



Vayikra: Living with Sacrifice and Closeness in the Shadow of War

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When war erupts again and again, how do Israeli families and communities live with constant loss? In this episode of TEXTing IRL, Elana Stein Hain and Hartman research fellow David Dishon turn to the book of Vayikra and to David's experience as a bereaved grandparent of a soldier killed in the Israel-Hamas War. Together, they examine how sacrifice shapes grief by transforming loss into enduring presence, and offer a framework for spiritual resilience.

*This source sheet is part of the **March 16, 2026** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life**. Host **Elana Stein Hain** sits down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields to explore how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with and act with integrity in the face of the big dilemmas of our time.*

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1. Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, Introduction

The Hebrew term for sacrifice, *korban*, has evolved to designate three different but related meanings. . . . In its primary use, a sacrifice is a gift, an offering given from humans to God. It involves an object, usually an animal, which is transferred from the human to the divine realm. In its second use, which emerged later, the term refers to giving up a vital interest for a higher cause. Someone may sacrifice his property, comfort, limb, or even life for his children, country, or in order to fulfill an obligation. This latter sense of sacrifice also entails giving, but in this case it is giving *up* or *for*, and not giving *to*.

. . . Yet there is an inner logic to the extension of the term's use from the first sense to the second. Though no transfer has actually taken place in giving up individual interests for others or a country, the verb "to sacrifice for" can be construed indirectly as a giving of a gift by the individual to the nation or for the good of others.

The third meaning of *korban* is manifested by an intriguing development in its use in many languages. In Modern Hebrew, *korban* denotes not only an offering but also a victim of a crime; yet in biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Hebrew as well as in Greek and Latin, no such use exists.

2. Vayikra (Leviticus) 10:3

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר ה' לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדָּשׁ וְעַל־פָּנָי כָּל־הָעַם אֶכָּבֵד וַיִּדְּם אֶהְרֹן:

Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what God meant by saying:

I will sanctify myself through those who are near me

And gain glory before all the people."

And Aaron was silent.

3. Sifra, Shemini, *Mekhilta deMilu'im*, par. 2:36, trans. Shraga Silverstein

"וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדָּשׁ" – זֶה דְּבִיר נְאֻמָּה בְּסִינֵי לְמֹשֶׁה וְלֹא יָדְעוּ עַד שֶׁבָּא מַעֲשֵׂה לִידוֹ. וְכִינּוֹן שֶׁבָּא מַעֲשֵׂה לִידוֹ אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה "אַהֲרֹן אָחִי לֹא מָתוּ בְּנִיךְ אֲלֵא עַל קְדוּשַׁת שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת כט, מג) 'וְנוֹעַדְתִּי שְׁמָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדָּשׁ בְּכַבּוּדִי". כִּינּוֹן שֶׁיָּדַע אֶהְרֹן שֶׁבָּנֵי יְדוּעֵי הַמָּקוֹם – שֶׁתֵּק, וְקִבֵּל שֶׁכָּר עַל שְׁתִּיקוֹתוֹ.

(Leviticus 10:3) "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what God meant by saying: I will sanctify myself through those who are near me'" – this saying was spoken to Moses on Sinai, and he did not know its meaning until it came to pass. And when it came to pass Moses said to Aaron, "Aaron, my brother, your sons died only to sanctify the Name of the Holy Blessed One, as it is written (Exodus 29:43): 'And I shall meet the Israelites there, and it will be sanctified by My glory.'" When Aaron understood that his sons were close to God, he was quiet, and he was rewarded for doing so.

4. Iyov (Job) 38:25-26

כה מיִפְלֵג לְשִׁטֹּף תִּעֲלֶה וְדַרְךְ לַחֲזוֹי קְלוֹת :
כו לְהַמְטִיר עַל־אֶרֶץ לֹא־אִישׁ מְדַבֵּר לֹא־אָדָם בּוֹ :

25 Who cut a channel for the torrents
And a path for the thunderstorms,
26 To rain down on uninhabited land,
On the wilderness where no one lives . . .

5. Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:42

וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזַכֵּר וְהָאֶרֶץ אֲזַכֵּר :
I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham I will remember; and I will remember the land.

6. Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 36:5

לָמָּה נֶאֱמַר בִּיעֲקֹב וּבְאַבְרָהָם זְכִירָה, וּבְיִצְחָק לֹא נֶאֱמַר, רַבִּי בְּרַכְיָה וְרַבִּינּוּ, רַבִּי בְּרַכְיָה אָמַר
עַל יְדֵי שְׁהִיָּה בֵּן שֶׁל יִסּוּרִיו, וְרַבִּינּוּ אָמְרֵי רוּאָה אֶפְרוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק כְּאֵלוֹ צְבוּר עַל גְּבֵי הַמְּזֻבָּח.

Why is remembrance mentioned for Jacob and Abraham and not for Isaac? Rabbi Berekhya and the Sages discussed. Rabbi Berekhya said: because Isaac suffered; and the Sages said: God sees Isaac's ashes as though they are gathered on the altar.

7. Etz Yosef, commentary to Vayikra Rabbah 36:5

כְּאֵלוֹ צְבוּר עַל גְּבֵי הַמְּזֻבָּח. וְלֹא יֵאמַר זְכִירָה עַל דְּבַר הַנִּרְאָה תָּמִיד :

One should not mention remembrance about something that is always before one's eyes.

8. Babylonian Talmud Zevachim 62a

מִזְבֵּחַ – מִנָּא יְדָעִי?

How did they know in the time of Ezra where the altar should be built?

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: רָאוּ מִזְבֵּחַ בְּנוֹי, וּמִיכָאֵל הַשָּׁר הַגָּדוֹל עֹמֵד וּמִקְרִיב עָלָיו. וְרַבִּי יִצְחָק
נִפְחָא אָמַר: אֶפְרוּ שָׁל יִצְחָק רָאוּ, שְׂמוֹנָח בְּאוֹתוֹ מָקוֹם. וְרַבִּי שְׂמוּאֵל בֶּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר: מִכָּל
הַבַּיִת כּוֹלוֹ הַרְיָחוּ רִיחַ קִטְרֶת, מִשָּׁם הַרְיָחוּ רִיחַ אֲבָרִים . . .

Rabbi Elazar says: They saw a vision of the altar already built and Michael the archangel standing and sacrificing offerings upon it.

And Rabbi Yitzhak Nappaḥa says: They saw a vision of the ashes of Isaac that were placed in that location.

And Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani says: From the entire House they smelled the scent of incense, yet from there, the location of the altar, they smelled a scent of burned animal limbs . . .