

# Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

## VAYIKRa

Sefer B'reishit is known as Sefer HaY'tzira, the Book of Creation, whose main content tells us of the lives and works of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, the three prototypes whose lives demonstrated the ideals of our people. Sefer Sh'mot is Sefer HaGeula, the Book of Redemption; physically, from slavery in Egypt, and spiritually, as the people who in their newly-found freedom chose the opportunity live by the Torah, the Creator's instructions. The brit, the Covenant, is that Am Yisrael in living according by the Torah will be bringing the Creation closer to the Almighty. In turn, the Almighty promises to give His special support and blessings. In due course, as Yeshayahu advocates, the ideals of Am Yisrael will inspire and get following from other nations and peoples.

Sefer Vayikra in turn goes under the name of Torat Kohanim, the laws appertaining to the Kohanim. This appears strange at first glance. Firstly, although the Kohanim handle and due-process the various types of offerings, it is the people who bring them, and for that you not only don't need to be a kohen, but with some categories of korban you don't even

need to be Jewish. In addition, the laws of kashrut, metzora, nida, shmita as well as gilui arayot (forbidden physical relationships) apply to all Klal Yisrael, kohen or not. Moreover, the prohibitions of gossip and lashon hara are equally relevant to everyone and are hallmarks of civilized and decent society and behaviour.

So as a possible approach, we, Am Yisrael, can consider our role as being kohanim within the wider Creation, irrespective of whether we are of kohen-linear ancestry or not. In receiving the Torah, G-d tells us that we are taking on the status of being a MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH, a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. For in assiduously following the Torah's teachings, we perpetuate the work of our forefathers living in harmony with the Creation and thus we strive to live in harmony with the Creator. The entire Halachic framework may be seen in this light and although emphasized in this aspect by Chasidism and Kabbalists is actually fundamental to everything that we do. The observance of a mitzva creates resonance with the Creation, and the opposite creates dissonance, a sense of being out of synch with the Creation. And, it follows, the act of sincere teshuva is one of restoring harmony within the Creation.

Let's take this idea a stage further. Nearly the entire content of Sefer Vayikra, a.k.a. Torat Kohanim defines our people's ideal way of life and its routines, day in and day out. Not only the korbanot, but Shabbat, Chagim, kashrut, taharat hamishpacha, and making sure that the poor are taken care of without impoverishing the better off. All these characterise the functioning of the MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH. But, as Sefer Vayikra strongly implies, the whole structure can only exist where the substratum of derech erez fully functions. We cannot be a goi kadosh without it. That includes taking a positive attitude towards the needs of those around us and further afield as far as suitable and possible, as well as correct behavior in personal and business relationships as guided by the Torah. For example a rich man cannot sleep with a commoner's wife and then make it up to the husband with financial compensation as was the common practice of other nations of the time. The Torah sets one standard incumbent on everyone, not one law for the privileged and another for everyone else. In that example, gilui arayot causes severe dissonance in the Creation. Accepting that as reality is part of Kabbalat HaTorah whether we understand the reasons or not.

So in sum, Sefer Vayikra - a.k.a. Torat Kohanim - shows our people as a

MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH what are the way-of-life practices that, when carried out correctly, bring resonance between the Creator to His People and ultimately, as kohanim to the world, to earn the respect and engage humanity at large. 🌿🇮🇱