

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

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Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
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The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him

וַיִּקְרָא * אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו

א

v. 1. א' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

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 worshippers.

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: ²Speak 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.

³If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall make his offering a male

מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: ²דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִן־
הַבְּהֵמָה מִן־הַבָּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ
אֶת־קָרְבַּנְכֶם:
אִם־עֹלָה קָרְבָנוֹ מִן־הַבָּקָר זָכָר תָּמִים ³

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.⁴ He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him.⁵ 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.⁶ The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into sections.⁷ The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and lay out wood upon the fire;⁸ 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.⁹ 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 לְרַצְנוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ⁴ וְסָמַךְ יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הָעֹלָה וְנִרְצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו: ⁵ וְשָׁחַט אֶת־בֶּן הַבָּקָר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהִקְרִיבוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶרֶן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת־הַדָּם אֶת־הַדָּם וְזָרְקוּ אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ⁶ וְהִפְשִׁיט אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְנָתַח אֹתָהּ לְנִתְחֶיהָ: ⁷ וְנָתְנוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶרֶן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֵשׁ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְעָרְכוּ עֵצִים עַל־הָאֵשׁ: ⁸ וְעָרְכוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶרֶן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת הַנִּתְחִים אֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וְאֶת־הַפָּדֵר עַל־הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ⁹ וְקִרְבּוּ וְכָרְעוּ יָרְחָץ 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 (*zevah*).

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'mikbah*), 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 pity. 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.

¹⁰If his offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. ¹¹It 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. ¹²When 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. ¹³The 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.

¹⁴If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, he shall choose his offering from turtledoves or pigeons. ¹⁵The 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. ¹⁶He 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

¹⁰ וְאִם-מִן-הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן-הַבְּשָׂרִים אֹו מִן-הָעוֹרִים לְעֹלָה זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיבוּ: ¹¹ וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ עַל יָרֵךְ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ צִפְנָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְזָרְקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-דָּמֹו עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: ¹² וְנָתַח אֹתוֹ לְנִתְחָיו וְאֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת-פָּדְרוֹ וְעֶרְףְּ הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם עַל-הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ¹³ וְהִקְרִב וְהִפְרָעִים יִרְחֹץ בַּמַּיִם וְהִקְרִיב הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַכֹּל וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲלֶה הוּא אִשָּׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה: פ

¹⁴ וְאִם מִן-הָעוֹף עֲלֶה קָרְבָּנוֹ לַיהוָה וְהִקְרִיב מִן-הַתּוֹרִים אֹו מִן-בְּנֵי הַיוֹנָה אֶת-קָרְבָּנוֹ: ¹⁵ וְהִקְרִיבוֹ הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמָלַק אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנִמְצָה דָּמֹו עַל קִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ¹⁶ 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: *isheh*, 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. ¹⁷The 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.

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, ²and 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

הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קִדְמָה אֶל־מְקוֹם הַדֶּשֶׁן: ¹⁷ וְשָׁטַע
אֹתוֹ בְּכַנְפָּיו לֹא יַבְדִּיל׃ וְהִקְטִיר אֹתוֹ
הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַה עַל־הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־
הָאֵשׁ עֲלֶה הוּא אִשָּׁה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ
לִיהוָה: ט

ב וְנִפֶּשׁ כִּי־תִקְרִיב קֶרְבָּן מִנְחָה לַיהוָה
סֵלֶת יִהְיֶה קֶרְבָּנוֹ וַיִּצֶק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וְנָתַן
עָלֶיהָ לְבֹנָה: ² וְהִבִּיֵּאתָ אֶל־בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן
הַכֹּהֲנִים וְקִמֵּץ מִשֶּׁם מֶלֶא קִמְצוֹ מִסֵּלֶתָהּ
וּמִשְׁמָנָהּ עַל כָּל־לִבְנָתָהּ וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן
אֶת־אֲזִכָּרְתָּהּ הַמִּזְבֵּחַה אִשָּׁה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ

THE GRAIN OFFERING (*minḥab*) (2:1–16)

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

Various types of *minḥab* offerings, usually with the same ingredients, are listed according to their methods of preparation. The *minḥab* 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 *minḥab* 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 *minḥab* 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 *minḥab* 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 *minḥab* 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. ³And the remainder of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the LORD's gifts.

⁴When 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.

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

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

⁸When 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. ⁹The 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. ¹⁰And the remainder of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the LORD's gifts.

