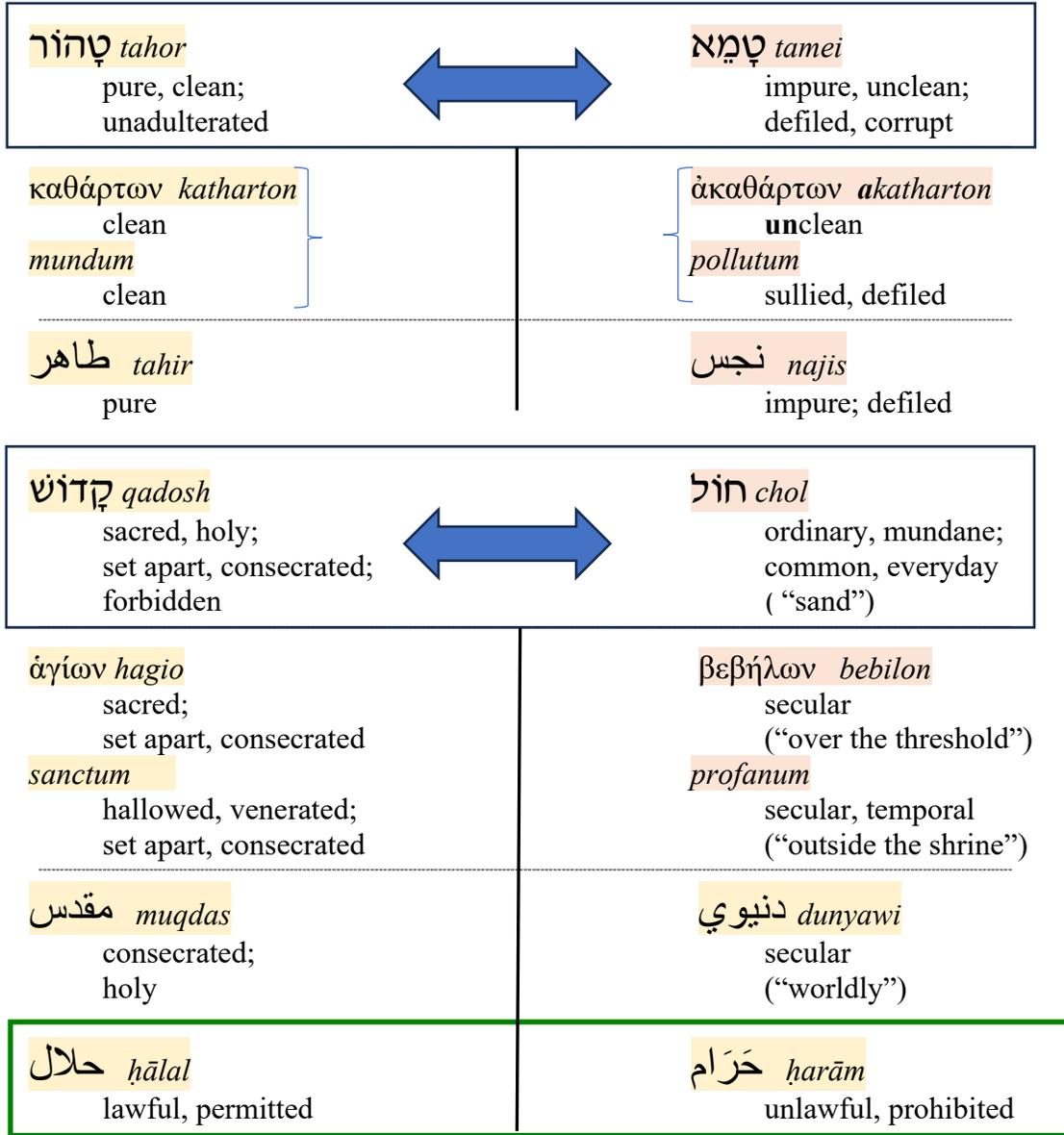
לריח שמניך טובים השמן הזה אורה לעולם

“The fragrance of Your oils is pleasing” [Song of Songs 1:3] - Just as oil brings light to the world,

אף דברי תורה אורה לעולם

so, too, are the words of Torah a light to the world.

**- Developing a Priestly Vocabulary -
dialectical adjectives for a culture of spiritual service**



B) William Hallo (1928-2015), *Leviticus and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* - The concepts of *q’dushah* (holiness) and *kapparah* (atonement) are attested in other Semitic languages and other Near Eastern societies, but **only in biblical Hebrew are they central to religious thinking**. Rites of expiation are relatively rare in older Egyptian and Mesopotamian religion, which centered most of its attention on the person of the king. In Old Kingdom Egypt, the king was himself a God and the object of worship; in Mesopotamia he was the deputy of the local deity, and it was only his ethical conduct and cultic meticulousness that served as warrant for the common weal.

Leviticus emerges as a coherent literary work **unified in its insistence on the theocratic basis of its legislation**. God, priesthood, and laity—the three subjects of its concern—all replaced the royal focus of the Near Eastern sources with which comparisons are possible. Not the

- more over

king, but God, is the source of law and the agency of its enforcement; not the king, but the priest, is the chief cultic ministrant; not the king, but “**the whole community in Israel**” is to obey the cultic instructions and thus earn the right to consume the fat of the land.

Leviticus 25:18 -
וְאֵת מִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי
 So obey My rules, and My laws— keeping them and doing them;
וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם עַל הָאָרֶץ לְבֵטַח
then you will dwell securely in the land.

