

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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# ויקרא

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# LEVITICUS

ויקרא  
צו  
שמיני  
תזריע  
מצרע  
אחרי מות  
קדשים  
אמר  
בהר  
בחקתי

# LEVITICUS

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BARUCH A. LEVINE

Popularly called by the Hebrew name *Va-yikra*, “He called,” which is its first word, Leviticus is known formally as *Torat Kohanim*, “instructions for the priests” (M Meg. 1:5). This title defines Leviticus as a prescription for the proper worship of the God of Israel.

The Hebrew Bible reflects the central concerns of the ancient Israelites: Perhaps the most vital of these was to know how they were to express their loyalty to the Lord. This very question is posed by the prophet Micah (6:6), who answers it by emphasizing the primacy of justice and love, ultimately desired by God more than sacrifice. Leviticus 19:2 gives a more specifically priestly answer to Micah’s question: “You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.” How Israel was to live as a holy nation is the burden of Leviticus.

The contents of Leviticus are diverse but unified by the theme of holiness. The first seven chapters delineate the major types of sacrifices undertaken by Israelites individually and as a community. Chapters 8 to 10 record the emergence of sacred worship in ancient Israel by describing the initiation of the Aaronide priesthood and its first performance on the sanctuary altar. As a stern admonition, chapter 10 records an instance of improper officiating by two of Aaron’s sons, who met their death at the hands of the Lord.

Leviticus 11 is one of two major sources in the Torah for *kashrut*, or the dietary laws (cf. Deut. 14). The subject of purity informs chapters 12 to 15, which specify procedures for expiating impurity and susceptibility to danger. Continuing this theme, chapter 16 prescribes the rites of *Yom Kippur* aimed at the periodic cleansing of the sanctuary and the Israelite people.

Leviticus 17 to 26 cohere as a literary unit, referred to as “the Holiness Code,” because of

the frequent use of the term *kadosh*, “holy.” This section begins by ordaining the place and form of proper worship of the God of Israel. It then defines the Israelite family and details improper sexual behavior, including incest (Lev. 18). Perhaps the best known part of Leviticus is chapter 19, which resonates with the Decalogue, combining ritual and ethical teachings. It is here that we read “Love your fellow as yourself.” Chapters 20 to 22 contain more on the Israelite family and ordain specifically priestly duties and prerogatives. In chapter 23, the festivals and other holy days of the year are scheduled in a calendar of sacred time. The rest of the Holiness Code (ch. 24–26) and its appendix (ch. 27) add instructions to the priests about administration of the sanctuary and laws governing ownership of land and indebtedness. Here the source for the inscription on the Liberty Bell proclaims the inalienable right of the Israelite people to its land: “You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (25:10). In an epilogue (26:3–26), the Israelites are admonished to obey God and are forewarned of the consequences of disobedience, the most dire being exile from the land.

Two concepts embody the primary message of Leviticus. First, the Israelites are one community (*edah*), united by a common destiny and by a holy way of life—as commanded by the Lord Himself. They are forbidden to worship any other deity or follow the impure ways of other nations (19:4, 20:1–3,6). Second, the Israelites were granted the Promised Land as an eternal estate (*ahuzzah*) on condition that they follow the laws of God and remain faithful to His covenant. In Leviticus, the priests of Israel are instructed in the ways of holiness, and the Israelites are told what the Lord requires of them.



# 1 The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him וַיִּקְרָא \* אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו

א' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים v. 1.

## THE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF SACRIFICE (1:1–7:38)

Chapters 1–7 outline the biblical sacrificial system, as the Israelite priesthood administered it. The laws of the Torah did not permit Israelites to atone for intentional or premeditated offenses by bringing a sacrifice. There was no ritual remedy for such violations. In such instances, the law dealt directly with the offender, imposing punishments and acting to prevent recurrences. Gaining atonement through ritual sacrifice was restricted to situations in which a reasonable doubt existed about the willfulness of the offense. Even then, restitution was required if another person had suffered any loss or injury.

These chapters describe the basic kinds of sacrifices and list the several classes of offerings to be presented to God in the sanctuary. Chapters 1–5, addressed to individual Israelites and their leaders, recount what may be offered—including animals, birds, and grain. They establish the proper procedures for presenting the various sacrifices, a function performed primarily by priests but that occasionally required the participation of

those who brought the sacrifices. Chapters 6 and 7 constitute a professional manual for the priesthood and provide “an instruction” (a *torah*) for each of the major classes of sacrifices. In most cases, sacrifices served to remove the charges against the offenders, restoring them to a proper relationship with God and to membership in the religious community.

In most ancient societies it was believed that gods required food for their sustenance, relying on sacrifices for energy and strength. The Torah preserves the idiom common to ancient religions. However, it has a different understanding of the process: God desires sacrifices not out of the need for sustenance but out of longing for the devotion and fellowship of worshipers.

### THE BURNT OFFERING (*olah*) (1:1–17)

Chapter 1 deals with the sacrifice called “burnt offering” (*olah*), which was burned to ashes in its entirety (except for its hide) on the altar of burnt offerings. It was brought on various occasions, of-

Leviticus is a difficult book for a modern person to read with reverence and appreciation. Its main subject matter—animal offerings and ritual impurity—seems remote from contemporary concerns. Yet almost half of the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah are found in this book, the text with which young children traditionally began their Jewish education. Our concern in reading Leviticus should be more than historical (“this is what our ancestors used to believe and practice”). It should be an effort to understand the religious needs that were met by these practices in ancient times, needs that we still confront today, and the religious ideas that were taught in the process.

The modern temper tends to discount prescribed ritual in favor of spontaneous religious expression. Yet something in the human soul responds to ritual, whether it be the formality of a traditional wedding or the rituals of a sporting event or a public meeting. There is something comforting about the familiar, the recognizable, the predictable. There is something deeply moving about performing a rite

that is older than we are, one that goes back beyond the time of our parents and grandparents. At crucial times, it is important for us to know that we are “doing it right.” There is power in the knowledge that we are doing what generations of people before us have done in similar situations, something that other people in other places are doing at the same time and in the same way. And rituals, including prescribed prayers, tell us what to do and say at times when we cannot rely on our own powers of inspiration to know what to do or say. “Ritual is a way of giving voice to ultimate values. Each of us needs a sense of holiness to navigate the relentless secularity of our lives” (Schorsch). For the Israelites of biblical times, it must have been gratifying to know what to do when they wanted to approach God at crucial moments of their lives, in need or in gratitude.

Discomfort with sacrificing animals as a way of worshiping God is hardly a modern phenomenon. The biblical prophets criticized the sacrificial system for its tendency to deteriorate into form without feeling. The Midrash

envisions God saying "Better that they bring their offerings to My table than that they bring them before idols" (Lev. R. 22:8). All religions of biblical time were based on sacrificial worship, and the Israelites could not conceive of religion without it.

Maimonides believed that God did not savor this manner of worship, lest people assume that they were feeding God—who would go hungry without their gifts. Abravanel, too, suggests that God never intended to call for animal offerings. After the Israelites worshiped the Golden Calf, however, God recognized the inability of people to deal with a totally abstract notion of the divine and at that point ordained the details of the sacrificial system. Just as God does not need our prayers although we need to pray, God does not need our sacrifices although we need to offer them to feel God's nearness. We recognize this feeling in the eagerness of people to offer donations to charity to accompany their prayers or memorial observances. "The cult [i.e., organized worship through sacrifice] is not man's kindness to God but God's kindness to man" (Kaufmann).

Although Leviticus outlines the technical procedures for the various offerings, the Book of Psalms offers us insights into the spiritual-emotional dimension of the sacrificial system. In Psalms, it becomes clear how privileged the Israelite worshiper felt to be able to come into God's presence. "O God, deliver me by Your name; / by Your power vindicate me. / . . . Then I will offer You a freewill sacrifice" (Ps. 54:3,8). "O people, bless our God, / . . . I enter Your house with burnt offerings, / I pay my vows to You" (Ps. 66:8,13). "One thing I ask of the LORD, / . . . to live in the house of the LORD / all the days of my life, / . . . I sacrifice in His tent with shouts of joy" (Ps. 27:4,6).

The destruction of the Second Temple and the abrupt end of the sacrificial system in 70 C.E. was traumatic for Jews, depriving them of the accustomed way of reaching out to God. By that time, however, the synagogue had already evolved as a place for worshiping God through prayer and study. Piety, good deeds, and obedience to the Covenant would take the place of animal offerings. Over the course of centuries, Jews learned to invest their prayer and religious deeds with the same feeling of nearness to God that the temple altar had evoked. Today, hardly any liberal Jew would choose a return to the sacrificial system.

It may well be that animal offerings were an instinctive gesture on the part of human beings

to express gratitude, reverence, or regret. The Bible pictures Cain, Abel, and Noah offering sacrifices without being commanded to do so. People must have felt that their prayers of gratitude or petition would seem more sincerely offered if they gave up something of their own in the process. Presumably, this is why game and fish were unacceptable as offerings. "I cannot sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that have cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24). The offerings of first fruit, the firstborn of the flocks, and the symbolic redemption of the firstborn son may have been ways of recognizing that these gifts ultimately came from God, ways of conveying the faith that more blessings would be forthcoming so that these could be given up.

Why did young children begin their Jewish studies with Leviticus? "Children are pure; therefore let them study laws of purity" (Lev. R. 7:3). It also has been suggested that Jewish learning began here to teach from the outset that life involves sacrifice. One contemporary writer suggests, "In sacrifice, we could for a fleeting moment imagine *our own* death and yet go on living. . . . No other form of worship can so effectively liberate a person from the fear of living in the shadow of death."

Some scholars believe that Leviticus was originally a set of instructions for *kohanim*, priests officiating at the altar and presiding over rituals of purification, detailing how they were to perform their duties properly. This professional guide became one of the five books of the Torah as part of the process of democratizing the Israelite faith, making all Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). There would be no secret lore accessible only to the clergy.

## CHAPTER 1

**1. The LORD called to Moses** Moses was afraid to approach the Tent of Meeting, intimidated by its holiness. God had to call him and reassure him that, although the Tent and the tabernacle were holy and had to be treated with due reverence, they existed to benefit Israel, not to threaten them (Ramban). In another interpretation, Moses thinks that his mission has been completed. The Israelites are out of Egypt, he has brought the tablets of the Pact down from the mountain and has supervised the construction of the Tabernacle. God summons him to declare that much more must be done, guiding the Israelites to sanctify their daily lives.

Even the religion of the Torah is not com-

from the Tent of Meeting, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them:

When any of you presents an offering of cattle to the LORD, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock.

<sup>3</sup>If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall make his offering a male

מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup>דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם  
אָדָם כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֶרֶבֶן לַיהוָה מִן-  
הַבְּהֵמָה מִן-הַבֶּקֶר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ  
אֶת-קֶרְבָּנְכֶם:  
<sup>3</sup>אִם-עֹלָה קֶרְבְּנוֹ מִן-הַבֶּקֶר זָכָר תָּמִים

ten together with other offerings. No part of it was eaten, either by priests or by donors. The *olah* could consist of male herd cattle (vv. 3–9), male flock animals (vv. 10–13), or certain birds (vv. 14–17). This range of choices—from expensive to inexpensive—enabled Israelites of modest means to participate in religious life, because they could present less costly offerings at the sanctuary.

The procedures for all burnt offerings were similar. The sacrifice was presented at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the donor laid his or her hand on the creature (thereby designating it for a particular rite), and blood from the sacrificed animal or fowl was dashed on the altar in appropriate ways.

**1. Tent of Meeting** Hebrew: *ohel mo-ed*, the portable tent structure that housed the Ark and the objects connected to the sacrificial system (see Exod. 25:1–27:21, Exod. 35–40). In other texts, this complex is called *mishkan*.

**2. the Israelite people** Hebrew: *b'nei yisra-el*, often translated literally as “the children of Israel.” “The Israelite people” reflects the concept of peoplehood basic to the biblical idea that nations, like families, are descendants of common ancestors with a common genealogy.

**offering** Hebrew: *korban*, which designates

anything presented to God as one approaches the sanctuary. A *korban* could consist of artifacts and vessels, votive objects (brought in fulfillment of a vow), or sacrificial animals and fowl, as is the case here.

**cattle . . . herd . . . flock** In many of the Bible’s legal statements, a general category is given first, followed by particulars. Here the general category is livestock (*b’hemah*), further specified by the two usual classes: “from the herd (*bakar*) or from the flock (*tzon*).”

