

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

VAYIKRa 5783

## Children

While Pesach is still some 2 weeks away, it is rather clear that the Book of Vayikra provides the broad biblical context for the Pesach festival. The Vayikra readings both precede and follow this holiday. Is this intersection of Pesach and Vayikra just coincidence or does it reflect some deeper idea?

In the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 247), R. Dosah asks why the custom was to select the Book of Vayikra to begin the teaching of Chumash to youngsters. His answer was, "let the pure children come and study the subject matters of purity", (i.e., the sacrificial order and subsequent topics of tahara). Apparently, the study of Vayikra was linked with the child. And so too is Pesach.

When we consider the Pesach Seder, it is quite clear that children occupy a central role. Many of our customs were specifically designed to arouse the curiosity of the child and encourage the youngsters to ask questions. As the Talmud tells us in (Pesachim 114b-115a), the washing without a bracha (Urchatz), the Karpas, the various dippings, the hiding of the Afikoman, and the removing of the Seder Plate prior to

the Ma Nishtana, were all intended to keep the children awake and engaged in the Seder drama and accompanying activities; and then, of course, let's not forget the Ma Nishtana itself and the Four Children.

Rav Soloveitchik, however, suggests a far deeper message in this confluence of Pesach and the child.

One of the persistent dilemmas facing the religious adult is trying to deal with the jadedness and ennui that afflicts our mitzva observance. The feeling of "been there, done that" sadly empties our religious life of the spiritual excitement - the sheer awe that ought to accompany our sh'mirat hamitzvot. This is no more evident than at the Pesach Seder. Let us consider: as adults, will the Seder present us with anything new, some topic that we haven't already heard? We all know the story, and the rituals appear to hold no surprise for us whatsoever.

Rav Soloveitchik often speaks of our obligation to become "Gd intoxicated, Gd thirsty". The Torah calls upon us to seek HaShem, to search for Him, to yearn to connect with Him on the deepest of levels. Now, if you had to identify the one person whose entire persona displays that enthusiasm, that curiosity, that innocent astonishment, it would be the child. It is the child who proverbially asks, "Why is the sky blue?" For the child,

everything is new and fresh. A sense of wonder and amazement pervades his entire personality. For the young, life is a thrilling adventure with all sorts of discoveries beckoning.

The reason why children take center stage at the Seder is not merely to keep them occupied and involved. Rather, the child-focus signals a command to all adults to transform once again into a child. The mandate is not to become childish, but child-like. We are enjoined to connect with our inner-child and experience anew the beginnings of our becoming a people. We are invited to relive the great drama of the Exodus. We are called upon to suffer the pain of our ancestors' slavery in Egypt, and then to exult in the ecstasy of their redemption. We are told it is actually possible to re-experience this event which occurred thousands of years ago, that we can genuinely feel awash by its sacred history. By recapturing our youth, by becoming child-like again.

And so, both with the Book of Vayikra and the festival of Pesach, the image of the child is evoked. The time is Spring and the stirrings of youth are in the air. Is it realistic to think that an old man can become young again? Absolutely. The moment we allow the past to come alive and impact us, the instant we connect with our heritage, we are transformed and reinvigorated, and new beginnings await.

There is something else we can learn from the child. When a child gets bruised, he may cry a bit but then immediately recovers and moves on. He forgets the hurt, begins to smile and looks to his next adventure. Not always so when we mature.

Very often, as adults, when we stumble and fall, when we struggle and fail, depression sets in. We feel overwhelmed, and we find it difficult to pick ourselves up and move forward. But if the adult has never lost his child-like essence, then no matter the setbacks, no matter the difficulties, he will rebound with vigor and resolve. Nothing can defeat his determination to look toward the promise of new tomorrows with exciting possibilities. Just like the child!

## **Spiritual Awareness**

As we begin our study of the korbanot in Vayikra, it is worth noting that for the most part, the Sin and Guilt offerings (Korban Chatat and Asham) could not be brought for the intentional violation of any mitzva. Only if as a result of plain negligence, a sin was committed, can a sacrifice atone for the error. How may we understand this ritual solution for such mistakes?

There is a reason why people are negligent. Shogeg (negligence) happens because a person is simply

careless about his/her behavior. He demonstrates a lack of awareness, seemingly oblivious or blissfully ignorant about the consequences of his actions. With such insensitivity, the person will inevitably transgress, not flagrantly, but inadvertently. To such an individual, the Torah said: "Bring a korban and you will be forgiven." How, though, does a sacrifice prevent such future negligence?

When the sacrifice was brought, its owner was required to clearly articulate and confess the sin in the presence of the kohanim. The animal was then sacrificed, and - as Ramban (1:9) understood it - with each stage of the offering, the person was to vicariously see himself as the korban, with the animal a mere substitution. Thus, the very experience of the entire sacrificial ritual left a powerful impression on the person. His spiritual awareness would now be heightened. His religious and ethical consciousness would be sensitized. In a word, he/she would probably not make the same mistake again.

Today, sadly, there is no Beit HaMikdash and no sacrifices, but we can help cure our religious and ethical negligence by deepening our awareness about the right and good through study and prayer. Think about it: The more we are informed through study and the more we are sensitized through heartfelt prayer,

the importance of not "messaging up", the better we become - the greater!

And when we engage in and sacrifice for such study and prayer, we are gifted with the same thrilling reward enjoyed by our ancestors in Temple days. HaShem visits us; He comes close to us (karov - korban), and we are forgiven. 🙏