

TORAH PORTIONS PARASHAT VAYIKRA

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

LEVITICUS 1:1-6:7*

Parashat Vayikra / פֶּרַשַׁת וַיִּקְרָא

In this week's guide...

COMMENTARY: We often refer to the life of faith as a “journey.” More than a flowery metaphor, this terminology accurately reflects our realities, especially the dynamic nature of a believer’s life. In other words, walking with *Yeshua* entails shifts and changes. How we adjust to them is a key to living faithfully. This week’s *parsha* describes a monumental shift in the way Israel related to God’s Presence—are you ready for a shift in your life?.....1

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN: It’s time to get stinky! On second hand, perhaps “fragrant” would be a nicer way to phrase that. Let’s take a deep dive, exploring a phrase that describes the various sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus: “a soothing aroma.” What could this possibly mean for our lives, living in today’s “post-sacrificial” world (i.e., we don’t bring livestock to church on Sunday mornings)?.....2

HEBREW WORD STUDY: Let’s keep following the “scent” in the New Testament Tie-in. Our study of this Hebrew word offers a rich and rewarding understanding of what that soothing aroma was and how you can participate in the worship led by our Great High Priest, *Yeshua*.....3

OVERVIEW

Welcome to the Book of Leviticus, unexpectedly rich with meaning and relevance to our lives as followers of *Yeshua*. The name of this first *parsha* is also the title for the Torah’s third book. While our English Bibles use “Leviticus,” Judaism typically refers to it by the name *Vayikra*—which means “And He called.” In this *parsha* are the various liturgical regulations (i.e., various offerings) which were central to the worship in the Tabernacle of Moses.

* due to verse and chapter discrepancies, Leviticus 6:1-8 in most of our Bibles is actually an extension of the fifth chapter in the Hebrew Bible and Torah Portion schedule.

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FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON Weekly Torah Portion – *Parashat Vayikra* / פְּרִשַׁת וַיִּקְרָא

Leviticus 1:1-6:7*

COMMENTARY

by Staff Contributor

Last week, we read the final *parsha* of *Shemot*, the Hebrew word for “names” (aka the Book of Exodus). The conclusion of the Torah’s second book describes the setting up of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) as God ordained and Moses orchestrated. The final verses of Exodus describe *haAish v’haKavod* (the Fire and Glory) of *ADONAI*’s *Shechinah* (Presence) upon the Holy of Holies before the entire Nation of Israel.

This week’s *parsha*, *Vayikra*—which is our first reading in the Book of Leviticus—begins with the following words: “Now *ADONAI* called to Moses and spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting” (Leviticus 1:1).

The Presence of God now dwelled within the Holy of Holies. The Tabernacle was now complete. And our reading schedule is bringing us into a biblical book (that I like to call “the most interesting boring book you’ll ever read”) that goes into great detail describing the sacrificial system, the priestly process, and the lifestyle of a devout follower of *HaShem*. But none of that is more significant than the astounding fact that God’s Presence filled the Tabernacle and His voice called out to Moses from within the heart of the Holy of Holies.



Moses would no longer climb a thundering, smoke-covered mountain to hear. He no longer had to go to the outskirts of the camp to listen. Rather, he would now hear *ADONAI* from within this special place in the heart of His people. Take hold, take firm hold of those very words! Moses now heard the voice of God from within His unique place, strategically located in the heart of His people.

Do you notice a similarity between this development and the life of a *Ruach*-filled believer in Messiah today? His Tabernacle (a temporary dwelling place here on earth) is now realized in the heart of the Lord’s disciples. *Yeshua*—God robed in flesh, “tabernacling” in our midst—has provided (and demonstrated) a way for the *Shechinah* through the *Ruach HaKodesh* to reside within our hearts. As new creations in Messiah, our hearts become a Holy of Holies (if you will), allowing us, like Moses, to hear the voice of God from within His unique place: the heart of His people.

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NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

by Staff Contributor

At the outset of this week's *parsha* we encounter a phrase that might seem odd: "a soothing aroma." In Leviticus 1:8-9, we read, "Then Aaron's sons, the *kohanim*, shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat upon the wood that is on the fire which is atop the altar. But its innards and its legs he is to wash with water. The *kohen* should burn it all up as smoke on the altar, for a burnt offering made by fire—a soothing aroma to *ADONAI*." Aside from a single reference in Genesis after the flood, the only other biblical reference of this "soothing aroma" up to this point was during the consecration of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29. Suddenly, the Torah features this liturgical fragrance NINE TIMES in this week's reading alone!