**3. If his offering is a burnt offering** The conditional word “if” (*im*) frequently introduces cultic laws (rules for organized religious worship) in the Book of Leviticus. Here it precedes each of the options available to those who offer sacrifices—the choice of which type of sacrifice to bring as well as the choice of which animal, fowl, or grain will constitute the offering. “Burnt offering” is designated by the Hebrew word *olah*, derived from the verb meaning “to ascend” (עלה). This offering may have been called *olah* because its flames and smoke “ascended” to heaven. The sacrifice, in its altered form, reaches God who was perceived as breathing its aromatic smoke, so to speak. Its purpose was to offer a gift to God to secure a favorable response. Frequently, the *olah*

plete. Each generation must find new ways to make God present in new situations that the Torah could not have foreseen.

**2. When any of you presents an offering** Literally, “When a man (*adam*) presents an offering.” May your offerings be like those of Adam, belonging to you and not stolen, offered solely to express your love of God and not to impress your neighbors (Lev. R. 2:7). The word for “offering” (*korban*) comes from the Hebrew root קרב, meaning “to bring close” or “to come close.” When we give a gift to someone we feel close to, we feel even closer for having given the gift. The *korban* both reflects and reinforces the Israelite’s bond to God. The point of

the sacrifice is not to feed or to bribe God but to come close to God.

The opening words of the Hebrew text are singular, but the Torah soon shifts to plural. This reflects the essence of the religious experience. A Hasidic master taught that we enter the sanctuary as individuals but the experience of worship leads us to transcend our separateness and become part of the community.

**3.** The *olah* is purely a gift to God, with no specific benefit to the donor anticipated, except the satisfaction of having brought the offering to God. Whether brought out of a sense of reverence or out of a sense of guilt, it expresses the idea that everything we have comes

without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in his behalf before the LORD. <sup>4</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him. <sup>5</sup>The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup>The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into sections. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and lay out wood upon the fire; <sup>8</sup>and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall lay out the sections, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. <sup>9</sup>Its entrails and legs shall be washed with water, and the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on

יִקְרִיבֵנוּ אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לְרֹצְנוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>4</sup>וְסָמַךְ יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הָעֹלָה וְנִרְצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו: <sup>5</sup>וְשָחַט אֶת־בֶּן הַבָּקָר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהִקְרִיבוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת־הַדָּם וְזָרְקוּ אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>6</sup>וְהִפְשִׁיט אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְנָתַח אֹתָהּ לְנִתְחֶיהָ: <sup>7</sup>וְנָתְנוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֵשׁ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְעָרְכוּ עֵצִים עַל־הָאֵשׁ: <sup>8</sup>וְעָרְכוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת הַנִּתְחִים אֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וְאֶת־הַפָּדֶר עַל־הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>9</sup>וְקִרְבּוּ וּבִרְעִיו יִרְחֹץ בַּמַּיִם וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־

was the first sacrifice in rites that included other offerings as well. In many instances, the *olah* was followed by the shared sacred meal (*zeval*).

**for acceptance in his behalf** The sacrifice is accredited to the donor as proper. When a sacrifice is not considered proper, the opposite is said of it: "not acceptable, discredited."

**before the LORD** This refers to a defined sacred area. Sometimes it was the zone beginning at the rear of the altar of burnt offerings in the sanctuary courtyard that continued to the interior of the tent; at times it was a large space near the entrance of the courtyard. Priestly law strictly limits sacrifice to a particular area and to the legitimate altar.

**4. He shall lay his hand** This symbolic act, "the laying on" of hands (known in later Hebrew as *s'mikhah*), indicated ownership and served to assign a sacrificial animal or fowl solely for use in a specific rite. The offering, once assigned in this way, was sacred and belonged solely to God.

**that it may be acceptable in his behalf** The *olah* sacrifice served as protection from God's wrath. Proximity to God was dangerous for both the worshipers and the priests, even in the absence of a particular offense. The favorable acceptance of the *olah* signaled God's willingness to be approached.

**5. against all sides of the altar** This refers to the altar of burnt offerings (mentioned by name in Lev. 4:7, and described in Exod. 27:1-8).

**6. shall be flayed and cut up into sections** Sacrificial animals usually were sectioned before being placed on the altar. The only exception was the paschal lamb. It was roasted whole (Exod. 12:9).

**8. with the head and the suet** The head of the animal had been severed. Suet is a type of hard organ fat.

**9. turn the whole into smoke** The burned parts of the sacrifice rise as smoke when they are consumed by the altar fire. Likewise, the word for

from God, given to us only on loan (Tanḥ. Tzav). It is called *olah* (from the root "to go up," as in *aliyah*) not only because it goes up in smoke but because it elevates the soul of the person who performs this act of generosity.

**without blemish** What renders an animal unfit in the sight of God does not disqualify the human being who offers it. The offering must be unblemished, as a sign of respect for God's altar and to discourage people from bringing

their lame and sick animals in a pretense of piety. An afflicted, broken soul, though, could bring an offering and might even be closer to God for having experienced pain and rejection. "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted" (Ps. 34:19). "You will not despise / a contrite and crushed heart" (Ps. 51:19, cited in Lev. R. 7:2).

**9. of pleasing odor to the LORD** The notion that God actually smells the aroma of the offering is rejected emphatically by rabbinic

the altar as a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD.

<sup>10</sup>If his offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. <sup>11</sup>It shall be slaughtered before the LORD on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>12</sup>When it has been cut up into sections, the priest shall lay them out, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. <sup>13</sup>The entrails and the legs shall be washed with water; the priest shall offer up and turn the whole into smoke on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a gift, of pleasing odor to the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, he shall choose his offering from turtledoves or pigeons. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall bring it to the altar, pinch off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup>He shall remove its crop with its contents, and cast it into the place of the ashes, at the east side of

הַכֹּל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲלֶה אִשָּׁה רִיחַ-נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה: ס

<sup>10</sup> וְאִם-מִן-הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן-הַבְּשָׂבִים אוֹ מִן-הָעוֹיִם לְעֹלָה זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיבֵנוּ: <sup>11</sup> וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ עַל יָרֵךְ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ צִפְנָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְזָרְקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-דָּמֹו עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>12</sup> וְנָתַח אֹתוֹ לְנִתְחָיו וְאֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת-פָּדְרוֹ וְעֶרֶךְ הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם עַל-הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>13</sup> וְהִקְרִיב וְהִפְרָעִים יְרֵחַץ בַּמַּיִם וְהִקְרִיב הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַכֹּל וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲלֶה הוּא אִשָּׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה: פ

<sup>14</sup> שְׁנֵי וְאִם מִן-הָעוֹף עֲלֶה קָרְבָּנוֹ לַיהוָה וְהִקְרִיב מִן-הַתּוֹרִים אוֹ מִן-בְּנֵי הַיוֹנָה אֶת-קָרְבָּנוֹ: <sup>15</sup> וְהִקְרִיבוֹ הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמָלַק אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנִמְצָה דָּמֹו עַל קִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>16</sup> וְהִסִּיר אֶת-מְרֹאתוֹ בְּנִצָּתָהּ וְהִשְׁלִיךְ אֹתָהּ אֶצֶל

incense (*k'toret*), in Hebrew and in other Semitic languages, derives from the word for smoke because it rises in the form of smoke.

**gift** Hebrew: *isbeh*, translated in the past as “offering by fire”—as if derived from *esh* (fire). Based on an Ugaritic cognate, we now know the meaning of the biblical term more accurately.

**pleasing odor** Hebrew: *rei-ah niho-ah* (a pleasant aroma). Aromatic substances were used routinely in the sacrificial system. This description, anthropomorphic in origin, is the Torah's way of stating that the sacrifice is accepted.

**15. pinch off its head** The Hebrew verb used for this here means “to break the nape of the neck.” According to rabbinic tradition, the priest did this with his fingernail, after which he severed the neck.

**16. remove its crop** The crop (an enlargement of the gullet, or esophagus) was too dirty to be placed on the altar. Therefore, it was consigned to the ash heap, near the altar. The entrails of animals sacrificed as burnt offerings had to be washed before being placed on the altar, to ensure that nothing offensive was offered to God (see v. 9).

commentators. “Far be it that the Almighty should smell or eat. The verse would tell us that the worshiper is as pleasing to God as a sweet odor is to a human being” (Ibn Ezra). “What is pleasing to God is not the aroma but the fact that Israel is doing God's will” (Rashi). Cassuto takes the phrase to mean that God accepts with pleasure the motives of the donor. According to Eliezer Ashkenazi, “Should the worshipers imagine that they have atoned for

their sins by bringing a sacrifice, the Torah informs them that the sacrifice is merely a foretaste of proper behavior in the future, even as the smell of food is only an anticipation of the meal.” And in an ancient passage that chillingly foreshadows 20th-century events, the Midrash states: “God smells the odor . . . of the burning flesh of Jewish martyrs” and is moved by that expression of their devotion (Gen. R. 34:9).

the altar. <sup>17</sup>The priest shall tear it open by its wings, without severing it, and turn it into smoke on the altar, upon the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a gift, of pleasing odor to the LORD.

הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קָדְמָה אֶל־מְקוֹם הַדִּשָּׁן: <sup>17</sup> וְשָׁטַע  
אֹתוֹ בְּכַנְפָּיו לֹא יַבְדִּיל׃ וְהִקְטִיר אֹתוֹ  
הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַה עַל־הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־  
הָאֵשׁ עָלָה הוּא אֲשֶׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ  
לַיהוָה: ס

**2** When a person presents an offering of grain to the LORD, his offering shall be of choice flour; he shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it, <sup>2</sup>and present it to Aaron's sons, the priests. The priest shall scoop out of it a handful of its choice flour and oil, as well as all of its frankincense; and this token portion he shall turn into smoke on the altar, as a gift, of pleasing odor

וְנִפֶּשׁ כִּי־תִקְרִיב קֶרֶבֶן מִנְחָה לַיהוָה  
סֵלֶת יִהְיֶה קֶרְבָּנוֹ וַיִּצֶק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וַנִּתֵּן  
עָלֶיהָ לִבְנֵה: <sup>2</sup> וְהִבִּיאָה אֶל־בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן  
הַכֹּהֲנִים וְקִמֵּץ מִשָּׁם מְלֵא קִמְצוֹ מִסֵּלֶתָהּ  
וּמִשְׁמָנָה עַל כָּל־לִבְנֹתָהּ וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן  
אֶת־אִזְכָּרֹתָהּ הַמִּזְבֵּחַה אֲשֶׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ

#### THE GRAIN OFFERING (*minḥah*) (2:1–16)

Appropriate for a variety of occasions, the grain offering (*minḥah*) often served as a less costly alternative to animal sacrifices. Both the *minḥah* and the burnt offering were regarded as “a most sacred offering,” a status that imposed special restrictions.

Various types of *minḥah* offerings, usually with the same ingredients, are listed according to their methods of preparation. The *minḥah* was made of the choice part of wheat taken from the inner kernels (*semolina*). Olive oil was mixed into the dough or smeared on it, and frankincense—a costly fragrant resin native to a tree in southern Arabia and Somaliland—was applied, to enhance the taste. The *minḥah* could be prepared on a griddle, in a pan, or in an oven. A fistful of the dough, with the oil and frankincense added, was burned

on the altar. The rest of the *minḥah* was prepared in one of the accepted ways, to be eaten by the priests in the sacred precincts of the sanctuary.

Verses 14–16 digress somewhat from the pattern of the chapter as a whole. They ordain a special *minḥah* of first fruits (*bikkurim*), which consisted of nearly ripe grain from the new crop. This grain was roasted and made into groats.

**1. a person** Hebrew: *nefesh*, here an individual as part of a group.

**offering of grain** The primary meaning of the term *minḥah* is “tribute” or “gift.” It is used in the Bible to reflect the subservient relationship of the worshiper toward God and to convey the notion that it is a duty to present gifts to God, often in the form of sacrifices.

**2. handful** A minute quantity.

**token portion** The fistful of dough represents the complete offering from which it was taken.

#### CHAPTER 2

In Lev. 1:2, the text reads, “when any of you (*adam*) presents an offering.” In chapter 2, introducing the grain offering, typically brought by a poor person, the text reads “When a person (*nefesh*) presents an offering.” The Hebrew word *nefesh*, a synonym for “person” in biblical Hebrew, later came to mean “soul.” This prompted a comment in the Talmud: “When poor people bring an offering, however meager, God credits them as if they had offered their own soul” (BT Men. 104b). What

sort of sacrifice does a soul offer? When we give up our unworthy dreams and ambitions, or when a person yearning for wealth decides to be content with a modest income rather than gain riches by unethical means, that is the sacrifice the soul brings to God’s altar (Lev. R. 3:1).

