Note: Please bring a complete Tanakh to every class, including the first. You should also have a Torat Hayyim edition of Shemot and Vayikra, and Jewish Study Bible (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford University Press, 2004)

Our goal is to understand why Vayikra is at the center of the Torah, how it serves as the Torah’s core. We will explore basic themes from a conceptual perspective, including

- the interconnected dimensions of sacred time, space and person;
- the meaning of sacrifice and atonement;
- the relationship between ritual and ethical action;
- the role of Sanctuary in maintaining Divine presence
- the concept of embodied spirituality, and the importance of touching in cultivating relationship, including intimacy with the divine
- Exploring the nexus of the three “bees”—blessing, brothers, blood
- Mediating tension between individual and community, as well as between individuated identity and socially defined roles

We will endeavor to think canonically as well as locally. That is, while learning to hear the Torah’s Priestly voice with clarity and comprehension, we will consider how this voice relates to other important voices in Tanakh, especially the prophetic, sapiential (wisdom), and narrative.

We will invite exploration of contemporary resonance and relevance, reading Vayikra as a fresh and engaging guide to the challenges and possibilities of spiritual leadership in our time.

Class requirements:
- Weekly text preparation: biblical verses, classical commentaries (with focus on Rashi, Ramban, and Seforo); secondary readings.
- Write a weekly one-page summary of your class notes to be passed in (hard copy)
- Give an oral presentation summarizing a secondary reading, and lead class discussion on it.
- Write a final paper that displays and draws upon your knowledge of the material we covered in class, and places it in dialogue with other biblical, rabbinic, and contemporary voices. Your topic is yours to choose—in consultation with the instructor—but be sure to demonstrate how the biblical and rabbinic ideas we have explored can be relevant to contemporary Jewish theology and practice.

Week #1. Introduction. The structure of Torah: Priestly and Deuteronomic perspectives. Leviticus as instruction [Torah]; as narrative; as theology; as system theory. The meaning of sacrifice. Major themes: blessing, attracting the Divine Presence, mediation; sacred space and time; meaning of the gift—to God. Ethics and ritual; purity and


Constructing and partitioning sacred space (compare with sacred place in Genesis). The sequence of nested rectangles; Tabernacle as a microcosm of creation. Tabernacle as projection and domestication of Sinai. Significance of the Tamid: at its core, the system is simple (one lamb in the morning, one lamb in late afternoon), and continual (starting from Sinai, extending in an unbroken chain through all time) Ex. 29:38-46; cf. Numbers 28:1-8. Tangible signs— the “envelope” circumscribing the divine Presence: the Glory/Kavod, the divine autograph, Moses’s *karnei hod*, the cherubim, the altar.

- Why is command of the incense altar situated at Ex. 30:1-10, rather than at Ex. 25:40 (or even Ex. 26:35)? Note how this textual dis-placement mirrors the description of the placement of the incense altar in contrast to the Menorah and Table; cf. Ex. 40:3-5; 40:22-27.
  - Comparing Ex. 29 and Lev. 8. [Theocentric view: priests as “sacred vessels.” Moving to the anthropocentric view: priests as representatives of the people and as individuals in their own right—individuals who will need to go deeper to seek their own atonement….] Establishment of a horizontal vector of approach to by-pass/over-come the paradox of self-referentiality. This is hinted in the enigmatic verse at Ex. 30:10—“Once a year Aaron shall perform kipper rites upon its horns, with the blood of the hattat of applications….” This of course alludes to Yom Kippur and Lev. 16, but what still obscure reality is alluded to here?

Moses’s intercessory role in Exodus. Ex. 32. Changing God’s mind. Moses and Noah. (cf. Gen. 8:22 with Gen. 6:5; cf. Ex. 32:9 with 34:9; note the term *va-yinahem*.

- Encounter between God and Moshe at 32:17-23. God wants intimacy. Interplay between Moshe’s personal quest and heightened empowerment for leadership. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.
- Moses returns with God’s instructions, erects the mishkan and begins the service. The first day of the first month. The end of Shemot, with bi-directional valence.

