

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara  
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**VAYIKRa - 31 p'sukim -  
Yeshayahu 43:21-44:21**

## Thirsting for More

This week we begin the third book of the Torah with the reading of Parashat Vayikra and, with it, we open up a new world in service to Hashem: the world of korbanot, ritual sacrifices. Having completed the second book of the Torah, Sefer Sh'mot, with the construction and the purpose of the Mishkan, the Torah now explains the precise details of HOW the sacrificial rite must be observed. And, although sacrifice was known in the ancient world (the Torah records that No'ach, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov offered korbanot to Hashem), no specific laws had been set up regarding the precise procedure that was to be followed. Sefer Vayikra does just that.

Given this background, we understand Chazal's choice of the 43rd and 44th p'rakim of Sefer Yishayahu as the haftara for this parasha. These chapters focus upon the sacrificial rite that was observed - or not observed - by the nation during the

prophet's lifetime. Indeed, the bulk of the selection depicts the glory of the future epoch when even idolators will turn to sacrifice to Hashem upon realizing the emptiness of pagan worship.

Nonetheless, the haftara begins with Yishayahu's criticism of Israel for having turned away from G-d. The navi's condemnation of Israel for not having sacrificed to Him is a source of disagreement between the parshanim. Rashi explains that G-d condemned the people for sacrificing to the false gods rather than to the true One. The Radak supports that view by quoting the episode found in Divrei HaYamim Bet that describes how King Achaz locked the gates of the Beit HaMikdash and built altars throughout the land, leading the nation to idolatry. Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, suggests that the navi was referring to the behavior of Israel in the Diaspora of Bavel, where they did not observe the sacrificial rite at all.

The different approaches suggested by these commentators reflect the two possible sins that Yishayahu condemns: either the people's cessation of worshiping G-d or their involvement in actual idolatry. We would imagine that the second sin is far worse than the first, but we might understand both approaches as actually being part of a process in

which one sin of omission leads to the more serious sin of commission.

As mortal beings, whose time on this earth is limited, we seek to cling to the Unlimited. We are blessed with an immortal soul that seeks to reunite to its Heavenly source. As a result, we naturally thirst for spirituality, for immortality, for G-d Himself, as the Psalmist wrote (43:3) - TZAM'A NAFSHI LEILOKIM. In today's parasha, the Torah provides us with a way to do just that, a way to reach out and connect to G-d. And, when followed as prescribed, that way quenches the soul and satisfies our longing.

But when, for whatever reason, people cease reaching out, when they stop searching or stop thirsting, they seek other paths. Often they find material success as satisfying that need. Or, perhaps, it can be intellectual achievement or technological advance that calms that yearning. They begin to see their progress as the accomplishment of Man alone and begin to believe, as the Torah puts it (D'varim 8:17) - KOCHI V'OTZEM YADI ASA LI ET HACHAYIL HAZE, that all this success, I have achieved through my own efforts. They replace 'Him' with 'I'. And yet, often enough, even great accomplishments fill the void only temporarily. That thirst and that longing remain. And so they search... and eventually return to worship. But

not the worship of the Almighty but worship of false powers, of nature, of philosophies, of "isms" - of idols. Simply, the abandonment of service of the Divine Being can lead to the service of a non-being.

The laws of korbanot, like the laws of t'fila, may seem to many as irrelevant or, perhaps, too picayune to be of real significance. But it is this body of laws that paves for us our way to draw nearer to G-d, to our true Source. It quenches our thirst, it soothes our longing and it elevates us beyond the world of the mortal. ✨