Kook, a chief rabbi of Palestine and a vegetarian, envisioned a time when the Temple would be rebuilt and only the grain offering would be brought, for no animals would be slaughtered in God’s name: “None shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain” (Isa. 11:9).

to the LORD.<sup>3</sup> And the remainder of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the LORD's gifts.

<sup>4</sup>When you present an offering of grain baked in the oven, [it shall be of] choice flour: unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.

<sup>5</sup>If your offering is a grain offering on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, unleavened. <sup>6</sup>Break it into bits and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering.

<sup>7</sup>If your offering is a grain offering in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil.

<sup>8</sup>When you present to the LORD a grain offering that is made in any of these ways, it shall be brought to the priest who shall take it up to the altar. <sup>9</sup>The priest shall remove the token portion from the grain offering and turn it into smoke on the altar as a gift, of pleasing odor to the LORD. <sup>10</sup>And the remainder of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the LORD's gifts.

<sup>11</sup>No grain offering that you offer to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for no leaven or

ליהוה: <sup>3</sup> והנותרת מן-המנחה לאהרן ולבניו קדש קדשים מאשי יהוה: ס

<sup>4</sup> וכי תקרב קרבן מנחה מאפה תנור סלת חלות מצות בלולת בשמן ורקיקי מצות משחים בשמן: ס

<sup>5</sup> ואם-מנחה על-המחבת קרבנך סלת בלולה בשמן מצה תהיה: <sup>6</sup> פתות אותה פתים ויצקת עליה שמן מנחה הוא: ס

שלישי <sup>7</sup> ואם-מנחת מרחשת קרבנך סלת בשמן תעשה:

<sup>8</sup> והבאת את-המנחה אשר יעשה מאלה ליהוה והקריבה אל-הפֿהֿן והגִּישָׁה אל-המזבֿח: <sup>9</sup> והרים הפֿהֿן מן-המנחה את-אזכרתה והקטיר המזבֿח אשה ריח ניחח ליהוה: <sup>10</sup> והנותרת מן-המנחה לאהרן ולבניו קדש קדשים מאשי יהוה:

<sup>11</sup> כל-המנחה אשר תקריבו ליהוה לא תעשה חמץ כי כל-שאר וכל-דבֿש לא-

**3. a most holy portion** Hebrew: *kodesh kodashim*; literally, "most holy of the holy offerings."

**4. baked... unleavened cakes... unleavened wafers** The law here distinguishes between the two customary varieties of baked goods: *hallah*, "a thick, round cake" (Ibn Ezra), and *rakik*, "a thin cake, cookie, or wafer."

**5. on a griddle** Cakes prepared on a griddle became crisp and could be broken into "bits," *pittim*, the plural of the Hebrew word for a slice of dry bread (*pat*).

**7. in a pan** The cakes were prepared in a pan with a lid and deep-fried, becoming soft in the process.

**9. The priest shall remove** This parallels the statement of verse 2: "The priest shall scoop out of it." Verses 8–10 recapitulate the provisions given earlier in verses 2–3. It is not uncommon for codes of law, as well as narratives, to include some repetition for clarity and for emphasis.

**10. And the remainder... for Aaron and his sons** This rule refers to a basic feature of the Israelite sacrificial system and that of most ancient

Near Eastern religions. In a few cases, the complete sacrifice was consumed by the altar fire. Quite often, however, large portions of the offerings were to be eaten by the priests and, in some cases, by the donors of the offerings as well. This was regarded as indispensable to the ritual process, because it was important to celebrate a sacred meal in the presence of God. Failure to eat the appropriate portion of the sacrifices in the proper place and within the proper span of time would render the sacrifices ineffectual. Thus there were two dimensions to a sacrifice (other than the *olah*, which was completely burned): the portions on the altar or table that were received by the deity, and the portions later consumed by the priests and the donors. Without both dimensions, the sacrifice was incomplete.

**11. no leaven or honey** "Leaven" refers to food that has fermented. "Honey" most likely is from the nectar of trees, such as date palms, or from fruit, not the honey of bees. It is not clear why these products were forbidden on the altar, whereas wine, which was fermented, was used in

honey may be turned into smoke as a gift to the LORD. <sup>12</sup>You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of choice products; but they shall not be offered up on the altar for a pleasing odor. <sup>13</sup>You shall season your every offering of grain with salt; you shall not omit from your grain offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt.

<sup>14</sup>If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the LORD, you shall bring new ears parched with fire, grits of the fresh grain, as your grain offering of first fruits. <sup>15</sup>You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>16</sup>And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke: some of the grits and oil, with all of the frankincense, as a gift to the LORD.

תִּקְטִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה: <sup>12</sup> קֶרְבֵּן  
רֹאשִׁית תִּקְרִיבוּ אֹתָם לַיהוָה וְאֶל-  
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא-יָעֲלוּ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ: <sup>13</sup> וְכָל-  
קֶרְבֵּן מִנְחָתְךָ בַּמֶּלַח תִּמְלַח וְלֹא תִשְׁבִּית  
מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹהֶיךָ מֵעַל מִנְחָתְךָ עַל  
כָּל-קֶרְבְּנֶךָ תִּקְרִיב מֶלַח: ס  
<sup>14</sup> וְאִם-תִּקְרִיב מִנְחָת בִּכּוּרִים לַיהוָה  
אָבִיב קִלּוֹי בָּאֵשׁ גָּרֶשׁ כֶּרֶמֶל תִּקְרִיב  
אֶת מִנְחָת בִּכּוּרֶיךָ: <sup>15</sup> וְנָתַתָּ עָלֶיהָ  
שֶׁמֶן וְשִׁמְתָּ עָלֶיהָ לְבִנָּה מִנְחָה הִוא:  
<sup>16</sup> וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֲזִפְרָתָהּ מִגִּרְשָׁהּ  
וּמִשְׁמֹנָהּ עַל כָּל-לִבְנָתָהּ אִשָּׁה  
לַיהוָה: פ

3 If his offering is a sacrifice of well-being—  
If he offers of the herd, whether a male or a

רביעי וְאִם-זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים קֶרְבְּנוֹ  
אִם מִן-הַבָּקָר הִוא מִקְרִיב אִם-זָכָר אִם-

libations poured over the altar and consumed by fire.

**12. choice products** Literally, “first fruits.” Although honey and leaven are unsuitable as burned altar offerings, they are suitable as offerings set before God. The Israelites were permitted to enjoy the bounty of the land, but first they were required to offer God some of what was His. Such offerings were simply given to the priest rather than burned on the altar.

**13. the salt of your covenant with God** Salt was the preservative par excellence in antiquity. According to priestly law, all sacrifices had to be salted. In the case of meat, salt functioned to remove whatever blood remained after slaughter. The unexpected use of salt in grain offerings probably reflects the normal tendency toward uniformity in ritual.

**14. first fruits** Hebrew: *bikkurim*, from the same root as the word for “firstborn” (*b’khor*), which refers to both animals and humans. Birth

and growth were perceived as dimensions of the same process in all of nature.

**new ears** Hebrew: *aviv*, grain just before ripening, when the kernels, not yet darkened, are still greenish in color. *Aviv* is also the name of the spring month when grains ripen.

#### THE OFFERING OF WELL-BEING (*zevah sh’lamim*) (3:1–17)

This chapter deals with the third type of offering in Israelite worship, *zevah*. The most frequent *zevah* was *zevah sh’lamim* (designated by Baruch Levine as the “sacred gift of greeting” and rendered here as “offering of well-being”).

Some of the same animals used for the burnt offering (Lev. 1) could also be used for *zevah*. The same altar was used for both types of offerings as well as for the grain offering (Lev. 2). *Zevah*, however, had a special character. Whereas the burnt offering (*olah*) was completely consumed by the altar fire, entirely given over to God, *zevah* was

#### HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

**2:11 leaven** Throughout *Pesah* we are commanded to refrain from eating or benefiting from leavened food (*hametz*). “*Hametz*” is defined as food prepared from any of five species of grain—wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye—that has been allowed to rise through contact with a liquid for more than 18 minutes or with a leavening agent, such as yeast. Among *Ashk’nazim*, many rabbis added restrictions forbidding the use of rice, millet, corn, and legumes (*kitniyot*), although their derivatives (such as oil) are permitted by most authorities. See Comment to Deut. 16:3.



female, he shall bring before the LORD one without blemish. <sup>2</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>He shall then present from the sacrifice of well-being, as a gift to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup>Aaron's sons shall turn these into smoke on the altar, with the burnt offering which is upon the wood that is on the fire, as a gift, of pleasing odor to the LORD.

נִקְבָּה תָּמִים יִקְרִיבֶנּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>2</sup>וְסָמַךְ יָדוֹ עַל-רֹאשׁ קָרְבָּנוֹ וּשְׁחָטוֹ פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּזְרָקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>3</sup>וְהִקְרִיב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה אֶת-הַחֹלֶב הַמְכֻסָּה אֶת-הַקָּרֶב וְאֶת כָּל-הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַקָּרֶב: <sup>4</sup>וְאֶת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלִיֹּת וְאֶת-הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַכְּסָלִים וְאֶת-הַיֵּתֶרֶת עַל-הַכְּבֵד עַל-הַכְּלִיֹּת יְסִירֶנָּה: <sup>5</sup>וְהִקְטִירוּ אֹתוֹ בְּנֵי-אֹהֶלן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עַל-הָעֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֵשׁ אִשָּׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה: פ

a sacred meal shared by the priests and by donors of the offering. Only certain fatty portions of the animal were burned on the altar, as God's share. The grain offering (*minḥah*) could be eaten only by priests. Thus *zevah* represents a distinctive mode of sacrifice, affording worshipers the experience of sharing a sacred meal with the priests.

**1. sacrifice of well-being** The term translated as "well-being" (*sh'lamim*) has various meanings, like the verb *שלם* from which it is derived. The usual translation, "sacrifice of well-being," is based on the meaning of *shalom* as "well-being, wholeness." Another view, understanding it as "sacred gift of greeting," reflects the specific role of this sacrifice as an offering made when one came to greet God at a sacred meal.

**3. fat** The Hebrew word *heilev* here refers specifically to fat that covers or surrounds the kidneys, the liver, and the entrails—not to ordinary fat that adheres to the flesh of an animal. Like blood, *heilev* is forbidden for human consumption. From the perspective of the sacrificial system, a food's desirability depends entirely on its symbolic value. Hence, although normally not regarded as choice food for humans, *heilev* was considered to be a desirable gift for God.

**4. protuberance on the liver** The "protuberance" refers to the fingerlike projection from the liver, close to the right kidney.

**5. with the burnt offering** The altar of burnt offerings was used for both the *olah* and the *zevah sh'lamim*.

## CHAPTER 3

This category of offering was brought by a person who had something to celebrate. Hoffman emphasizes that *zevah sh'lamim* is always an individual, never a communal, offering because the feelings of gratitude and well-being from which it flows are very personal. It is called *sh'lamim* (from *shalem*, "whole," and *shalom*, "harmony"), because it is motivated not by guilt or obligation but by a sense of wholeness in the donor's life, a sense of being at peace with one's family, with the priests of the Temple, and with God. One commentator derives the name from the fact that "it brings peace between the individual and neighbors who are invited to join in the feast."

Some readers of the chapters describing the

sacrifices might conclude that they were all meant to atone for guilt, with the animal brought to the altar serving as a vicarious substitute for the person who might feel deserving of death for the sin. But as we see in the first three chapters of Leviticus, the first major categories of offering are motivated by profound reverence and overflowing happiness, not only by guilt.

Later injunctions of the Torah impose the rule that the *sh'lamim* be eaten on the day when it is brought or the following day at the latest, and that it must be discarded by the morning of the third day (Lev. 7:15, 19:6). One suspects that this is to encourage the donor to invite more friends and poor people to join the celebration. The sense of joy increases with the number of participants.

<sup>6</sup>And if his offering for a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD is from the flock, whether a male or a female, he shall offer one without blemish. <sup>7</sup>If he presents a sheep as his offering, he shall bring it before the LORD <sup>8</sup>and lay his hand upon the head of his offering. It shall be slaughtered before the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>9</sup>He shall then present, as a gift to the LORD, the fat from the sacrifice of well-being: the whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone; the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; <sup>10</sup>the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>11</sup>The priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as food, a gift to the LORD.

<sup>12</sup>And if his offering is a goat, he shall bring it before the LORD <sup>13</sup>and lay his hand upon its head. It shall be slaughtered before the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>14</sup>He shall then present as his offering from it, as a gift to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; <sup>15</sup>the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>16</sup>The priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as food, a gift, of pleasing odor.

