



Jewish Congregation of Marco Island

## A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF TORAH

OVERVIEW ISSUE ON THE WEEKLY PORTION

March 25, 2023



בָּרוּךְ אֵתֶה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קָדְשָׁנוּ בְמִצְוֹתָיו, וַצְנָנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תּוֹרָה:

### Torah Stats

Weekly Portion: vaYiqra



Consists of: Leviticus 1:1-5:26

Sequence—

in annual Torah-reading cycle: 34<sup>th</sup> of 54

in the Book of Leviticus: 1<sup>st</sup> of 10

### - Overview of this Third Book of the Bible -

Context: *Leviticus, third of the Five Books of the Torah, is a catalogue of ceremonial laws, dealing in large part with the sacrificial offerings made on God's Altar. Although named for the Levitical priests who officiated at the Altar, it ultimately defines the ritual and spiritual norms for all of Israelite society.*

### - Nomenclature for the Five Books of the Torah -

structurally (text)	thematically (Talmud)	Septuagint το βιβλίο του...	Vulgate liber...
1) בְּרִאָשִׁית	ספר מעשה בראשית “account of the works of Creation”	Γένεσις Genesis “Creation”	→ <i>Genesis</i>
2) שְׁמֹות	ספר יציאת מצרים “account of the departure from Egypt”	Εξόδος Eisodos “Going-out”	→ <i>Exodus</i>
3) וַיִּקְרָא	תּוֹרַת כהנִים “the rules for the [Aaronide] Priests”	Λευϊτικον Leivitikon “tractate of the Levites”	→ <i>Leviticus</i>
4) בְּמִדְבָּר	חֻמֶּשׁ הַפְּקוּדִים “the Fifth-Book of the census-counts” ch 1 & 26	Αριθμοι Arithmoi “Numbers”	→ <i>Numeri</i>
5) דְּבָרִים	מִשְׁנֶה תּוֹרָה “a reprise of the Torah”	Δευτερονομιον Deuteronomion “the reprise of The Law”	→ <i>Deuteronomium</i>

- more over

**תורת הכהנים** “the rules for/ **Torah of the [Aaronide] Priests**”

3x in	Mishnah	Tiberias	(212)	→
4x in	Jerusalem Talmud	Tiberias	(350)	→
18x in	Babylonian Talmud	Asoristan (Iraq)	(500)	←
<b>234x in</b>	<b>RaSHI</b>	<i>France</i>	(1100)	
10x in	RaMBaM	<i>Egypt</i>	(1200)	
<b>133x in</b>	<b>RaMBaN</b>	<i>Spain</i>	(1250)	
1x in	Zohar	<i>Spain</i>	(1300)	
1x in	Yosef Caro	<i>Israel</i>	(1565)	
4x in	Judah Loeb (MaHaRal)	<i>Prague</i>	(1585)	
24x in	SHeLaH (Horowitz)	<i>Poland</i>	(1610)	
<b>193x in</b>	<b>Hayim ibn-Attar</b>	<i>Algeria/Livorno</i>	(1725)	
3x in	Luzzato	<i>Amsterdam</i>	(1740)	

**Content of the 27 Chapters (and 10 Weekly Portions) of Leviticus**

<u>Portion/Chapter</u>	<u>subject matter or theme</u>	blue = narrative
		brown = ritual / ceremonial
		red = ethical / behavioral / societal
1) <i>vaYigra</i>		
1)	Procedure for <b>עולה 'olah</b> <u>burnt-offering</u> .	
2)	“ “ <b> מנחה minchah</b> <u>grain-offering</u> .	
3)	“ “ <b> שלמים sh'lamim</b> <u>celebration-offering</u> .	
4)	“ “ <b> חטאת chatat</b> <u>sin-offering</u> (communal).	
5)	“ “ <b> חטאת chatat</b> <u>sin-offering</u> (individual).	The five kinds of <i>qorbanot</i> (sacrifices)
2) <i>Tzav</i>		
6)	“ “ daily burnt-offerings ( <b>תמיד tamid</b> ).	
7)	“ “ <b> אשם asham</b> <u>guilt-offering</u> .	
8)	First week of the eight-day consecration of the Aaronide priesthood.	
3) <i>Sh'mini</i>		
9)	Eighth concluding day of the consecration ritual— Aaron assumes his duties.	
10)	Disaster befalls Aaron's eldest sons, as they exceed their authority.	
11)	Delineating those <b>animals which Israelites may eat</b> .	
4) <i>Tazri'a</i>		
12)	<b>טומאה tum'ah</b> associated with childbirth.	
13)	<b>טומאה tum'ah</b> associated with the skin affliction <b>tzora'at</b> .	
5) <i>M'zora</i>		
14)	Procedure for reversing <b>טומאה tum'ah</b> of one afflicted with <i>tzora'at</i> .	
15)	<b>טומאה tum'ah</b> associated with an oozing condition.	
6) <i>Acharei Mot</i>		
16)	Institution of, and procedure for, an annual <b>Day of Atonement</b> .	
17)	The <b>sacrament of eating meat</b> .	
18)	Definition of consanguinity, and associated <b>prohibition of sexual impropriety</b> .	