Week #2. Understanding Leviticus’s sacrificial system. Individual and community. Lev. 1:1—“*a person ---who shall offer--- from among you--- an offering--- unto God...*” Priesthood: petitioner, officiant, sacrifice; Three primary dimensions: space, time and personnel. Holiness—consecration—is expressed by restriction. Greater degrees of
holiness are associated with greater restriction along all three dimensions in a coordinated fashion.

- Leviticus 1 (olah); The meaning of *semikhah*. The meaning of *nirtzah*, *kipper* (cf. *kapporet*, *kippurim*)

**Week #3, Minhah and Shelamim.** See Lev. 5:13; Num. 4:16, 18:9 (*minhah* before *hattat*); Joel 1:9, 1:13, 2:14 (note connection to *berakhah*). Nehemia 10:34 (list of Temple sacrifices).

The *azkarah*: Lev. 24: 5-9; the meaning and significance of *noteret*.

Key terms: *hiktir*, *saraf*, *akhal*.

In what context is each term used, and what is the difference between them? Shelamim. The significance of separation and offering of the suet.

**Week #4.** Lev. 4 (*Hattat*). Compare with Lev. 6: 17—23; 7:1-10. Two types of *hattat*. The role of the golden incense altar in the Inner *hattat*. Milgrom’s “Picture of Dorian Gray” The role of the golden incense altar in the Inner *hattat*. Structural dependence of *hattat* on *minhah* and *shelamim*.

**Week #5, Korban Asham.** (Lev. 5) How does *Asham* differ from *Hattat*? (See Nahmanides on the meaning of ‘asham’). Asham as uncertain, unacknowledged guilt; the role of *vidui* (confession)—see Lev. 5:5. Cf. Gen 26:10—Abimelech and Isaac; Gen 42:21—Aval ashamim anahnu…; Lev. 16:21 (*vidui* of the High Priest on Yom Kippur); Lev 26:40.; Num. 6:12—*asham* of the Nazirite who comes into contact with unexpected, sudden death.

See Lev 5:2—*ve-ne’elam mimenu* ve-hu tame’* ve-aschem  
5:3, 5:4--------*ve-ne’elam mimenu* ve-hu yada’* ve-aschem*

Note that in verse 2, *ve-hu tame*’ can mean, he had already been *tame*’. Similarly, *ve-hu yada’* *ve-aschem* means he had *already known*—but had then forgotten—thus his guilt is that he did not take his situation seriously enough to keep it in mind, he allowed it to slip from memory. *yada*’ is a pluperfect. Cf. Rashi on Gen 4:1 *Ve-ha-adam yada’* --“the man had known…” See note of Rosebaum-Silbermann, p. 17, n. 1---

“This explains *ve-hitvadah* in Lev 5:5—as the person struggles to acknowledge guilt, he must articulate it. [Note that Hazal categorize the “sliding-scale” offering as a *hattat*, but consider that the terminology of *asham* pervades this section; see Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan.] Cf Num 5:7 (a passage that augments Lev 5:20-26), which specifies *vidui* for this type of *asham*. (Maimonides uses Num 5:7 to derive the requirement of confession in his exposition of Teshuvah)

Assignment: Rashi on Lev 5:17—the meaning of *asham talu’i*, the reward for observance of commandments; note the incremental structure of this Rashi. Rashi on Lev 5:21.

**Week #6.** [Parashat Tzav] Disposition of Sacrifice; Priestly Perquisites Disposition of Olah: 6:1-6 . the *deshen* (residue) [Sefat Emet on terumat ha-deshen.]

Disposition of Minhah: Lev. 6:7-11. The *azkarah*: Lev. 6:5 [cf. 24: 5-9]; the meaning and significance of *noteret*. Key terms: *hiktir*, *saraf*, *akhal*.

Disposition of *hattat*: Lev. 6:17-23. Disposition of Shelamim: Lev. 7:11-18; note, in v. 18, the importance of eating the meat in the proper time frame. Cf. Lev. 19:5-8; 22:29-30; Ex. 12:10.