All fat is the LORD's. <sup>17</sup>It is a law for all time throughout the ages, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

**6-8.** See Comments to Lev. 1.

**9. whole broad tail** This refers to the large, broad tail of certain species of sheep that are still raised in Israel and neighboring countries.

**11. as food** Hebrew: *lehem*, not only bread (its literal meaning) but food in general. The sacrifices are referred to as *lehem elohim* (food for God) in Lev. 21:6. The priests present the offerings to God in the same way as food is served to humans.

<sup>6</sup>וְאִם־מִן־הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ לַזֶּבַח שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה זָכָר אֹו נִקְבָּה תָּמִים יִקְרִיבֵנוּ: <sup>7</sup>אִם־כֶּשֶׂב הוּא־מִקְרִיב אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ וְהִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>8</sup>וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ קָרְבָּנוֹ וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְזָרְקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶל־אֶת־דָּמּוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>9</sup>וְהִקְרִיב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה חֶלְבּוֹ הָאֵלִיָּה תְּמִימָה לַעֲמַת הָעֵצָה יְסִירָנָה וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב הַמְכֻסָּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַקֶּרֶב: <sup>10</sup>וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי הַפְּלִיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עָלֶהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַפְּסָלִים וְאֶת־הַיִּתְרֹת עַל־הַפֶּבֶר עַל־הַפְּלִיֹת יְסִירָנָה: <sup>11</sup>וְהִקְטִירוּ הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לַחֵם אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה: פ

<sup>12</sup>וְאִם עֵז קָרְבָּנוֹ וְהִקְרִיבוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>13</sup>וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְזָרְקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶל־אֶת־דָּמּוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>14</sup>וְהִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ קָרְבָּנוֹ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה אֶת־הַחֹלֶב הַמְכֻסָּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַקֶּרֶב: <sup>15</sup>וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי הַפְּלִיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עָלֶהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַפְּסָלִים וְאֶת־הַיִּתְרֹת עַל־הַפֶּבֶר עַל־הַפְּלִיֹת יְסִירָנָה: <sup>16</sup>וְהִקְטִירֵם הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לַחֵם אִשָּׁה לַרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ

כָּל־חֹלֶב לַיהוָה: <sup>17</sup>חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם כָּל־חֹלֶב וְכָל־דָּם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ: פ

חמישי

**17. law** Hebrew: *hukkah*, from the root meaning "to inscribe, incise" (חָקַק). This reflects the practice of inscribing statutes on stone.

**for all time** The priestly codes often stipulate that a law or regulation applied to a specific instance is meant to be a permanent statute as well.

**you must not eat any fat or any blood** They belong to God as sacrificial offerings. For the main prohibition against the eating of blood, see 17:10-12.

**4** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people thus:

When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them—

#### THE EXPIATORY SACRIFICES (4:1–5:26)

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the laws governing the “purification offering” (*hattat*) and the “reparation offering” (*asham*), which are intended to secure atonement and forgiveness from God. These offerings are effective only for unintended offenses. They do not apply to defiant acts or premeditated crimes. Whenever an individual Israelite, a tribal leader, a priest, the High Priest, or the entire Israelite community is guilty of inadvertent wrongdoing or failure to do what the law requires, atonement through sacrifice is required.

The laws of these chapters reflect a deep concern for sanctity. They were intended to maintain the purity of the sanctuary against all forms of defilement that might be caused by the priests or by the people and to ensure the acceptability of all Israelites in God's sight. Inherent in these laws is a connection between sinfulness and impurity. As in many other ancient traditions, the levitical codes of the Torah associate legal innocence—

**ד** וידבר יהוה אל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> וידבר אל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר:  
נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תִחַטָּא בְשִׁגָּגָה מִכָּל מִצְוֹת  
יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְעָשָׂה מֵאֲחַת  
מִקֳּדָהּ:

and-guilt with purity-and-impurity, so that the guilty are also considered impure. Conversely, the forgiven are regarded as purified. Thus the *hattat* sacrifice can be viewed both as a form of purification and as a ritual for the removal of guilt. Also, sinful acts are frequently the very ones that cause impurity.

#### THE PURIFICATION OFFERING

*For Sins Committed Unintentionally* (4:1–35)

**2. unwittingly incurs guilt** Ignorance of the law is a mitigating circumstance in both the biblical and the rabbinic traditions. This is especially true in ritual matters. The presumption is that a fully aware and knowledgeable Israelite would seek to obey God's laws, not to violate them. Unwitting offenses, therefore, could be expiated by ritual means.

**things not to be done, and does one of them** In contrast to “sins of omission,” when the fault lies in the failure to do what the law requires.

#### CHAPTER 4

Biblical religion had a prophetic as well as a priestly dimension. The prophet (represented in the Torah by Moses and developed later in the Bible by Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, among others) set high standards for the people, emphasizing God's disappointment with them when they failed to meet those standards. The priest (represented by Aaron and his descendants) met people where they were and, by accepting them, helped them deal with their feelings of inadequacy for having fallen short of the Covenant's demands. If religion sets very high standards, people will inevitably fall short of those standards at one time or another. Indeed, the most devoted people will feel most troubled at falling short of the standards. Religion will then have to offer them a means of finding their way back to acceptability in God's sight.

The purpose of the *hattat* was not to bribe God to overlook the sin or to balance it with an act of generosity. Its purpose was to ac-

quaint the donor with one's own more generous side, so that instead of seeing oneself as weak and rebellious, a person could say “sometimes I am weak and rebellious, but that is not the real me. Often I can be generous and obedient.” It was an opportunity to clear one's conscience, not a penalty for having done wrong. We can compare it to our own feelings of having been cleansed and reconciled with God at the end of *Yom Kippur*, our prayers and fasting being the contemporary equivalent of a sacrifice. “In the inwardness of the act, the offering of man and the gift of God are indistinguishable. . . . God already answered us when He prompted our heart to pray” (Shalom Spiegel). In a sense, only a good person can recognize having sinned and be motivated to return to God's path. The willingness to bring a *hattat* was in itself a sign of virtue.

#### 2. When a person unwittingly incurs guilt

The Hebrew word *nefesh*, translated as “person” here and elsewhere in the Bible, is often taken to mean “soul” in postbiblical literature.

<sup>3</sup>If it is the anointed priest who has incurred guilt, so that blame falls upon the people, he shall offer for the sin of which he is guilty a bull of the herd without blemish as a purification offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD, and lay his hand upon the head of the bull. The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD, <sup>5</sup>and the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it into the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup>The priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the Shrine. <sup>7</sup>The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense,

<sup>3</sup>אם הכהן המשיח יחטא לאשמת העם והקריב על חטאתו אשר חטא פֶּרֶבְיָקָר תָּמִים לַיהוָה לְחַטָּאת: <sup>4</sup>והביא אֶת־הַפָּר אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְסָמָן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>5</sup>וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַמָּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפָּר וְהֵבִיא אֹתוֹ אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>6</sup>וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־אֶצְבָּעוֹ בְּדָם וְהִזָּה מִן־הַדָּם שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת־פְּנֵי פֶרֶכַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ: <sup>7</sup>וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַדָּם עַל־קַרְנוֹת מִזְבֵּחַ קֹטֶרֶת הַסַּמִּים לִפְנֵי

**3. anointed priest** According to the laws of Leviticus, the High Priest is the only priest anointed with oil. This accounts for his title here and in 6:15.

**so that blame falls upon the people** The entire community was affected by the errors and possible offenses of the individual in charge of the sanctuary and the priesthood. Here the law refers to offenses that occurred while the priest was performing priestly duties—not to the personal sins of the priest, for which he had to atone independently. Such inadvertent offenses, even where there was no intent to violate the commandments, might immediately arouse God's wrath and result in divine punishment. Prevent-

ing and mitigating that wrath is a major objective of the religious life.

**4. lay his hand upon the head of the bull** See Comment to 1:4.

**6. in front of the curtain of the Shrine** The blood rites prescribed here and in verses 16–21 are unusual. Elsewhere, they are reserved for the *Yom Kippur* ritual, as set forth in Lev. 16.

**7. on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense** For the design of the altar, see Exod. 30:1–10. For the ingredients of the incense to be used on it, see Exod. 30:34–38. Nothing but incense was to be offered on this altar, which stood inside the tent. Only in this instance, and in the ritual on *Yom Kippur* (see Lev. 16:18), was sac-

"It is in the soul that the impulse to do wrong begins" (Ramban). "When a person sins, intelligence departs and for the moment one behaves like an animal." It is an appropriate response to sacrifice an animal, which symbolizes the expulsion of one's animal nature (*Seifer Ha-Hinnukh*). The Midrash pictures God saying to the soul, "I created you as the most God-like part of the human being (able to distinguish between good and evil)! How could you choose to lead astray those other limbs and organs" (Lev. R. 4:4)?

The *hattat* is brought for unintentional violations. Why must we atone for inadvertent sins? Perhaps because we were insufficiently attentive to what we were doing (Hirsch). Carelessness is no excuse for violating God's commandments. Inadvertent sins may reflect a lowering of our guard against temptation.

There is a part of us that is inclined to be selfish, to take advantage of others. We must constantly be vigilant against such inclinations. Perhaps we must atone for inadvertent sins because the misdeed, though inadvertent, weighs on our conscience until we do something to atone for it. Because verbal regrets do not strike us as adequate, we must give up something to show our remorse (*Seifer Ha-Hinnukh*).

**3.** The anointed priest must atone for his own inadvertent failings in office before he can guide the people to atone for their sins. He must personally be familiar with feelings of guilt and repentance. Therefore, the rule for the *hattat* of the priest is mentioned first here. The Torah and later Jewish law and custom consistently demand that leaders set an example for the community by holding themselves to a higher standard.

which is in the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD; and all the rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>8</sup>He shall remove all the fat from the bull of purification offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; <sup>9</sup>the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys—<sup>10</sup>just as it is removed from the ox of the sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar of burnt offering. <sup>11</sup>But the hide of the bull, and all its flesh, as well as its head and legs, its entrails and its dung—<sup>12</sup>all the rest of the bull—he shall carry to a pure place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and burn it up in a wood fire; it shall be burned on the ash heap.

<sup>13</sup>If it is the whole community of Israel that has erred and the matter escapes the notice of the congregation, so that they do any of the things which by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt—<sup>14</sup>when the sin through which they incurred guilt becomes known, the congregation shall offer a bull of the herd as a purification offering, and bring it before the Tent of Meet-

יהוה אשר באהל מועד ואת כל-דם הפר ישפך אל-יסוד מזבח העולה אשר-פתח אהל מועד: <sup>8</sup>ואת-כל-חלב הפר החטאת ירים ממנו את-החלב המכסה על-הקרב ואת כל-החלב אשר על-הקרב: <sup>9</sup>ואת שתי הפליות ואת-החלב אשר עליהן אשר על-הכסלים ואת-היתרת על-הכבד על-הפליות יסירנה: <sup>10</sup>באשר יורם משור זבח השלמים והקטירם הפהון על מזבח העולה: <sup>11</sup>ואת-עור הפר ואת-כל-בשרו על-ראשו ועל-כרעיו וקרבו ופרשו: <sup>12</sup>והוציא את-כל-הפר אל-מחוץ למחנה אל-מקום טהור אל-שפך הדשן ושרף אותו על-עצים באש על-שפך הדשן ושרף: פ

<sup>13</sup>ואם כל-עדת ישראל ישגו ונעלם דבר מעיני הקהל ועשו אחת מכל-מצות יהוה אשר לא-תעשינה ואשמו: <sup>14</sup>ונודעה החטאת אשר חטאו עליה והקריבו הקהל פר בן-בקר לחטאת

ritual blood to be dabbed on the horns of the incense altar. All sacrifices other than *hattat* were to be burned on the altar that stood in the courtyard, facing the entrance to the tent.

**10. just as it is removed from the ox of the sacrifice of well-being** The same parts of the animal are placed on the altar for the *hattat* sacrifice as for the *sh'lamim* sacrifice. Unlike the latter sacrifice, however, here the rest of the animal is not eaten but destroyed.

**11.** This rite, like the *Yom Kippur* ritual, combines two methods of expiation: an offering by fire on the altar for the purpose of placating God, and a ritual by which impurity is removed

from the Israelite camp and physically destroyed. **its dung** The undigested contents of the stomach.

