



Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY
EDITION

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

TZAV • 19

STUDIES IN SPIRITUALITY

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צא

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.

An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

Understanding Sacrifice

● This summary is adapted from this week's main essay by Rabbi Sacks, available at www.RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/tzav/understanding-sacrifice/

One of the most difficult elements of the Torah and the way of life it prescribes is the phenomenon of animal sacrifices – for obvious reasons. First, Jews and Judaism have survived without them for almost two thousand years. Second, virtually all the Prophets were critical of them, not least Yirmiyahu in the *Haftarah* for *parshat Tzav*.

None of the Prophets sought to *abolish* sacrifices, but they were severely critical of those who offered them while at the same time oppressing or exploiting their fellow human beings. What disturbed them – what disturbed God in whose name they spoke – was that some people thought of sacrifices as a kind of bribe: if we make a generous enough gift to God then He may overlook our crimes and misdemeanours. This is an idea radically incompatible with Judaism.

What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism and why does it remain important, at least as an idea, even today? The simplest answer – though it does not explain the details of the different kinds of offering – is this: **We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for.** That is why, when they were a nation of farmers and shepherds, the Israelites demonstrated their love of God by bringing Him a symbolic gift of their flocks and herds, their grain and fruit; that is, their livelihood. **To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give. Sacrifice is the choreography of love.**

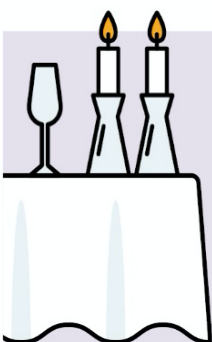
This is true in many aspects of life. A happily married couple is constantly making sacrifices for one another.

Parents make huge sacrifices for their children. People drawn to a calling – to heal the sick, or care for the poor, or fight for justice for the weak against the strong – often sacrifice remunerative careers for the sake of their ideals. In ages of patriotism, people make sacrifices for their country. In strong communities people make sacrifices for one another when someone is in distress or needs help. **Sacrifice is the superglue of relationship. It bonds us to one another.**

That is why, in the biblical age, sacrifices were so important – not as they were in other faiths but precisely because at the beating heart of Judaism is love: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.

We see this in the Hebrew word for sacrifice itself: the noun *korban*, and the verb *lehakriv*, which mean "to come, (or bring) close." The name of God invariably used in connection with the sacrifices is *Hashem*, God in His aspect of love and compassion, never *Elokim*, God as justice and distance. The word *Elokim* occurs only five times in the whole book of *Vayikra*, and always in the context of other nations. The word *Hashem* appears 209 times.

And as we saw in the previous *parsha*, the very name of the book, *Vayikra*, means to summon in love. **Where there is love, there is sacrifice.**



Around the Shabbat Table

1. What or who do you make sacrifices for in your life?
2. How does this demonstrate your love for them?
3. Now we no longer have sacrificial worship, how can we show our love for God through sacrifice?



Sharing Light

by Rebbetzen Lauren Levin

When my husband and I were just starting out as a Rabbi and Rebbetzen in London, we were invited to Rabbi Sacks' house with a group of other young Rabbis and Rebbetzens. Rabbi Sacks invited us all to ask questions, and one Rabbi put his hand up and asked:

“We really want to help and teach people of all backgrounds about their Judaism. But we are worried that if we want our children to be very religious, maybe it will be confusing for them to meet all different kinds of Jews?”

Rabbi Sacks gave the following answer: If you have money and you give half to a friend, you will only have half left. If you have chocolate and you give some to a friend, you will have less chocolate for yourself. But if you use the flame of your candle to light another person's candle, you will both have light without you having less. Sharing knowledge is like sharing light. You can share as much as you want without diminishing what you have.

I often think back to this, and how important it is to share what we know about Judaism with love. Sharing is caring – we have nothing to lose when it comes to learning with others; we can only gain!

● Rebbetzen Lauren Levin serves as Director of Education at South Hampstead Synagogue, London. She is Yoetzet Halacha and a Sacks Scholar.



A CLOSER LOOK

● **Rabbetzen Levin** now reflects on some of the deeper ideas of Rabbi Sacks' teachings.

What is your favourite quote from Rabbi Sacks' essay this week, and why?

I loved the line: “In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.” Religion can often be practised out of fear instead of love. Rabbi Sacks shows that from the very way the Torah presents sacrifices, it is a way of expressing love.

Can you share something you learnt from Rabbi Sacks himself?

As a teenager, I was very touched by the way Rabbi Sacks wrote about the prophet Hoshea. He compared the Jewish people's relationship with God to that of a husband and wife. Just as in marriage both the husband and wife have responsibilities, the same is true of our role as Jewish people in the world today. We have a responsibility to make a difference, and it all stems from love.

How can we implement Rabbi Sacks' message on sacrifice into our own lives?

There are things that we do in Judaism out of habit, or because we feel we have to. I think it would be wonderful if we could spend more time thinking about why we practise our traditions.

This would help us discover the love, excitement, and meaning in our Jewish identity.



TORAH TRIVIA

Q: How many *parsha* names consist of just two Hebrew letters? Can you name them?

1. Noach
2. Bo
3. Tzav

A: There are three *parshiyot* with just two letters in their name.

● Adapted from Torah IQ by David Woolf, a collection of 1500 Torah riddles, available worldwide on Amazon.