Parashat Vayikra unveils intricate instructions for sacrifices, particularly those for sin and guilt. As followers of *Yeshua*, we must grasp these rituals as profound symbols that foreshadow our Redeemer, who was "revealed once and for all at the close of the ages—to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). When we embraced the path of *Yeshua*, the Holy Spirit "incorporated" us into His life in ways that deeply impact us. As Paul proclaimed, "Therefore we were buried together with Him through immersion into death—in order that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become joined together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be joined together in His resurrection" (Romans 6:4-5 *emphasis added*).

Let's put all of this together...

1. *Vayikra* repeatedly describes sin sacrifices that have a soothing *aroma*.
2. Hebrews 9 states that *Yeshua*'s death was the final sacrifice for sin.
3. Romans 6 insists that in baptism, believers are united to that death (and resurrection).

Like the sacrifices detailed in our reading this week, there is an *aroma* associated with the Lord's death. But because we are united to Him through grace and by faith, this holy fragrance is now essential to who *we* are. Consider what the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians,

But thanks be to God, who in Messiah always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us reveals everywhere the aroma of the knowledge of Himself. For **we are the aroma of Messiah** to God, among those who are being saved and those who are perishing—to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. Who is competent for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:14-16 *emphasis added*)



We are the 'aroma of Messiah'! Perhaps you've entered a home during the holidays and caught the scent of a roast cooking in the oven. You might have even heard it described as 'heavenly.' **But here's the crucial point:** the aroma of that roast is not the roast itself. You can't consume a fragrance. A smell can't nourish you. Yet, the delightful scent informs you that the cook has accomplished something significant in that oven. Similarly, because our baptism unites us to *Yeshua* in His death (*cf.* Romans 6:1-4), our very existence as His "living sacrifices" (*cf.* Romans 12:1-2) inherently (fragrantly?) communicates **His work** to the world.

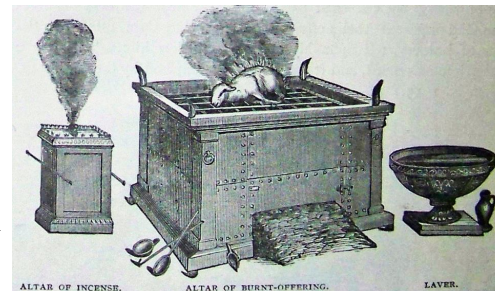
These sacrifices, then, are not tedious rituals we muscle through in a 'reading plan.' These texts point to the Lamb of God and those of us whose yielded lives emit the *soothing aroma* of His sacrifice on the cross.

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HEBREW WORD STUDY: *reiach* (ריח) “odor, aroma, fragrance”

by Staff Contributor

This week’s New Testament Tie-in unpacked some profound connections related to the description of the burnt offerings as having a “sweet aroma.” The English word “aroma” is a translation of the Hebrew word *reiach* (ריח), and it appears in the Hebrew Bible more than fifty times. As we read in Leviticus 1:9, the word appears as part of a “multi-term noun.” In Hebrew, the TLV’s “soothing aroma” is *reiach-nichoach*—a “fragrance of appeasement.” A Hebrew-speaking person would appreciate the wordplay of this phrase, as detailed by scholar James Parks: “The final sounds of ‘fragrance’ [*reiach*] are the same as ‘as an appeasing’ [*nichoach*]. The similarity between the final sounds of these words creates the wordplay.”ⁱⁱ



On its own, *reiach* functions in two ways:

1. in reference to a pleasing fragrance, and
2. in reference to a smell (without positive connotation).