**12. to the ash heap** Outside the camp. (Another ash heap was located near the altar of burnt offerings; see 1:16).

**13. community** Hebrew: *edah*, referring in the priestly codes of the Torah to the Israelites as a whole. It conveys the sense that a shared history and a common religion unified the group as a community.

**they realize their guilt** A state of guilt exists because of the wrongdoing, whether the individual is aware of the misdeed or not.

**13. If it is the whole community** It is possible for an entire community to be misled or

swept away by prejudice or emotion. The voice of the people is not necessarily the voice of God.

ing. <sup>15</sup>The elders of the community shall lay their hands upon the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. <sup>16</sup>The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting, <sup>17</sup>and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain. <sup>18</sup>Some of the blood he shall put on the horns of the altar which is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting, and all the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>19</sup>He shall remove all its fat from it and turn it into smoke on the altar. <sup>20</sup>He shall do with this bull just as is done with the [priest's] bull of purification offering; he shall do the same with it. Thus the priest shall make expiation for them, and they shall be forgiven. <sup>21</sup>He shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the purification offering of the congregation.

<sup>22</sup>In case it is a chieftain who incurs guilt by

וַיְהִיאוּ אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>15</sup> וְסָמְכוּ זָקְנֵי הָעֵדָה אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>16</sup> וַיְהִי־אֵל הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפָּר אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>17</sup> וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶצְבָּעוֹ מִן־הַדָּם וַהֲזָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת פְּנֵי הַפָּרֹכֶת: <sup>18</sup> וּמִן־הַדָּם יִתֵּן | עַל־קַרְנֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת כָּל־הַדָּם יִשְׁפֹךְ אֶל־יְסוֹד מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>19</sup> וְאֶת כָּל־חִלְבּוֹ יָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ וַהֲקִטִּיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>20</sup> וַעֲשֵׂה לַפָּר כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לַפָּר הַחֲטָאת כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה־לּוֹ וּכְפָר עֲלֵהֶם הַכֹּהֵן וְנִסְלַח לָהֶם: <sup>21</sup> וַהֲוִצִּיא אֶת־הַפָּר אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְשָׂרַף אֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׂרַף אֶת הַפָּר הָרִאשׁוֹן חֲטָאת הַקֹּהֵל הוּא: פ

<sup>22</sup> אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יַחֲטֵא וַעֲשֵׂה אֶחָת מִכָּל־

**15. elders of the community** The “elders” (*z’kenim*), an ancient institution in biblical Israel, were comparable to councils of elders known from other ancient Near Eastern societies. The elders here act on behalf of the Israelite community in expiating collective offenses against God, as they often were obliged to do.

**16–19.** The rites required to atone for the sins of the whole community are identical to those prescribed for the expiation of the anointed priest, as set forth in verses 3–12.

**20. the priest shall make expiation for them** Expiation by means of sacrificial blood rites is a prerequisite for securing God’s forgiveness. It was formerly thought that the Hebrew word for expiate (*kipper*) meant “cover over, conceal,” a well-known image (see Ps. 32:1). On the basis of Akkadian usage of the cognate (linguistically related word) *kuppuru*, it has been established that

the verb *kipper* means “to wipe off, burnish, cleanse.” Expiation is conceived of as cleansing, as wiping away impurity and contamination and, by extension, sinfulness itself. The purification comes from God in response to the proper performance of required rituals undertaken in good faith.

**they shall be forgiven** The word for forgiving (*salah*) most likely derives from a verb meaning “to wash, to sprinkle with water” in Akkadian. The basic notion is that of cleansing with water, a concept then extended to connote God’s forgiveness and acceptance of expiation.

**21. congregation** Hebrew: *kahal*; like *edah* in verse 13, this is a term for the Israelites as a whole. It characterizes a group living together.

**22. a chieftain who incurs guilt** The chieftain, unlike the priest, was a secular leader. He was not, therefore, held directly responsible for

**22. In case it is a chieftain who incurs guilt** Literally, “when a chieftain incurs guilt.” A ruler must make so many difficult decisions

that it is virtually impossible never to harm innocent people in the process. Yoḥanan ben Zakai is quoted as saying, “Fortunate is the

doing unwittingly any of the things which by the commandment of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and he realizes his guilt—<sup>23</sup>or the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his knowledge—he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. <sup>24</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the goat's head, and it shall be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD; it is a purification offering. <sup>25</sup>The priest shall take with his finger some of the blood of the purification offering and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering. <sup>26</sup>All its fat he shall turn into smoke on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of well-being. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

<sup>27</sup>If any person from among the populace unwittingly incurs guilt by doing any of the things which by the LORD's commandments ought not

מִצֹּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ  
בְּשִׁגְגָה וְאִשָּׁם: <sup>23</sup> אֹזֶה־הוֹדֶעַ אֵלָיו חַטָּאתוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא בָּהּ וְהֵבִיא אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׁעִיר  
עִזִּים זָכָר תָּמִים: <sup>24</sup> וְסָמָךְ יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ  
הַשְּׁעִיר וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁחַט  
אֶת־הָעֹלָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה חַטָּאת הִוא:  
<sup>25</sup> וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחַטָּאת בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ  
וַיָּנִתֵן עַל־קַרְנֹת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־דָּמּוֹ  
יִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יִסּוֹד מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה: <sup>26</sup> וְאֶת־כָּל־  
חִלְבּוֹ יִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כַּחֲלֵב זֶבַח  
הַשְּׁלָמִים וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן מִחַטָּאתוֹ  
וַיִּגְסֶלֶח לוֹ: פ

שִׁי <sup>27</sup> וְאִם־נִפְשׁ אֶחָת תַּחֲטָא בְּשִׁגְגָה מִעַם  
הָאָרֶץ בַּעֲשֻׁתָּהּ אֶחָת מִמִּצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר

the religious offenses of the whole community, as the High Priest was. His sacrifice of expiation, consequently, was basically the same as that of any other Israelite.

**23. a male goat** Literally, “a hairy goat” (*sa-ir*). Goats frequently were used for purification offerings.

**25–26.** The same portions of the sacrificial animal are placed on the altar here as for the *sh’lamim* (prescribed in 3:3–4). Here, however, some of the sacrificial blood is daubed on the horns of the altar of burnt offerings and the rest is poured out at the base of the altar. All of the sacrificial blood involved in both the *olah* and the *sh’lamim* sacrifices is dashed against the sides of the altar.

**27. any person** From here to the end of chapter 4, the form of the *hattat* sacrifice is essentially the same as the one prescribed for the chieftain (*nasi*), with one difference: An individual Israelite shall offer a female goat or a female sheep instead of a male animal.

**populace** Hebrew: *am ha-aretz*; literally, “people of the land.” In the Bible, it connotes landed gentry, “people of status,” not the populace at large. (In Rabbinic times, *am ha-aretz* took on the pejorative meaning it has today—an untutored person, an ignoramus. This is probably because it came to refer to someone from the countryside who was unlettered. The Latin word *paganus* suffered a similar fate.)

generation whose leader recognizes having sinned and brings an offering of purification” (BT Hor. 10b, reading in this verse the word *asher*, “in case,” as *ashrei*, “fortunate”). When the people see the ruler humbling himself to atone for mistakes, they will be more likely to do so themselves. But a leader who denies ever being wrong, who seeks to blame others, will teach the people to behave in the same way.

Also, leaders who admit their own human weaknesses will be more compassionate toward the weaknesses of their followers.

**27. If any person from among the populace unwittingly incurs guilt** Literally, “if a single person sins.” This prompted the comment that the person was led to sin by separating from the community and becoming an isolated individual (*Tiferet Sh’mu-el*).

to be done, and he realizes his guilt—<sup>28</sup>or the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his knowledge—he shall bring a female goat without blemish as his offering for the sin of which he is guilty. <sup>29</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the head of the purification offering, and the purification offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering. <sup>30</sup>The priest shall take with his finger some of its blood and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. <sup>31</sup>He shall remove all its fat, just as the fat is removed from the sacrifice of well-being; and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, for a pleasing odor to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make expiation for him, and he shall be forgiven.

<sup>32</sup>If the offering he brings as a purification offering is a sheep, he shall bring a female without blemish. <sup>33</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the head of the purification offering, and it shall be slaughtered as a purification offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered. <sup>34</sup>The priest shall take with his finger some of the blood of the purification offering and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. <sup>35</sup>And all its fat he shall remove just as the fat of the sheep of the sacrifice of well-being is removed; and this the priest shall turn into smoke on the altar, over the LORD's gift. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the sin of which he is guilty, and he shall be forgiven.

**28. female goat** It is not certain why female animals were required for certain offerings and not for others. Most animal sacrifices consisted of males, probably because fewer males than females were necessary to reproduce the herds and flocks.

**29. at the place of the burnt offering** It is done there in order not to embarrass those bringing a *hattat* by identifying them as re-

לֹא־תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְאָשָׁם: <sup>28</sup>אוּ הוֹדַע אֱלֹיוֹ  
חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְהָבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׁעִירַת  
עִזִּים תְּמִימָה נִקְבָּה עַל־חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר  
חָטָא: <sup>29</sup>וְסָמָן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הַחֲטָאת  
וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַחֲטָאת בַּמָּקוֹם הָעֶלְיוֹ:  
<sup>30</sup>וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּמָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְנָתַן עַל־  
קֶרְנֵת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֶלְיוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־דָּמָהּ יִשְׁפֹּךְ  
אֶל־יִסּוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>31</sup>וְאֶת־כָּל־חִלְבֶּהּ יֹסִיר  
בְּאֶשֶׁר הוֹסֵר חֶלֶב מֵעַל זֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים  
וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לַרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ  
לַיהוָה וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: פ  
<sup>32</sup>וְאִם־כֶּבֶשׂ יָבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ לַחֲטָאת נִקְבָּה  
תְּמִימָה יְבִיאָנָהּ: <sup>33</sup>וְסָמָן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל  
רֹאשׁ הַחֲטָאת וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הָחֲטָאת  
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׁחַט אֶת־הָעֶלְיוֹ: <sup>34</sup>וְלָקַח  
הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחֲטָאת בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְנָתַן עַל־  
קֶרְנֵת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֶלְיוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־דָּמָהּ יִשְׁפֹּךְ  
אֶל־יִסּוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>35</sup>וְאֶת־כָּל־חִלְבֶּהּ יֹסִיר  
בְּאֶשֶׁר יוֹסֵר חֶלֶב־הַכֶּשֶׂב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים  
וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עַל אֲשֵׁי  
יְהוָה וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל־חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־  
חָטָא וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: פ

This pattern is common to most ancient Near Eastern religions.

**32–35.** The procedures for a female sheep offered as a *hattat* sacrifice are identical to those for a female goat.

pentant sinners. It would not be apparent to an onlooker whether the individual was bringing a purification offering or a burnt offering.



## 5 If a person incurs guilt—

When he has heard a public imprecation and—although able to testify as one who has either seen or learned of the matter—he does not give information, so that he is subject to punishment;

<sup>2</sup>Or when a person touches any impure thing—be it the carcass of an impure beast or the carcass of impure cattle or the carcass of an impure creeping thing—and the fact has escaped him, and then, being impure, he realizes his guilt;

<sup>3</sup>Or when he touches human impurity—any such impurity whereby one becomes impure—and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later he realizes his guilt;

*For Unintended Sins of Omission (5:1–13)*

**1. public** Hebrew: *kol*; literally, “voice, sound.” Here it has the technical sense of “oral proclamation.” The proclamation urged all who possessed information in a certain case to come forward and testify.

**subject to punishment** A person who heard the proclamation but who failed to assist the judicial process and withheld evidence was liable to a penalty. (In the ancient Near East, courts and archives generally were located on temple grounds, and this was most likely true of ancient Israel as well. An institutional connection links testimony and related juridical procedures, on the one hand, with expiation for what we usually refer to as religious sins, on the other.) The failure to come forth was a form of negligence; and the omission involved speech, not deed.

**2. when a person touches any impure thing** The main source for these prohibitions of contact is chapter 11, especially verses 24–31, where their significance is discussed.

