

## Vayikra

With this week's Torah reading we begin Sefer *Vayikra*, known also as *Toras Kohanim*—The Laws of the Priests. In the very first sentence, we observe a rather strange phenomenon—although all of the letters in the first word of *Vayikra* are written in their natural size, the last letter of the word—the *Aleph*—is written in a miniature size. The Sages interpreted this to reflect on the humility of Moses. He was reluctant to write about himself and use the word *Vayikra* which would be understood as a term denoting deep affection and esteem by G-d. He therefore sought to minimize its significance inasmuch as he was commanded to use that very flattering phrase, by reducing the size of the letter, so that it could be read *Vayikar*—it happened perchance that the L-rd spoke to him, although he was not really worthy of any special consideration.

An equally beautiful Commentary however explains it to refer to small children—as indicated by the small *Aleph*—that they should be introduced by beginning to read the Third Book of the Torah—*Vayikra*.

In the words of the Midrash, “Since small children are pure and the sacrifices denote and represent purity, it is only proper that the pure shall occupy themselves with the laws of purity as expounded in this Book.”

Perhaps this custom of initiating small children into the laws of purity and sacrifices was to ingrain in them that Judaism is a way of life which strives for holiness and purity. In order to achieve the desired state as enumerated in this part of the Torah, it is imperative to be prepared mentally and psychologically, to physically make supreme sacrifices for our faith and people. Learning and studying these laws would then create a lasting impression on the mind and soul of the child, and would inspire him to even higher achievements in the pursuit of spirituality and morality.

As for the parents, they, too, receive a message which rings loud and clear. If you are to raise your children to be G-d-conscious and moral individuals in their daily lives, you too must be prepared for sacrifices. You will have to sacrifice first of all your money to send your son or daughter to the best Yeshiva Day Schools avail-

able, regardless of the financial expense. You need to be prepared to sacrifice part of your leisure time daily in order to observe and enjoy your children as they grow up. You will also have to serve as an example for them to follow religiously, morally and socially. All of this will take sacrifices of many sorts. Thus, in this simple custom of starting off the religious education of your children by reading the book of purity and sacrifices, much is achieved in the way of educating adults and children simultaneously.

The wisest of all men, King Solomon, proclaimed many centuries ago, "Train the child in his proper way, so that in his old age he will yet retain the teachings of his youth and remain loyal to those postulates." This truism is so evident that it really need not even be quoted, since we see the validity of this concept all around us. Those children who were blessed with devoted parents who cared and were really interested in their wholesome, intensive religious education and moral training, grew up to be useful and creative members of society. They became, and are, the backbone and solid foundation of the Jewish people.