- In what case is the hide not given as a perquisite (“perk”) to the priest? What does this mean?
- What is the significance of 6:23 “But no *hattat* may be eaten from which any blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting …”?  
- Lev. 7:28- 34. Verse 30: *Yadav tevi’enah*: ‘His [=the Israelite’s] own hands shall bring the fire-offerings of the Eternal’ Significance of the waving. The importance of the sense of touch,
the tactile, in Vayikra’s embodied theology. [intimacy by proxy: business cards in the far East] Rashi on Lev. 7:30.

**Week #7. Consecration of Aaron and sons:** Ex. 29:1-37; Lev. 8:1-36. Seven-fold pattern in Lev. 8. The manufacture of anointing oil, associated particularly with Moses (Ex. 30:22-33). The paradox of self-referentiality, and the paradox of initiation. Comparing Ex. 29 and Lev. 8. [Moving from the theocentric view—priests as “sacred vessels” to the anthropocentric view: priests as representatives of the people and as individuals in their own right—individuals who will need to go deeper to seek their own atonement…. Recall Lev 1—the emergence of individuated agents out of communal space. Recall also the introduction of the incense altar following the section on the ordination of the priests in Exodus, suggesting that only after the corporate nature of the Tabernacle is established do we now begin the development of priests as individuals]

The eighth day of consecration. What surprises us about Lev. 9?

**Week # 8. Animals and humans; domestication. Kashrut.** [Jared Diamond Guns, Germs & Steel; Michael Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma; Jonathan Safran Foer, Eating Animals]

* Tume’ah and taharah as Sanctuary-mindfulness. Reading: Ramban on Lev. 11:8, s.v. uve-nivlatam lo tiga’u.—the command is a call to awareness, to mindfulness. Compare Hanna Liss, “Ritual Purity and the Construction of Identity,” in The Books of Leviticus and Numbers, edited by Thomas Romer (Leuven, 2008), pp. 329-354.

* Tzara’at and boundaries: somatic, sartorial, social
Reading: Sefat Emet on Lev. 13:2. No’am Elimelekh on Adam ki yihiyeh be-or besoro se’et o sapahat o baheret…—positive traits inhibited by stereotyped patterns ingrained in childhood; on zot tihiyeh torat ha-metzora— the baal teshuva uplifts the prayers of the zaddik

**Week # 9. The meaning of Yom Kippur. Lev. 16. The hidden and manifest Glory. Penetrating the inner sanctum,** the ultimate repository and reservoir of Divine Purity. Tume’ah as “implication/entanglement” Rabbi David Pardo, Maskil le-David on Lev. 16: 16; God wants to be implicated in Israel, just as Israel wants to rise to purity and holiness.

The pattern of dovetailing—notice how 16:6 prepares for 16:11, while 16:9 prepares for 16:15. Meanwhile, 16:7,8&10 prepare for 16:20b, 21 & 22. What does this dovetailing accomplish? [contrast the lack of dovetailing—that is, the discrete completion of each stage—in the inauguration rites at Lev 9]

Sa’ir la-Azazel—Ramban on Lev 16:8, 16:21—s.v. ve-natan otam al rosh ha-sa’ir.
Note how 16:7 & 16:10 support Ramban’s view that even the sair la-azalel is an offering (not a sacrifice) to God—y’omad chai lifnei Hashem le-khaper alav…; God is present (even) in the sending-out-of-the-camp…

Reading: Bonna Devorah Haberman, “The Yom Kippur Avodah within the Female Enclosure.”