## ה ונפש פי-תחטא

וְשָׁמְעָה קוֹל אֱלֹהִים וְהָיָא עֵד אוֹ רֹאֵה  
אוֹ יָדַע אִם-לֹא יִגִּיד וְנִשְׁאַ עֲוֹנוֹ:  
<sup>2</sup> אוֹ נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּגַּע בְּכָל-דָּבָר טָמֵא  
אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת חַיָּה טָמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת  
בְּהֵמָה טָמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת שָׂרֵץ טָמֵא  
וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָיָא טָמֵא וְאָשָׁם:  
<sup>3</sup> אוֹ כִּי יִגַּע בְּטָמְאָת אָדָם לְכָל טָמְאָתוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר יִטְמֵא בָּהּ וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָיָא יָדַע  
וְאָשָׁם:

*then, being impure, he realizes his guilt* Better: “insofar as he was impure, he had incurred guilt.” Impurity is the basis of the offender’s guilt.

**3. human impurity** Hebrew: *tum-at adam*; the forms of impurity that affect a woman after childbirth (12:2), a person who has a bodily discharge (15:2,19), or a man who engages in sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman (15:24). It also applies to a person who has eaten the meat of an animal that died naturally or was torn by beasts (17:15–16).

*and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later he realizes his guilt* Although the fact escaped him, ultimately he knew that he had been guilty; i.e., something originally was ignored or forgotten, then later recalled. Verses 2 and 3 serve to protect the sanctuary and all within it from any impurity carried by an impure person. If the offense had been intentional, contamination of the sanctuary would subject the offender to the more severe penalty of being cut off from the community (7:19–21).

## CHAPTER 5

**1.** We are held responsible not only for the wrong things we do but for the things we should but do not do. During the *Sho-ah*, as well as in other circumstances, bystanders who did not act to oppose evil caused enor-

mous, irreparable harm. In Jewish law, one who has knowledge about a crime or legal dispute and does not come forward to divulge it is “innocent before a human court but liable in the sight of God” (BT BK 56a). The *asham* (reparation offering) is how the Torah seeks to resolve that conflict.

<sup>4</sup>Or when a person utters an oath to bad or good purpose—whatever a man may utter in an oath—and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later he realizes his guilt in any of these matters—

<sup>5</sup>when he realizes his guilt in any of these matters, he shall confess that wherein he has sinned. <sup>6</sup>And he shall bring as his penalty to the LORD, for the sin of which he is guilty, a female from the flock, sheep or goat, as a purification offering; and the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for his sin.

<sup>7</sup>But if his means do not suffice for a sheep, he shall bring to the LORD, as his penalty for that of which he is guilty, two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a purification offering and the other for a burnt offering. <sup>8</sup>He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the purification offering, pinching its head at the nape without severing it. <sup>9</sup>He shall sprinkle

<sup>4</sup> או נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תִשָּׁבַע לְבִטָּא בְּשִׁפְתָּיִם לְהִרְעֵ | או לְהִיטִיב לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִבְטָא הָאָדָם בְּשִׁבְעָה וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא יִדְרֹעַ וְאָשָׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה:

<sup>5</sup> וְהָיָה כִּי־יֵאָשֵׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה וְהִתְוֹדָה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ: <sup>6</sup> וְהָבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה עַל חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא נִקְבָּה מִן־הַצֹּאן כִּשְׁבָּה אִו־שְׁעִירַת עֹזִים לְחֲטָאת וְכֹפֶר עָלָיו הִכְהֵן מִחֲטָאתוֹ: <sup>7</sup> וְאִם־לֹא תִגִּיעַ יָדוֹ כִּי שֶׁהָ וְהָבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא שְׁתֵּי תְרִים אִו־שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־יוֹנָה לַיהוָה אֶחָד לְחֲטָאת וְאֶחָד לְעֹלָה: <sup>8</sup> וְהָבִיא אֹתָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן וְהַקָּרִיב אֶת־אֲשֶׁר לְחֲטָאת רִאשׁוֹנָה וּמִלֶּק אֶת־רִאשׁוֹ מִמּוֹל עֲרָפוֹ וְלֹא יַבְדִּיל: <sup>9</sup> וְהִזָּה

**4. an oath** One who neglects to fulfill an oath, or allows the matter to escape notice, offends not only those affected by the oath but also God, in whose name the oath was taken.

**5. he shall confess that wherein he has sinned** This is the only explicit reference to confession in all of chapters 4 and 5—for a good reason. In the other cases, which involve second parties, there are indications that the offender was prompted to undertake expiation either by individuals or by the situation. Here, however, we are dealing with private acts and the failure to act, which might never have come to light had the offender not come forth to confess. The motivation for confessing was religious and moral—the desire to be purified and to avert God’s wrath for having

failed to fulfill one’s commitments. It was also related to the judicial process.

**6. a purification offering** The sacrifice prescribed in this instance consisted of a female from the flock. This was for “sins of omission,” just as the sacrifice prescribed in 4:27–35 was for “sins of commission.” Here, the offender had the option of offering either a sheep or a goat. One who could afford the full *hattat* sacrifice was to offer it even for sins of omission, which were deemed less severe.

**8–9. pinching its head at the nape without severing** The use of sacrificial blood here is similar to the procedure for the *hattat* generally (as prescribed in 4:25,30), except that in this instance the blood was not sprinkled on the horns of the altar of burnt offerings but on its side (*kir*).

**4.** Jewish thought, taking words seriously, warns us against uttering oaths, lest we find ourselves unable to fulfill them. “It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill” (Eccles. 5:4). “Say little and do much” (M Avot 1:15).

**5. he shall confess** The Hebrew verb is reflexive, as if to say “one shall admit to oneself” having done wrong.

**7. if his means do not suffice** Throughout this detailed presentation of the rules of animal offerings, emphasizing that everything must

be done in a prescribed manner, the Torah tells us that a person who cannot afford the prescribed offering may bring a more modest one, with the same result. There is nothing magical or automatic about the rituals. It is the attitude of the worshiper that matters most, not the details of the ceremony.

**8.** The purification offering is presented first, so that the burnt offering (*olah*) that follows will be offered by a cleansed and forgiven worshiper.

some of the blood of the purification offering on the side of the altar, and what remains of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a purification offering.<sup>10</sup> And the second he shall prepare as a burnt offering, according to regulation. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the sin of which he is guilty, and he shall be forgiven.

<sup>11</sup>And if his means do not suffice for two turtledoves or two pigeons, he shall bring as his offering for that of which he is guilty a tenth of an *ephah* of choice flour for a purification offering; he shall not add oil to it or lay frankincense on it, for it is a purification offering.<sup>12</sup> He shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop out of it a handful as a token portion of it and turn it into smoke on the altar, with the LORD's gifts; it is a purification offering.<sup>13</sup> Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for whichever of these sins he is guilty, and he shall be forgiven. It shall belong to the priest, like the grain offering.

<sup>14</sup>And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

<sup>15</sup>When a person commits a trespass, being

**11.** Embellishments of oil and frankincense, prescribed for the grain offering in 2:1 and elsewhere, are not included here. The reason is not entirely clear. Possibly the elimination of costly ingredients was intended to lower the cost of the offering so that all in need of expiation could afford it. Then, too, it might not be appropriate for an offering brought by a sinful person to be so embellished.

**ephah** See Comment to Exod. 16:36.

THE REPARATION OFFERING (vv. 14–26)

*For Sins against the Sanctuary* (vv. 14–16)

The law of verses 14–16 applies only to unintentional

מדם החטאת על־קיר המזבח והנשא  
בדם ימצה אל־יסוד המזבח חטאת הוא:  
10 ואת־השני יעשה עלה כמשפט וכפר  
עליו הכהן מחטאתו אשר־חטא ונסלח  
לו: ס

שביעי <sup>11</sup> ואם־לא תשיג ידו לשתי תרים או  
לשני בני־יונה והביא את־קרבנו אשר  
חטא עשירת האפה סלת לחטאת לא־  
ישים עליה שמן ולא־יתן עליה לבנה  
כי חטאת היא: <sup>12</sup> והביאה אל־הכהן  
וקמץ הכהן ממןה מלוא קמצו את־  
אזרתה והקטיר המזבחה על אשי יהוה  
חטאת הוא: <sup>13</sup> וכפר עליו הכהן על־  
חטאתו אשר־חטא מאחת מאלה ונסלח  
לו והיתה לכהן כמנחה: ס

<sup>14</sup> וידבר יהוה אל־משה לאמר:  
<sup>15</sup> נפש בִּי־תמעל מעל וחטאה בשגגה

tional misuse or destruction of sanctuary property. (Intentional theft of sacred property or damage to it was a crime punishable by death.)

**15. trespass** Hebrew: *ma'al*; in the Bible, the word refers to ancient notions of sacrilege and impurity. Here it is an appropriate term for the theft of sanctuary property. The term may also relate to betrayal of trust, such as marital infidelity, acts of deceit, and violation of the covenant between God and the people Israel by the worship of alien gods.

**any of the LORD's sacred things** This refers to sanctuary property, not to priestly allocations or tithes, which belonged to the priests and Levites. Misappropriation of what belonged to the

**15.** Hirsch contrasts "inadvertent" trespass of sanctuary property with "deliberate" violation, commenting, "It is not deliberate desecration but indifference and apathy that the sanctuary need fear." People who are angry

at God or at religious institutions often display a passion that has a religious dimension. It is a way of caring deeply. People who do not care at all are the ones who commit the ultimate blasphemy.

unwittingly remiss about any of the LORD's sacred things, he shall bring as his penalty to the LORD a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into payment in silver by the sanctuary weight, as a reparation offering. <sup>16</sup>He shall make restitution for that wherein he was remiss about the sacred things, and he shall add a fifth part to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make expiation on his behalf with the ram of the reparation offering, and he shall be forgiven.

<sup>17</sup>And when a person, without knowing it, sins in regard to any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and then realizes his guilt, he shall be subject to punishment. <sup>18</sup>He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a reparation offering. The priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the error that he committed unwittingly, and he shall be forgiven. <sup>19</sup>It is a reparation offering; he has incurred guilt before the LORD.

<sup>20</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>21</sup>When

מִקְדָּשֵׁי יְהוָה וְהֵבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה  
אֵיל תָּמִים מִן־הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְפָּךְ כֶּסֶף־  
שְׁקָלִים בְּשֶׁקֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְאָשָׁם: <sup>16</sup>וְאֵת  
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא מִן־הַקֹּדֶשׁ יִשְׁלַם וְאֶת־  
חֲמִישְׁתּוֹ יוֹסֵף עָלָיו וְנָתַן אֹתוֹ לַכֹּהֵן  
וְהִכָּהוּ יִכְפֹּר עָלָיו בְּאֵיל הָאָשָׁם וְנִסְלַח  
לוֹ: פ

<sup>17</sup>וְאִם־נִפְשׁ בִּי תַחֲטָא וְעָשִׂתָּה אַחַת  
מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ  
וְלֹא־יָדַע וְאָשָׁם וְנִשְׂא עֹנֹו: <sup>18</sup>וְהֵבִיא אֵיל  
תָּמִים מִן־הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְפָּךְ לְאָשָׁם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן  
וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל שְׁגִגָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁגָג  
וְהוּא לֹא־יָדַע וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: <sup>19</sup>אָשָׁם הוּא  
אָשָׁם אָשָׁם לַיהוָה: פ

<sup>20</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>21</sup>נִפְשׁ  
בִּי תַחֲטָא וּמַעֲלָה מַעַל בִּיהוָה וְכָחַשׁ  
בַּעֲמִיתוֹ בִּפְקֻדֹן אוֹ־בִתְשׁוּמַת יָד אוֹ בְגָזִל

priests (according to 22:14) required the offender to make restitution and to pay a penalty, but there is no mention of an *asham*.

**convertible into payment in silver** That is, the equivalent in silver. The offender had the option of either providing a ram of one's own or remitting the cost of one so that a proper sacrificial ram could be secured on one's behalf.

**sanctuary weight** Hebrew: *shekel ha-kodesh*, the prevailing standard in ancient Israel at certain periods.

**16. add a fifth part to it** The penalty of one fifth was a common feature of Temple administration. The provisions of this law are reformulated in verse 24.

*For Contingency* (vv. 17–19)

**17. without knowing it, sins . . . and then realizes** The person did not know for certain that he committed an offense; it was only a sus-

picion. Certain knowledge of an offense would invoke the law of 4:27–35. In cases of uncertainty, however, an *asham* consisting of a ram was prescribed to avert God's wrath.

*For Deceit with False Oaths* (vv. 20–26)

Unlike the careless taking of sanctuary property in 5:14–16, the offenses outlined here were intentional: persons who deliberately misappropriated property or funds entrusted to their safekeeping, or defrauded another, or failed to restore lost property they had located. When sued, these defendants then lied under oath and claimed no responsibility. Without witnesses, the aggrieved party had no further recourse and sustained a great loss. But what if the accused later admitted to having lied under oath—thus assuming liability for the unrecovered property? Such persons were given the opportunity to clear themselves by making restitution and by paying a fine of 20 per-

**17. any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done** Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev read this text literally: "one of the LORD's commandments which should not be done."