- continued

7) *Q'doshim*

19) “**The Holiness Code.**”  
 20) Prescribing penalties for **idolatrous behavior** { reprise of chapter 18 }.

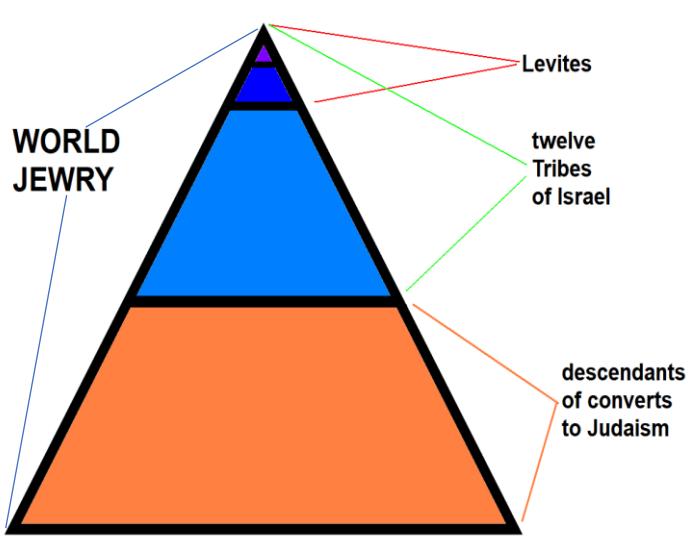
8) *Emor*

21) Regulating **comportment** of the anointed Aaronide priests.  
 22) Outlining **prerogatives**— and responsibilities— of the priests.  
 23) Establishing the **holy days of the Jewish year**.  
 24) **Communal provision** of oil for the *M'norah* and bread for the *Golden Table*.

9) *b'Har* – { instituting “atop the Mountain” a legislation for the future in The Land }  
 25) Promulgating the **Sabbatical Year** and the 50<sup>th</sup>-year *Yoveil* (Jubilee).

10) *b'Chuqotai*

26) Concluding **admonition to comply with God's laws**.  
 27) **Provision for individual free-will donations** to demonstrate personal probity and commitment to the Covenant.



**Judean slaves carry spoils of the Jerusalem Temple**  
**Arch of Titus, Rome**

A) Bernard J. Bamberger (1904-1980) in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* - Much of this book is devoted to matters completely remote from our present-day life— directions for sacrifice and rules of ritual defilement and purification. Nearly all these laws ceased to function when the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. . . . Yet **this material reveals a dramatic development in concepts of religion and morality** not just within the ancient Near East, but within the Bible itself.

In Leviticus the word **קדש kadosh** (usually rendered “holy”) . . . designates the highest level of ethical and spiritual aspiration. . . . The ritual procedures here described may have resembled in some ways those of other ancient peoples, but . . . **the distinctive outlook of a developing Judaism makes itself felt** even in an area resistant to change: custom and ceremony administered by a hereditary, and therefore generally conservative, priesthood.

Most important, perhaps, is the fact that **these materials were made accessible to all the people**. The ritual and liturgical texts of other Near Eastern nations 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.**

B) Baruch Levine (1930-2021), *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* - Two concepts embody the primary message of Leviticus.

First, the Israelites are one community (**עֵדָה eidah**), **united by a common destiny and a holy way of life**— as commanded by God Himself. They are forbidden to worship any other deity or follow the impure ways of other nations. Second, the Israelites were granted the Promised Land as an eternal estate (**אֲחֶזֶת achuzzah**) **on condition that they follow the laws of God** and remain faithful to His covenant.

In Leviticus, the priests of Israel are instructed in the ways of holiness, and **the Israelites are told what the Lord requires of them.**

- Leviticus 19:19 -

**אַתָּה - חֲקָתִי תָשִׁמְרוּ**

**You are to keep My laws.**

C) Ellen Frankel (1951- ), *The Five Books of Miriam* - This third Book of the Torah introduces the sacrificial system presided over by the priestly cult. Two major categories of sacrifices are described: the “joyful offerings,” consisting of the burnt, meal, and well-being (or peace) sacrifices, and the “sorrowful offerings,” consisting of the purification and guilt sacrifices.

The Israelites are commanded **to offer these sacrifices so that they may draw near and stay near to God.**

D) David Jaffe (1973- ), “*N’divut-Generosity*” in *The Mussar Torah Commentary* - An important progression emerges in the last *parashiyot* of Exodus and the first *parashiyot* of Leviticus. After the incident of the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai, the Israelites needed a way to repair and then remain in right relationship with God.