Blood: Lev. 17: 11—*“Ki nefesh ha-basar ba-dam hi…ki ha-dam hu, ba-nefesh yekhaper”* Blood as essence of life; killing animals is shedding blood Lev. 17:11-14; cf. Deut. 12:27

• the meaning of Lev. 19: 26—*‘Do not eat upon the blood,* you shall not indulge in sorcery or divination”—compare 1Samuel 14:32—33. A divinatory practice?
• Compare II Samuel 23:14-17. Why does David not wish to drink the water? What does he do instead?
Assignment: Ramban on Lev 17:11-12, s.v. “Ki nefesh ha-basar...” Note Nahmanides’ view of intimate proximity of animal and human life. Cf. Anne Fadiman, Spirit Catches You, p. 107: “The souls of sacrificed animals are precious and vitally connected to human souls. Animals are not considered to be as far removed from the human species as they are in our world view.” (quoting Dwight Conquergood)
Ramban on Lev. 18:4, s.v. et mishpotai ta’asu—the mitzvot give life—in accord with your understanding of ‘life’.

Assignment: Ramban on Lev 19:2, s.v. Kedoshim tiheyu.

Week # 11. The sacred calendar of Lev. 23; comparison to other calendars, e.g. Num. 28 and Deut. 16. The role of Shabbat in the festival cycle. Why the double beginning (23:2, 4) and the double ending (23:37, 44)?
"" What is the meaning of “Holy convocation”? (1) Ramban on Leviticus 23:2—Torat Hayyim page 224
Note—You may omit the first part of Ramban’s comment and begin with the words ותא אהלמה וקוהז—this is four lines up from the bottom of page 224; the comment continues on pages 225 and 226.
(2) Seforno on Leviticus 23:2—In the Torat Hayyim edition, the comment begins at the bottom of page 223 and continues on 224.
(3) Seforno on Numbers 28:11, s.v. וראות והפסים—the inner significance of Rosh Hodesh: comparison between the moon and Israel
The meaning of הזכות הים הזוד

Lev. 24:13-23—the Nokev Shem. Why placed at this point? Compare to Ex. 2:11—Va-yigdal Moshe va-verze el elah...; Ex. 18:7—Va-verze Moshe likrat hono...; Va-yomer Yitro ‘Barukh ha-Shem... ’ Ex. 21:22-27 (ayin tahat ayin)—what similarities and differences do you see? Note that ‘mum’ ‘blemish’ is a disqualification for sacred service—compare to Lev. 21:21—kol ish asher bo mum...lo yigash le-hakriv ...et lehem Elo-hav... Name theology in Vayikra: The meaning of Kiddush ha-Shem and Hillul ha-Shem. Swearing falsely with God’s Name as Hillul ha-Shem—Lev 19:12; Priestly holiness as safeguarding the sanctity of the Name: Lev 21:6. A priest bearing tume ’ah approaching the sancta desecrates the Name: Lev 22:2 Uttering (nokev) the Name: Lev 24:11, 16
Compare Ex 33:17 va-eida-akha be-Shem; Lev 20: ki mi-zar’o natan la-molekh,le-ma’an tame’ et mikkashi, u-le-hallel et Shem kodshi [note ‘Panai’]
Lev 22:32 Ve-lo tehalleu et Shem kodshi/ve-nikdashti be-tokh Bnei Yisrael
Compare Malachi 1: 6-7 ...ha-konim bozei Shemi....Magishim al mizbehi lehem me-go’al...

“ve-natai Panai ...” is applied only in three circumstances: Lev 17:10—one who eats blood (attempting to internalize life-spirit as practice of power); Lev 20:3, 5—one who “gives of his seed” to Molech—committing idolatry, murder, destroying seed; Lev 20:6—Turning to Ovot, Yidonim—internalization of the ghost for visitation with the dead, divination. cf. Lev 26:17—misuse of land and its sacred personhood .....
Week # 11 **Sabbatical year and Jubilee. The land as living person.**

Compare Jer. 16:7-8; Hosea 14: 6-8; Joel 4:18; Amos 9:13-15; Psalms 65: 8-14; Ps 104.