Based on this reading, he taught, "sometimes it is possible to perform a *mitzvah* in such an improper manner that it would have been better not to do it at all."

a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding his fellow, <sup>22</sup>or by finding something lost and lying about it; if he swears falsely regarding any one of the various things that one may do and sin thereby—<sup>23</sup>when one has thus sinned and, realizing his guilt, would restore that which he got through robbery or fraud, or the deposit that was entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he found, <sup>24</sup>or anything else about which he swore falsely, he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth part to it. He shall pay it to its owner when he realizes his guilt. <sup>25</sup>Then he shall bring to the priest, as his penalty to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a reparation offering. <sup>26</sup>The priest shall make expiation on his behalf before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for whatever he may have done to draw blame thereby.

או עֲשֶׂק אֶת־עֲמִיתוֹ: <sup>22</sup> או־מִצָּא אֲבֹדָה וְכָחַשׁ בָּהּ וְנִשְׁבַּע עַל־שֹׁקֶר עַל־אֲחֹת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָאָדָם לְחֹטֵא בְהִנָּה: <sup>23</sup> וְהָיָה כִּי־יִחְטֹא וְאָשָׁם וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הַגְּזֻלָּה אֲשֶׁר גָּזַל אוֹ אֶת־הָעֶשֶׂק אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂק אוֹ אֶת־הַפְּקֻדֹן אֲשֶׁר הִפְקֹד אֹתוֹ מִכָּל מִפְטוּר <sup>24</sup> אוֹ אֶת־הָאֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא: <sup>25</sup> אוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבַּע עָלָיו לְשֹׁקֶר וְשָׁלַם אֹתוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וּחֲמִשְׁתּוֹ יִסֹּף עָלָיו לְאִשֶּׁר הוּא לוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ בַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁמָּתוֹ: <sup>26</sup> וְאֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ יָבִיא לַיהוָה אֵיל תְּמִים מִן־הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְכָּךְ לְאָשָׁם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>26</sup> וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִסְלַח לוֹ עַל־אֲחֹת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִשְׁמָה בָּהּ: פ

cent to the aggrieved party. Having lied under oath, they also had offended God and were obliged to offer an *asham* in expiation.

**23. would restore** Literally, “must restore.”

This expresses what criminals are required to do, not what they may prefer to do.

**25–26.** The provisions here are identical to those of the *asham* prescribed in verses 15–16.

**21. trespass against the LORD by dealing deceitfully** To cheat another person is to sin against God as well as against that person. “It is worse to rob a fellow human being than to steal from God” (BT BB 88b). Akiva taught that whenever two people enter into an agreement, each is relying on the divine dimension of the other, the part of a person that is the image of God and knows what is right and what is wrong, making God a witness to every transaction. To betray that trust is to deny the divine image in ourselves, and to deny God’s participation in our activities.

**robbery . . . defrauding** According to the Talmud, robbery (*gezel*) is defined as taking something that belongs to another person, and fraud (*oshek*) refers to withholding from another person something that is owed (BT BM 111a). “The reparation offering may not be brought until the violator has returned the property to its rightful owner” (Maimonides).

**26. and he shall be forgiven** The *parashah* concludes on this affirming note. As a Hadisic master taught, “The gates of repentance open for anyone who does wrong and then realizes it and seeks to make amends.”

# הפטרת ויקרא

## HAFTARAH FOR VA-YIKRA

ISAIAH 43:21–44:23

This prophecy was addressed to the Judeans living in exile in Babylon, sometime after 538 B.C.E., when Cyrus the Mede issued an edict allowing the exiles to return to their homeland. Many of these people hesitated to return, and Isaiah exhorted them repeatedly to trust in God's saving power (see Isa. 40–48).

The opening verse of this *haftarah* is actually the conclusion of an independent statement of promise (Isa. 43:16–21) in which the Lord asks the people not to recall what happened in the past, because He is “about to do something new.” God will nurture and restore His chosen people. As read in context, the nation will proclaim divine glory as a result of God's new act of sustenance: “. . . the people I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise.”

In the framework of the *haftarah* alone, however, verse 21 introduces what is to follow. It must, therefore, be read as God's unconditional proclamation: “The people I formed for Myself shall declare My praise!” This declaration now serves as a unilateral promise whose theme anticipates the redemption and fulfillment of the people Israel at the end of the *haftarah* (44:23). The transformation of Isa. 43:21 from its original context to its use in the *haftarah* is an instructive example of how the ancient Sages transformed words of a biblical prophecy into a synagogue recitation for new generations.

The *haftarah* contrasts past and future time, revolving around the theme of divine forgiveness. Addressing the nation in exile (in the present), the prophet opens his divine discourse with a rebuke of the people's failure to worship the Lord (in the past), which is the reason for the nation's present calamity. As the prophecy develops, however, the tone of accusation is replaced by the language of reconciliation and hope in the future (43:25). Israel is called on to “remember” its intimate bond

with God (44:21). The language of the conclusion underscores the reality of divine forgiveness (44:22–23).

The *haftarah* develops thematically from judgment to redemption. The language of the opening rebuke (43:22–24) is a blunt and direct reprimand that criticizes the people for violating the sacrificial cult, but does not include any moral or social critique. In this respect, Isaiah's rebuke stands in sharp contrast to a characteristic feature of prophecy in the Bible.

Chapter 44 begins a dramatic turnabout, in which a new word of God announces divine grace. Echoing the opening promise, in which Israel is called the people “I formed for Myself” (*yatzarti li*, 43:21), Israel is now called the chosen nation whom “Your Creator (*yotzrekha*) . . . has helped . . . since birth” (44:2). This intimate relationship leads to God's unilateral promise to pour His spirit upon future offspring and a prophecy that this progeny will renew their loyalty to the Lord and to the nation (44:3–5).

To reinforce the theme of God's unique supremacy, the divine assertion in Isa. 44:6–8 is contrasted with an extended polemic against idol worship. With stylistic deftness, similar terms are used here to mark with ironic force the difference between the worship of God and the worship of idols.

The mocking tone of the polemic against idols widens the gap between the God of Israel and the gods of the foolish. Not only does God create His people and care for them, but He is their redeemer who forgives their sins. By contrast, the image makers are prey to their own desires. They create a form of wood and then pray to it, apparently not realizing the folly of their deeds. Indeed, for the prophet, the realization that all self-proclaimed divinities are “a fraud” (43:20) is the first stage of a purified religious consciousness.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH*  
TO THE *PARASHAH*

The *parashah* details the forms of public sacrifice whereby one may sustain and renew a relationship with God. In the *haftarah*, the prophet decries the abandonment of these cultic offerings as well as the offenses of sin and iniquity (43:22–24). In a pun on the verb that commonly means “to perform religious service” (*avad*), God declares that He did not “burden” (*he-evadtikha*) Israel with demands for grain offerings. They, however, have “burdened” Him (*he-evadtani*) with their transgressions. This word play underscores the perversity of Israel, along with their inversion of true worship.

A specific verbal link between the *parashah* and the *haftarah* focuses reflection on the importance of witnesses in the realms of morality and theology. A rule in Lev. 5:1 states that a person who has heard a public imprecation and can serve as a “witness” (*ed*) to the offense incurs guilt by fail-

ing to do so, avoiding social responsibility. By contrast, Isa. 44:6–8 speaks of Israel’s role as “witnesses” (*edai*) to God’s incomparable ability to fulfill His prophetic word. This places human experience at the center of theological claims, for without human testimony, the reality of God and the wonder of His ways would have no significance. Rabbinic tradition, understanding this paradox, presented a remarkable transformation of Isaiah’s words. God’s words in Isaiah are exultant: “You [Israel] are My witnesses. Is there any god . . . but Me?” The Midrash boldly drives the lesson home. There may be no god other than *YHWH*, but He needs humankind to be known as such: “If ‘you are My witnesses,’ then I am God; but if you are not My witnesses, then, so to speak, I am not God” (Sifrei Deut. 346). This remarkable teaching presents theology as a form of human testimony to religious experience. Integrity is as vital here as in the social sphere, where honest testimony is crucial if the social fabric of the world is to be maintained.

**43** <sup>21</sup>The people I formed for Myself  
Shall declare My praise!

<sup>22</sup>But you have not worshiped Me, O Jacob,  
That you should be weary of Me, O Israel.

<sup>23</sup>You have not brought Me your sheep for  
burnt offerings,

Nor honored Me with your sacrifices.

I have not burdened you with grain offerings,  
Nor wearied you about frankincense.

<sup>24</sup>You have not bought Me fragrant reed with  
money,

Nor sated Me with the fat of your sacrifices.

**Isaiah 43:21. I formed** Hebrew: *yatzarti*. This verb recurs as a theme word throughout the *haftarah*, underscoring the contrast between true and false creations.

**22–24.** The negative *lo* (not) occurs seven times; the verb *yaga* (weary) concludes each verse.

**מג** <sup>21</sup>עַם-זֶה יִצְרָתִי לִי  
תְהִלָּתִי יִסְפְּרוּ: ס

<sup>22</sup>וְלֹא-אֲתִי קִרְאתָ יַעֲקֹב  
כִּי-יִגְעַתָּ בִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
<sup>23</sup>לֹא-הֵבִיאתָ לִי שֶׁהָ עֹלֹתֶיךָ  
וְזִבְחֶיךָ לֹא כִבְדֹתַנִּי  
לֹא הִעֲבַדְתִּיךָ בַּמִּנְחָה  
וְלֹא הוֹגַעְתִּיךָ בַּלְבֹנָה:  
<sup>24</sup>לֹא-קִנִּיתָ לִּי בַכֶּסֶף קָנָה  
וְחֶלֶב זִבְחֶיךָ לֹא הִרִיתַנִּי

**22. worshiped Me** Literally, “called upon Me” in worship (see Gen. 12:8).

**24. bought Me fragrant reed** The Hebrew employs a pun: “bought” (*kanita*) . . . fragrant reed (*kaneh*).” See Exod. 30:23.

Instead, you have burdened Me with your  
sins,  
You have wearied Me with your iniquities.  
25 It is I, I who—for My own sake—  
Wipe your transgressions away  
And remember your sins no more.  
26 Help me remember!  
Let us join in argument,  
Tell your version,  
That you may be vindicated.  
27 Your earliest ancestor sinned,  
And your spokesmen transgressed against  
Me.  
28 So I profaned the holy princes;  
I abandoned Jacob to proscription  
And Israel to mockery.

אֶף הָעֲבֻדָּתִי בְּחַטֹּאתַי \*  
הוֹגַעְתָּנִי בְּעֹנֵיךָ: ס  
25 אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא  
מִחָה פְשָׁעֶיךָ לְמַעְנִי  
וְחַטֹּאתֶיךָ לֹא אֶזְכֹּר:  
26 הַזְכִּירָנִי  
נִשְׁפָּטָה יַחַד  
סִפֵּר אֶתָּה  
לְמַעַן תִּצְדָּק:  
27 אָבִיךָ הָרִאשׁוֹן חָטָא  
וּמְלִיצֶיךָ פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי:  
28 וְאַחֲלַל שְׂרֵי קֹדֶשׁ  
וְאַתָּנָה לְחֶרֶם יַעֲקֹב  
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְגִדּוּפִים: ס

**44** But hear, now, O Jacob My servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen!  
2 Thus said the LORD, your Maker,  
Your Creator who has helped you since birth:  
Fear not, My servant Jacob,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen,

**מִד** וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב עַבְדִּי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֶרְתִּי בּוֹ:  
2 כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה עֹשֶׂךָ  
יֹצֵרְךָ מִבֶּטֶן יִעֲזָרְךָ  
אֶל-תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב  
יִשְׁרוּן בְּחֶרְתִּי בּוֹ:

v. 24. מלא ר

**25. for My own sake** God acts with unilateral grace, and not because of Israel's merit.

**26. Let us join in argument** Literally, "let us enter judgment together." This is a formal petition for countertestimony so that the accused might be justified.

**27. Your earliest ancestor** Literally, "your first forefather." This obscure reference evokes the sin of Adam (Radak).

**28. So I profaned the holy princes** The Hebrew for "holy princes" (*sarei kodesh*, cf. 1 Chron. 24:5) makes the verse difficult, conceptually and theologically. The Septuagint (ancient Greek) translation seemed to understand the phrase to mean "Your rulers profaned My sanctuary" (presumably based on a Hebrew text that read *va-y'hall'lu sarekha kodshi*).