<p>C) Exodus 20:12 - לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ ...in order that your days may be long upon that soil which The Eternal One, your God, is giving you.</p>	<p>D) Deuteronomy 22:7 - לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ וְהֵאָרְכַת יָמֶיךָ ...in order that it may be well with you, and that you may know length of days [upon the land].</p>	<p>E) Deuteronomy 30:18 - הַגִּדְתִּי לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲבַד תֵּאבְדוּן לֹא תֵאָרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹבֵר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבוֹא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ Then I declare to you this day that you will surely be destroyed; you will <u>not</u> know length of days upon that soil which you are crossing this Jordan to come to and possess as your legacy.</p>
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F) Bernard Bamberger (1904-1980), *Leviticus: A Modern Commentary* - While the ritual procedures described herein may resemble in some ways those of other ancient peoples, they also display significant differences. Most important is the fact that **these materials were made accessible to all the people.**

	לְאֹמֵר “speak to Aaron, telling him...”	דִּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן 6x in Leviticus
	לְאֹמֵר “speak to Aaron and his sons, telling them...”	דִּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בָּנָיו 6x in Leviticus
	לְאֹמֵר “speak to the Israelites, telling them...”	דִּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 28x in Leviticus

Other Near Eastern nations had myths and legends, and bodies of civil and criminal law included in monuments set up in public places. But in the case of those societies, their ritual and liturgical texts were generally kept in temples for the exclusive use of the priests. **Only in the Torah do we find stories, laws, and rituals combined into an inclusive document available to everyone.**

It was something of a revolution when the priestly laws were included in a work designed for

the entire population. These laws were not to be professional secrets any longer. The concept of a complete Torah, which all may study who have the will to do so, expresses a **new democratic spirit** in world religious thought.

Chapter[s]	subject matter/content
1-7	conduct of, and procedures for, the five kinds of sacrifices: <i>Olah</i> עלה burnt-offering <i>Minchah</i> מִנְחָה grain-offering <i>Sh'lamim</i> שְׁלָמִים celebration-offering <i>Chattat</i> חַטָּאת purgation/sin-offering <i>Asham</i> אָשָׁם reparation/guilt-offering
8-10	narrative - the eight-day ritual of ordination of the Aaronide priesthood: - Moses officiates as <i>de facto</i> first High Priest of Israel; - Aaron undertakes his duties, on the eighth culminating day of the ritual; - two of Aaron's sons exceed their authority, and are struck dead.
11-15	sources of <i>tum'ah</i> טְמֵאָה (spiritual defilement): - eating animals unfit for human consumption; - a woman <i>post-partum</i> , and the ceremony of purification marking her re-entry into the community; - a man or woman afflicted with <i>tzora'at</i> צָרַעַת, and the ceremony of purification marking their re-entry into the community; - a man or woman afflicted with genital discharges, and the ceremony of purification marking their re-entry into the community.
16	institutionalizing an annual Day of Atonement.
17	blood-guilt for destroying God's creatures for food.
18	definition of consanguinity and legislations against sexual impropriety.
19	The Holiness Code.
	<p style="text-align: center;">Midrash Sifra, Q'doshim 1 -</p> <p style="text-align: center;">דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם קדושים תהיו מלמד שהפרשה נאמר בהקהל</p> <p>[The opening words of this chapter] "Speak to the entire assemblage of the Israelites, telling them 'You shall be holy...'" teach that this passage was addressed to the whole community.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ומפני מה נאמרה בהקהל</p> <p>And on what account was it addressed to the assemblage?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">מפני שרוב גופי תורה תלויים בה</p> <p>Because it constitutes the essence of the entire Torah.</p>
20	proscribing pagan licentiousness and superstition, as a summons to holiness.
21	professional obligations of the Aaronide priesthood.
22	attitudinal obligations of the people: taking holiness seriously.
23	hallowing time : institution of Shabbat, and of the five once-a-year holidays.
24	furnishing fine oil for the <i>M'norah</i> , and show-bread for the Display Table.
	case-law - treatment of a blasphemer.

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- 25 institution of a Sabbatical, for the land to lie fallow every 7th year.
institution of a Jubilee, for property rights to be restored every 50th year.
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- 26 **exhortation** to honor God’s law— starting with ban on idolatry
series of blessings (epitomized by prosperous continuity in the Land),
in reward for faithfulness to God’s Law.
series of disasters (culminating in national exile from the Land),
as punishment for abdication of the Covenant
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- 27 making and honoring personal vows to God
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G) Joseph Herman Hertz (1872-1946),
The Pentateuch and Haftorahs
on Leviticus 19 -

The precepts contained in this chapter may, at first sight, appear a medley of the spiritual and ceremonial— fundamental maxims and **principles of justice and morality, alongside of ritual laws** and observances.

The Torah, however, regards human life as an indivisible whole, and declines to exclude any phase thereof from its purview.

H) Bernard Bamberger (1904-1980),
Leviticus: A Modern Commentary -

The second half of the book, from chapter 17 through 26, explains the purpose and intent of the laws. In addition to stating the reasons for individual provisions, these chapters constantly refer to their overall purpose: to maintain the holiness of the Israelite people. And **holiness is understood not only in terms of ceremonial purity, but especially in terms of personal and social righteousness.**

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ

You shall be to Me
a kingdom of **priests**,
and a **holy** nation.

- Exodus 19:6 -