**Leviticus and Beyond. prophecy and sacrifice.** Jer. Ch. 7; Ez. 37:27-28; 43:1-9. Ps. 51.


**Christian views of sacrifice. Epistle to the Hebrews.**


Week # 12. **Sacrifice in Mishnah. Action and Intention: The Human Will In Rabbinic Thought.** The correspondence between animal sacrifice and meal-offerings The word mahashavah in biblical Hebrew and Mishnah. How the Mishnah reads Leviticus. The notions of mattir; piggul. Mishnah Zevahim 4:6; lishmah, shelo-lishmah. (Cf. Rashi on Lev. 7:18 and 19:5-8.) Mishnah Zevahim 1:1-4; Mishnah Zevahim 2:2-5. The four critical parts of the blood rite. The correspondence to the four stages of the meal offering. *Menahot* Ch. 1; Ch. 13:11. The linkage of mattir and piggul: Zevahim 4:1-4. Piggul is possible only when there is no other essential flaw in the sacrifice. It is the taking of sacred energy—that which could have, would have, should have been kodesh—and perverting it, reversing its direction but not its power. This is piggul. That which could not have been holy cannot be piggul. Zevahim 3:6—thoughts which do not cause piggul. Reading: Glatzer, “Concept of Sacrifice”; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Human Will in Judaism: The Mishnah’s Philosophy of Intention* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), especially pp. 145-189, “Plans in the Sacrificial System.”

**The Book of Leviticus in Aggadic Thought. The primacy of ethics in Midrash.** Selected texts from Vayikra Rabbah Recommended edition: Mordecai Margoliot (Jerusalem 5732 [1972]). Midrash Tanhuma. Substitutes for sacrifice in Rabbinic Judaism: Study, prayer and deeds of lovingkindness. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 4 (“We have an atonement like the Temple sacrifices…”); “Whoever engages in study of the laws of Ola… (Menahot 110a); “daily prayers (Tefillot) were instituted in correspondence with the Tamid offerings” (Berakhot 26b) The development of the synagogue and bet midrash.

Week # 13. **Sacrifice and Sanctuary in Medieval Jewish Thought.** Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Bet ha-Beihrah.*

Ramban (Nahmanides), *Torah Commentary* Introduction to Exodus —the climax of the Redemption is the making of the Tabernacle and the dwelling of the Shekhina there—this is homecoming. Commentary to Ex. 25:1 (pp. 434-437)—“the main purpose of the Tabernacle was to contain a place in which the the Divine Glory rests, this being the ark…”

Introduction to Leviticus (pp. 3-5); Introduction to Numbers (pp. 3-4)

R. Bahya ben Asher, *Torah Commentary* to Ex. 25:7 (ed. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1981], vol. 2: 266-7—the significance of the fifteen items listed for contribution to the Mishkan; Commentary on Lev. 1:9 (vol. 2 pp. 399-403)—the meaning of olah re’ah niho’ah.

**Sacrifice and Sanctuary in Zohar.**

Reading: Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* I: 319-322 (”The Unification of the Sefirot through the Mystery of the Light of the Lamp”)
Ani & ayin: personal, collective, transpersonal identity.
*Rosh Hashanah*, s.v. “Inyan ha-prishah le-kohen ha-gadol” (I:367a-369a)
“One & one….One & seven”: meditative awareness of continual creation.
R. Jacob Leiner, *Sefer Bet Ya’akov al Sefer Va-Yikra*. (selections)

Sacrifice and Sanctuary in contemporary Jewish Thought. Summary and review.

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Knohl, Israel. The Sanctuary of Silence (Augsburg Fortress, 1995).
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Biblical Cosmology/Jewish Biblical Theology


Priestly Worldview


**Death of Nadav and Avihu—Torah’s Midpoint ("darosh darash")—Moses and Aaron**


**Hattat and other Sacrifices**


**Blood, Circumcision, and Covenant**


**Tzipporah, Moses, and the “Bridegroom of Blood”**


**Sacred Space and Sanctuary**


**Land Alive: Leviticus and Ecological Consciousness**


**Second Temple, Purity, and Sacrifice**


**Sacrifice: A Comparative Perspective**


**Vayikra and the Structure of Torah;**

**Vayikra in Canonical Perspective**


[semihah as ‘pre-sanctification’ of the animal; press of the five-fingered Hand to transmit the Spirit]