[This initial] *parashah* begins the description of how to engage in this relationship. The Hebrew word for “sacrifice” is *korban*, from the root ב-ר-ק, meaning “to draw close.” The entire sacrificial system is an exercise in drawing close and being in relationship with God—**and, by extension, with oneself and others.**

E) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *T’rumat Tz’vi* on Leviticus 27:1 - This entire third Book of the Torah consists of instructions telling us how to meet the requirements represented by the Sanctuary of the Law; how to lead hallowed lives as individuals and as a nation, an endeavor to be **expressed in symbolic terms by our offerings and in practice by our conduct.** By way of recapitulation, the end of the Book states that the **חֻקִּים chuqim** [statutes], **מִשְׁפָטִים mishpatim** [social ordinances] and **תּוֹרֹות torot** [teachings]— which tell us what we must do in order to hallow our lives as individuals and as a nation— are **the sole covenantal intermediary between ourselves and God.**

These laws are the only connecting link between ourselves and God, the sole determining factor in our relations with Him. For us there is no other intermediary, no other way to God than through His Law. **Our nearness to God**, and thus also our weal and ill, are **determined solely by whether or not we observe these laws.**

F) Joseph Herman Hertz (1872-1946), *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* - One half the contents of this Book of the Torah deals with **sacrifices** and **laws** that **safeguard the priestly character of Israel**. It raises sacrifice, which was at the time a universal mode of worship, to a purely spiritual plane. All magic and incantation are banished, and everything idolatrous and unholy is rigorously proscribed.

The other half of the Book treats with **the sanctification of human existence . . . i.e. purity of life, purity of action, purity of thought**, as befitting a priestly Nation. All the precepts in Leviticus are merely a translation into terms of daily life of the Divine call, “You shall be holy [Leviticus 19:2].”

As a result of its stern legislation, Israel’s sons and daughters were freed from the ignoble and the vile— from all brutality and bestiality. As a result of its sanctifying guidance, **no people ever attained to a higher conception of God**, nor a saner appreciation of the vital significance of health and holiness in the life of men and nations.

אמר רבי אסי מפני מה מתחילין לתנוקות בתורת כהנים ואין מתחילין בבראשית

G) Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 7:3 - [the third-generation Land-of-Israel Amora] Rabbi Assi declared: On what account do we begin study for the very young with The Torah of the Priests,

ואין מתחילין בבראשית

rather than with [the start of the Torah at] “in the beginning...”?

אלא שהתנוקות טהורין

For no other reason save that small children are pure,

והקרבות טהורין

and sacrifices are pure—

יבאו טהורין ויתעסקו בטהורים

so let the pure come, and occupy themselves with the pure!

H) Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986- ), Darash Moshe on Leviticus 1:1 -

ויקרא אל משה וידבר יהוה אליו

“Then The Eternal One summoned Moses to speak to him...”

In the opening word of this Book of the Torah, the **alef**— which is the initial of God’s Own Name— is written smaller than the adjacent letters in the Torah scroll. RaSHI explains that even though God spoke to Moses with a thundering loud Voice, only Moses was able to hear it.

If the rest of the community were not meant to hear God’s Voice, then why was it necessary to speak so loudly?

Our tradition is teaching us here that, even though we know the commandments only through Moses, we should bear in mind that God’s Voice was in fact loud enough for everyone to hear... except that the people had not yet proven themselves worthy of hearing it. Accordingly, **we should consider ourselves as if each Jew personally had been commanded by God.**

It is for the same reason that all future Jewish souls were already present at Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given. Even though souls without bodies are not obliged to keep commandments, **God nonetheless wanted all future generations to know that the Torah was meant for them**, fully as much as for those had who departed from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 29:13-14 -

**וְלֹא אַתֶּם לְבָדְכֶם אָנֹכִי פְּרַת אֶת-הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת  
וְאַת-הָאֱלֹהֶת הַזֹּאת כִּי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁנֶוּ פֵּה עַמּוּנָי  
עַמְּדֵד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ**

For it is not with you alone that I am entering into this Covenant and this enduring oath—but, rather with all who are here, standing in the Presence of The Eternal One, your God,

**וְאַת אֲשֶׁר אִינֶנוּ פֵּה עַמּוּנָי הַיּוֹם**

as well as with those who are not present here with us this day.

Exodus 19:5-6 -

**וְעַתָּה אִם-שְׁמֹעַתְּשִׁמְעוּ בְּקָلִי**

Now, then, if you will truly heed My Voice

**וְשִׁמְרַתֶּם אֶת-בְּרִיתִי**

and keep My Covenant,

**וְהִיִּתֶם לִי סְגִלָּה מִקֶּל-הָעָםִים**

then you shall be My elect from among all nations—

**כִּי-לִי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ**

for the entire world is Mine;

**וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי**

yet you will be to Me

**מְמִלְכַת כְּהָנִים**

**a kingdom of priests**

**וּגֹוי קָדוֹשׁ**

**and a holy people.**