**proscription** The Hebrew word *herem* is

used most commonly to designate ritual extermination or devoting objects to the shrine (i.e., proscribing them from common use, as in Lev. 27). Either use of the cult term is odd here, especially in conjunction with the references to "mockery" (*giddufim*). Therefore, it has been suggested that one should read "I abandoned Jacob to insult" here (Hebrew: *heref* instead of *herem*). This verb is found frequently in parallelism with the word for "mock" (*gadaf*). Compare Ps. 44:7.

**Isaiah 44:1–2. Jacob . . . Israel . . . Jeshurun whom I have chosen** The theme of this nation as chosen occurs frequently in this prophetic collection (see Isa. 41:8–9, 43:10, 44:2). Deuteronomy (4:37–38, cf. 7:6, 14:2) first speaks of God's love for the patriarchs as the reason for choosing Israel, redeeming them from Egypt, and restoring them to the Promised Land.



<sup>3</sup>Even as I pour water on thirsty soil,  
And rain upon dry ground,  
So will I pour My spirit on your offspring,  
My blessing upon your posterity.  
<sup>4</sup>And they shall sprout like grass,  
Like willows by watercourses.  
<sup>5</sup>One shall say, "I am the LORD's,"  
Another shall use the name of "Jacob,"  
Another shall mark his arm "of the LORD"  
And adopt the name of "Israel."

<sup>6</sup>Thus said the LORD, the King of Israel,  
Their Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts:  
I am the first and I am the last,  
And there is no god but Me.  
<sup>7</sup>Who like Me can announce,  
Can foretell it—and match Me thereby?  
Even as I told the future to an ancient people,  
So let him foretell coming events to them.  
<sup>8</sup>Do not be frightened, do not be shaken!  
Have I not from of old predicted to you?  
I foretold, and you are My witnesses.  
Is there any god, then, but Me?  
"There is no other rock; I know none!"

<sup>9</sup>The makers of idols  
All work to no purpose;  
And the things they treasure  
Can do no good,

<sup>3</sup>כִּי אֶצְקֶמַיִם עַל־צִמָּא  
וְנָזְלִים עַל־יִבְשָׁה  
אֶצְקֶ רִוְחִי עַל־זֶרְעֶךָ  
וּבְרַכְתִּי עַל־צֶאֱצָאֶיךָ:  
<sup>4</sup>וְצִמְחוּ בְּבֵין חֲצִיר  
בְּעֵרְבִים עַל־יְבִל־מַיִם:  
<sup>5</sup>זֶה יֹאמֵר לַיהוָה אֲנִי  
וְזֶה יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם־יְעֻקֵּב  
וְזֶה יִכְתֹּב יָדוֹ לַיהוָה  
וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה: פ

<sup>6</sup>כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְגֹאֲלוֹ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת  
אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרֹן  
וּמִבְלַעְדִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים:  
<sup>7</sup>וּמִי־כְמוֹנִי יִקְרָא  
וְיַגִּידָהּ וְיַעֲרֹכָהּ לִי  
מִשׁוּמֵי עַם־עוֹלָם וְאַתִּיּוֹת  
וְאֲשֶׁר תִּבְאֲנָה יַגִּידוּ לָמוֹ:  
<sup>8</sup>אֶל־תִּפְחָדוּ וְאֶל־תִּרְהוּ  
הֲלֹא מֵאִזְ הִשְׁמַעְתִּיךָ  
וְהִגַּדְתִּי וְאַתָּם עַדִּי  
הִישׁ אֱלֹהֵי מִבְלַעְדִּי  
וְאֵין צוּר בַּל־יִדְעֵתִי:

<sup>9</sup>יִצְרֵי־פֶסֶל  
כָּל־מַחְשָׁבָה  
וְחִמּוּדֵיהֶם  
בַּל־יִוְעִילוּ

**3. I pour My spirit** Israel, revived as a people, will return to its God as in previous times.

**5. One shall say** A prophecy of renewal and identification. The threefold repetition of *zeh* (translated as "one," "another," "another") suggests three main types of connection: (1) proclaiming identity, "I am the LORD's"; (2) using the ancestral name "Israel" for identity; and (3) marking "of the LORD's" on the flesh, in the manner of a bound servant, and adopting the name "Israel."

**6. I am the first** God is incomparable, the only being worthy of worship. This is a dominant theological theme of Isaiah (see 43:10, 45:5–6, 18, 22).

**7. Who like Me can announce** Divine uniqueness is proclaimed on the basis of the fulfillment of prophecy.

**9–20.** The supreme folly is constructing an image from a tree, one half of which serves for fuel and the other for a divine figure to which one says "Save me, for you are my god," *eli attah*

As they themselves can testify.  
 They neither look nor think,  
 And so they shall be shamed.  
<sup>10</sup>Who would fashion a god  
 Or cast a statue  
 That can do no good?  
<sup>11</sup>Lo, all its adherents shall be shamed;  
 They are craftsmen, are merely human.  
 Let them all assemble and stand up!  
 They shall be cowed, and they shall be  
 shamed.

<sup>12</sup>The craftsman in iron, with his tools,  
 Works it over charcoal  
 And fashions it by hammering,  
 Working with the strength of his arm.  
 Should he go hungry, his strength would ebb;  
 Should he drink no water, he would grow  
 faint.

<sup>13</sup>The craftsman in wood measures with a line  
 And marks out a shape with a stylus;  
 He forms it with scraping tools,  
 Marking it out with a compass.  
 He gives it a human form,  
 The beauty of a man, to dwell in a shrine.  
<sup>14</sup>For his use he cuts down cedars;  
 He chooses plane trees and oaks.  
 He sets aside trees of the forest;  
 Or plants firs, and the rain makes them grow.  
<sup>15</sup>All this serves man for fuel:  
 He takes some to warm himself,  
 And he builds a fire and bakes bread.  
 He also makes a god of it and worships it,

וְעֵינֵיהֶם הֵמָּה \*  
 בִּלְיִרְאוֹ וּבִלְיִדְעוֹ  
 לִמְעַן יִבָּשׁוּ:  
<sup>10</sup> מִי־יִצַּר אֵל  
 וּפָסַל נֹסֶף  
 לְבִלְתִּי הוֹעִיל:  
<sup>11</sup> הֵן כָּל־חֲבָרָיו יִבָּשׁוּ  
 וְחֲרָשֵׁיהֶם הֵמָּה מְאֲדָם  
 יִתְקַבְּצוּ כָּל־ם יַעֲמֻדוּ  
 יִפְחָדוּ יִבָּשׁוּ יַחַד:

<sup>12</sup> חָרַשׁ בְּרוֹזֶל מַעֲצָד  
 וּפָעַל בַּפָּחַם  
 וּבִמְקַבּוֹת יִצְרֶהוּ  
 וַיַּפְעֵלְהוּ בְּזִרְעוֹ כֹּחַ  
 גַּם־רָעֵב וְאֵין כֹּחַ  
 לֹא־שָׁתָה מַיִם וַיִּיעָף:

<sup>13</sup> חָרַשׁ עֲצִים נָטָה קוֹ  
 יִתְאַרְהוּ בַשֶּׁדֶר  
 יַעֲשֶׂהוּ בַּמְקַצְעוֹת  
 וּבַמְחוּגָה יִתְאַרְהוּ  
 וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ כְּתַבְנִית אִישׁ  
 כְּתַפְאֶרֶת אָדָם לְשִׁבְתָּ בַּיִת:  
<sup>14</sup> לְכַרְתָּ־לוֹ אֲרָזִים  
 וַיִּקַּח תִּרְזָה וְאַלֹון  
 וַיֹּאמֶץ־לוֹ בַּעֲצֵי־יַעַר  
 נָטַע אֲרֶן \* וְגִשְׁם יִגְדֵּל:  
<sup>15</sup> וְהָיָה לְאָדָם לְבָעֵר  
 וַיִּקַּח מֵהֶם וַיִּחַם  
 אֶף־יִשְׁיֶק וְאָפָה לֶחֶם  
 אֶף־יַפְעֵל־אֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

v. 9. נקוד על ה' מ' ה'

v. 14. ו' זעירא

(v. 17, cf. 42:17). Such a false formula of commitment counterpoints the positive allegiance stated by Israel in v. 5: "I am the LORD's"

(*la-YHVH ani*). This is the language of legal commitment, used to indicate marriage or adoption in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East.

Fashions an idol and bows down to it!

<sup>16</sup>Part of it he burns in a fire:

On that part he roasts meat,

He eats the roast and is sated;

He also warms himself and cries, "Ah,

I am warm! I can feel the heat!"

<sup>17</sup>Of the rest he makes a god—his own carving!

He bows down to it, worships it;

He prays to it and cries,

"Save me, for you are my god!"

<sup>18</sup>They have no wit or judgment:

Their eyes are besmeared, and they see not;

Their minds, and they cannot think.

<sup>19</sup>They do not give thought,

They lack the wit and judgment to say:

"Part of it I burned in a fire;

I also baked bread on the coals,

I roasted meat and ate it—

Should I make the rest an abhorrence?

Should I bow to a block of wood?"

<sup>20</sup>He pursues ashes!

A deluded mind has led him astray,

And he cannot save himself;

He never says to himself,

"The thing in my hand is a fraud!"

<sup>21</sup>Remember these things, O Jacob

For you, O Israel, are My servant:

I fashioned you, you are My servant—

O Israel, never forget Me.

<sup>22</sup>I wipe away your sins like a cloud,

Your transgressions like mist—

Come back to Me, for I redeem you.

עֲשֶׂהוּ פֶסֶל וַיִּסְגְּדוּ-לָמוֹ:

<sup>16</sup> חֲצִיּוֹ שָׂרַף בְּמוֹ-אֵשׁ

עַל-חֲצִיּוֹ בָשָׂר יֹאכֵל

וַיִּצְלָה צְלִי וַיִּשְׂבַּע

אֶף-יָחַם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֵח

חַמּוֹתִי רָאִיתִי אֹר:

<sup>17</sup> וַשְּׂאֲרִיתוֹ לָאֵל עֲשֶׂה לְפִסְלוֹ

יִסְגֹּד וַיִּסְגְּדוּ-לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר

הַצִּילֵנִי כִּי אֵלִי אַתָּה:

<sup>18</sup> לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יִבִּינוּ

כִּי טַח מְרֹאוֹת עֵינֵיהֶם

מִהַשְׂכִּיל לְבָתָם:

<sup>19</sup> וְלֹא-יָשִׁיב אֶל-לִבּוֹ

וְלֹא דַעַת וְלֹא-תְבוּנָה לֵאמֹר

חֲצִיּוֹ שָׂרַפְתִּי בְּמוֹ-אֵשׁ

וְאֶף אָפִיתִי עַל-גִּחְלִיו לֶחֶם

אֲצַלָּה בָשָׂר וְאֹכֵל

וַיִּתְּרוּ לְתוֹעֵבָה אֶעֱשֶׂה

לְבוֹל עֵץ אֶסְגֹּד:

<sup>20</sup> רָעָה אֶפֶר

לֵב הוֹתֵל הִטָּהוּ

וְלֹא-יִצִּיל אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ

וְלֹא יֹאמֶר

הֲלוֹא שָׁקַר בְּיָמֵינִי: ס

<sup>21</sup> זָכַר-אֱלֹה יַעֲקֹב

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי עַבְדִּי-אַתָּה

וַיִּצְרְתִּיךָ עַבְדִּי-לִי אַתָּה

יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תִנְשָׁנִי:

<sup>22</sup> מַחֲיִיתִי כָעֵב פִּשְׁעֶיךָ

וְכַעֲנָן חֲטָאוֹתֶיךָ

שׁוּבָה אֵלִי כִּי גֹאֲלְתִּיךָ:

**22. Come back to Me** Hebrew: *shuvah elai*. Later commentators found here an appeal for spiritual renewal as well. In context, the call is for a physical return from the Babylonian exile to the homeland (Radak).

<sup>23</sup>Shout, O heavens, for the LORD has acted;  
 Shout aloud, O depths of the earth!  
 Shout for joy, O mountains,  
 O forests with all your trees!  
 For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,  
 Has glorified Himself through Israel.

<sup>23</sup> רָנּוּ שָׁמַיִם כִּי־עָשָׂה יְהוָה  
 הִרְיעוּ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרֶץ  
 פְּצְחוּ הָרִים רִנָּה  
 יַעַר וְכָל־עֵץ בּוֹ  
 כִּי־גָאֹל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב  
 וּבִישְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאֵר: פ