As to the *pleasing* fragrance, the writer of the Song of Solomon used the term most frequently (no surprise here!). We find an example in the opening chapter,

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine.
Your ointments have a pleasing fragrance [*lereiach*].
Your name is poured out like perfume.
No wonder maidens love you! (Song of Solomon 1:2-3)

We see an instance of the more general “smell” usage in the account of Isaac and Jacob’s interaction, which resulted in Jacob stealing “the blessing”:

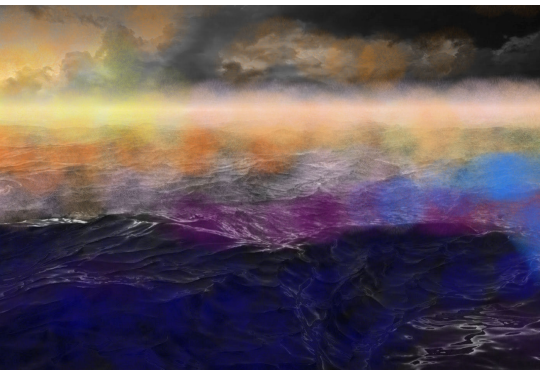
So he came closer and kissed him. When he smelled the smell [*reiach*] of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

“Behold, the smell [*reiach*] of my son is
like the smell [*kereiach*] of a field that
Adonai has blessed.” (Genesis 27:27)

In the Genesis text, Isaac does not suggest that the fragrance on Jacob is good or bad, but rather that it reminds him of Esau. However, in Leviticus, we should note that as far as the burnt offering was concerned, “its chief function is to make a pleasing odor for God.”ⁱⁱⁱ And perhaps there is a reason for this divine purpose “hiding” in the word itself. We can all agree that God is the universe’s only absolute, essential good. Surely there are other “good” things, but whatever goodness they may possess, it is only derivative of God’s essence. The Triune Godhead is the fullness of goodness and, by extension, is satisfied (or “pleased”) in Itself. Plainly said, God didn’t create the universe because He needed anything—all the pleasure and satisfaction of the three Persons of the Godhead were sufficient. God is pleased with God.

With all of this in mind, consider the possibility that the burnt offerings created an aroma that (in their “pleasing” essence) presented God back to God. That may cause your brain to hurt, but again, let’s look at the Hebrew for clarification.

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The word *reiach* is a derivative of another word—its “parent noun”—רוּחַ... *ruach*. You may recognize that Hebrew word from Genesis 1:2, “Now the earth was chaos and waste, darkness was on the surface of the deep, and the *Ruach Elohim* was hovering upon the surface of the water.”

The highest purpose of all of these offerings was to create a pleasing *reiach* for *ADONAI*, a fragrant echo of God’s creative Spirit and very essence by which “man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7 KJV). We are capable of “smelling (*reiach*) like God” because His Spirit (*Ruach*) is the source of our very life.

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present HEBREW WORD STUDY

רוּחַ

רוּחַ / *reiach*: N. odor, aroma, fragrance.

scent, odour, of plants and fields, of ointments, of persons and garments, of water; [figuratively used] of influence, reputation. 2. term. techn., רוּחַ נִיחָח odour of soothing (to God), tranquillizing odour (of ascending sacrifices, v. נִיחָח).

taken from The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament

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ⁱ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

ⁱⁱ James Parks, *Wordplay in the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2021), Le 1:9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sarah Shectman et al., “Themes and Perspectives in Torah: Creation, Kinship, and Covenant,” in *The Old Testament sand Apocrypha*, eds. Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber, Fortress Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 182.

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- The Tabernacle of Moses must have been a truly magnificent, awe-inspiring yet mysterious phenomenon. The wild assortment of materials—from various animal skins to precious metals and intricate artisanal work—must have been a sight to behold! And, of course, its ceremonies and protocols would have only added to the intrigue. Now consider: we are God's dwelling place! His Presence fills our lives, and His voice emanates from within us! How does this truth shape the way you think about yourself and your fellow believer?
- Speaking of smells, do you recall what the Hebrew slaves said to Moses earlier in the Book of Exodus (after his initial confrontation with Pharaoh)? They said, "you have made us a stench in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants" (Exodus 5:21). What do you make of this verse in light of what we studied regarding sweet smelling aromas? Are there connections between Moses' behavior and the offering of sacrifices? Are these two different "smells"? Why? If these "odors" are the same, why would it be offensive in one setting and sweet in another? Have you experienced anything like this in your life?

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Parashat Tzav* / פְּרִשַׁת צוֹ

TORAH

Sunday / Leviticus 6:8-18*

Monday / Leviticus 6:19-7:10

Tuesday / Leviticus 7:11-38

Wednesday / Leviticus 8:1-13

Thursday / Leviticus 8:14-21

Friday / Leviticus 8:22-29

Saturday / Leviticus 8:30-36

Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*): Jeremiah 7:21-8:3, 9:22-23

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 9:10-17

** Verse numerations modified from those in the Hebrew Bible*

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.