

MARCH 15, 2010

## Parashat Vayikra

### Direct Communication

#### Vayikra el Moshe – “And [God] called to Moses” (Leviticus 1:1)

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Parashat Vayikra opens with God calling out to Moses. Why did God choose this moment, upon the Tabernacle’s completion, to call out to Moses and what was the nature of the message? Ramban notes that God called out to Moses at this time in order to demonstrate affection for Moses in light of the fact that Moses was excluded from the service of the Tabernacle. Moreover, each time God wished to relay instructions to the people, a call would emanate from the Tabernacle—“Moses, Moses”—to which Moses would answer “Here I am.” Rashi (on 1:1) adds that while the call permeated the entire camp, only Moses could hear it. Thus, the personal nature of the call to Moses at the beginning of Leviticus highlights the importance of personal interaction.

God’s use of direct communication carries a special relevance for us today. As Israel attempts to renew peace talks with the Palestinian Authority (PA), the need for direct, personal talks is paramount.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently said that while he looked forward to the proximity talks which are scheduled to begin, he prefers to sit face-to-face with PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Netanyahu has been calling for direct talks with the PA for months, but Abbas has refused to meet with him until Israel meets a series of preconditions. While the proximity talks represent an important first step, they must lead rapidly and without precondition to direct, bilateral negotiations between the parties. As Netanyahu has stated, “Our ultimate objective is to try to achieve a peace settlement with our Palestinian neighbors by means of direct talks.” Such negotiations are the only way to achieve peace, reconciliation and the end of all claims. If the PA is sincere about peace, they will drop the pretense and the preconditions and engage in direct negotiations without delay. For more on the PA stance towards negotiations, click [here](#).

For over six decades, Israel has consistently offered its hand in peace, demonstrating again and again its willingness to make difficult sacrifices—altering borders, relinquishing territory and uprooting entire communities—in the pursuit of peace. It is time for the Palestinians and the Arab states to understand the significance of the type of direct communication that God used with Moses and grasp Israel’s outstretched hand in order to end the conflict once and for all. ■

### A Timeless Connection

#### V’higishah el hamizbeach – “And he shall bring it unto the altar” (Leviticus 2:8)

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Throughout the book of Leviticus the altar of the Tabernacle plays a pivotal role as the proper place for any and all sacrificial offerings. Later, these offerings were brought to the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem. Maimonides explains the historical significance of this altar, writing in his Laws of the Temple (2:2): “Through our tradition, it is well known to everyone that the Temple mount on which David and Solomon built the altar is the very place on which Abraham built the altar on which he bound his son Isaac. It is the very place on which Noah built his altar after leaving the Ark. It is the very place on which Cain and Abel offered their respective sacrifices. And in this very place Adam offered his sacrifice after he was created. From this place Adam was created; Our Sages said, ‘From the place of his atonement, Man was created.’”

The altar in Jerusalem was more than just a place to bring sacrificial offerings, it also fostered a connection between past, present and future generations of Jews. Nowadays, the significance of the altar's location serves as an eternal reminder of the need for all Jews to connect to our historical roots.

During his keynote address at the annual Herzliya Conference in February, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of the importance of the Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel. "I am talking about educating children about the values connected to our identity and heritage, teaching children to know our people's history, educating young people and adults to deepen our ties to one another and to this place." Indeed, it is crucial that we remember this sentiment as Israel's detractors continue to spread a narrative that Israel was created by Europeans attempting to atone for the sins of the Holocaust. Without a doubt, the Holocaust convinced much of the world of the urgent need to establish a Jewish state, but the urgency of Israel's establishment and the timing of its creation must not be confused with the Jewish people's deep historical roots in the Land of Israel. By adopting the "Holocaust-atonement" narrative, Israel's detractors can freely assert that there is no Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel. This is exactly what Yasser Arafat and his top aides did at Camp David in 2000, when they denied that any Jewish Temple ever existed in Jerusalem. For more on the Jewish people's ancient connection to the Land of Israel, click [here](#).

Although we no longer offer sacrifices on the altar in Jerusalem, we remain connected to it as a key element in our national history. It is now our responsibility to actively ensure that this history is not forgotten or distorted—lest the world overlook the nearly 3,500 year connection between our people and the Land of Israel. ■

## Following the Leaders

### **V'im kol adat Yisrael yishgu – “And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err” (Leviticus 4:13)**

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In our *parashah* the Torah introduces a special sacrifice which was brought when the Sanhedrin issued an incorrect ruling and only later realized its mistake. Yet, the Torah describes the sin not as one of leadership, but as a sin of the “whole congregation.” If it was only the members of the Sanhedrin who erred then why does the Torah blame the entire nation? The Zohar (Section 3, 20:1) explains that, “If the [members of the Sanhedrin] err, it is as if the entirety of Israel erred.” The Zohar conveys the critical notion that when leaders guide their followers down a negative path, they not only tarnish themselves, but their entire nation as well.

Just as the faulty leadership of the Sanhedrin reflected negatively upon the entire Jewish congregation, the misguided leadership of the Iranian regime has begun to taint not only the government of Iran, but its citizens as well.

Commander of U.S. Central Command General David Petraeus recently warned that Iran is becoming a “thugocracy” in its attempts to suppress popular anger over last year's contested presidential vote results, *Agence France-Presse* reports. Petraeus alluded to Iran's willingness to suppress free speech following allegations of widespread fraud during Iran's presidential elections last year, as well as to the recent executions of a number of those who protested in the aftermath of those elections. Iran's human rights violations remind us of the threat that Iran would pose if it is successful in its attempt to develop nuclear weapons. As the Iranian government openly represses freedoms, supports terrorism, calls for the destruction of Israel and attempts to develop the weapons to carry out that goal, the House of Representatives and the Senate must immediately reconcile their versions of enhanced Iran sanctions legislation and send them to President Obama to sign into law. For more on Iran, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

The offering of the “forgotten matter” reminds us that misguided leadership taints not only the leaders themselves, but their followers as well. Now, the leaders of Iran must heed this example, abandon their nuclear weapons program and spare ordinary Iranians the hardships inherent in increased sanctions.