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

לִיהוָה: ³וְהַנּוֹתֵרֶת מִן־הַמִּנְחָה לְאַהֲרֹן
וּלְבָנָיו קֹדֶשׁ קֹדָשִׁים מֵאֲשֵׁי יְהוָה: ס
⁴וְכִי תִקְרַב קֶרְבֵּן מִנְחָה מֵאִפֶּה תֵנוּר
סֶלֶת חֲלוֹת מִצֹּת בְּלוֹלֹת בְּשֶׁמֶן וּרְקִיקֵי
מִצֹּת מְשֻׁחִים בְּשֶׁמֶן: ס
⁵וְאִם־מִנְחָה עַל־הַמַּחֲבֵת קֶרֶבֶנָּה סֶלֶת
בְּלוֹלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן מִצָּה תִהְיֶה: ⁶פָּתוֹת
אֶתָּה פֹתִים וַיִּצְקֶתָ עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן מִנְחָה
הוּא: ס

שְׁלִישִׁי ⁷וְאִם־מִנְחָת מִרְחֶשֶׁת קֶרֶבֶנָּה סֶלֶת בְּשֶׁמֶן
תַּעֲשֶׂה:

⁸וְהִבֵּאת אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מֵאִלָּה
לִיהוָה וְהִקְרִיבָהּ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן וְהִגִּישָׁה אֵל־
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ⁹וְהַלִּים הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַמִּנְחָה אֶת־
אֲזִכְרָתָהּ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁה רִיחַ
נִיחֹחַ לִיהוָה: ¹⁰וְהַנּוֹתֵרֶת מִן־הַמִּנְחָה
לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו קֹדֶשׁ קֹדָשִׁים מֵאֲשֵׁי
יְהוָה:

¹¹כָּל־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לִיהוָה לֹא
תַעֲשֶׂה חֶמֶץ כִּי כָל־שָׂאֵר וְכָל־דְּבַשׁ לֹא־

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. ¹²You 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. ¹³You 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.

¹⁴If 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. ¹⁵You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. ¹⁶And 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.

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

תִּקְטִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה: ¹² קָרְבַּן
רֹאשִׁית תִּקְרִיבוּ אֹתָם לַיהוָה וְאֶל-
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא-יָעֲלוּ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ: ¹³ וְכָל-
קָרְבַּן מִנְחָתְךָ בַּמֶּלַח תִּמְלַח וְלֹא תִשָּׁבֵית
מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹהֶיךָ מֵעַל מִנְחָתְךָ עַל
כָּל-קָרְבָנְךָ תִּקְרִיב מֶלַח: ס

¹⁴ וְאִם-תִּקְרִיב מִנְחָת בִּכּוּרִים לַיהוָה
אֲבִיב קִלּוֹי בָּאֵשׁ גֶּרֶשׁ כֶּרֶמֶל תִּקְרִיב
אֶת מִנְחָת בִּכּוּרֶיךָ: ¹⁵ וְנָתַתָּ עָלֶיהָ
שֶׁמֶן וְשִׁמְתָּ עָלֶיהָ לִבְנָה מִנְחָה הִוא:
¹⁶ וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אִזְפָּרְתָּהּ מִגֶּרְשָׁהּ
וּמִשְׁמָנָה עַל כָּל-לִבְנָתָהּ אִשָּׁה
לַיהוָה: פ

ג וְאִם-זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים קָרְבָנוֹ רביעי
אִם מִן-הַבֶּקָר 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. ²He 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. ³He 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; ⁴the 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. ⁵Aaron'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 יִקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ²וְסָמַךְ יָדוֹ עַל-רֹאשׁ קָרְבָּנוֹ וּשְׁחָטוֹ פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּזְרָקוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: ³וְהִקְרִיב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה אֶת-הַחֵלֶב הַמִּכְסֶּה אֶת-הַקֶּרֶב וְאֶת כָּל-הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַקֶּרֶב: ⁴וְאֶת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלָיֹת וְאֶת-הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַפְּסָלִים וְאֶת-הֵיתָרָתוֹ עַל-הַכֶּבֶד עַל-הַכְּלָיֹת וְסִירְנָה: ⁵וְהִקְטִירוּ אֹתוֹ בְּנֵי-אֹהֶל 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 (*minḥab*) 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.

⁶And 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. ⁷If he presents a sheep as his offering, he shall bring it before the LORD ⁸and 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. ⁹He 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; ¹⁰the 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. ¹¹The priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as food, a gift to the LORD.

¹²And if his offering is a goat, he shall bring it before the LORD ¹³and 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. ¹⁴He 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; ¹⁵the 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. ¹⁶The priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as food, a gift, of pleasing odor.

All fat is the LORD's. ¹⁷It 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.

⁶וְאִם־מִן־הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ לַזֶּבַח שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה זָכָר אֹו נִקְבָּה תָמִים יִקְרִיבֵנּוּ: ⁷אִם־כֶּשֶׁב הוּא־מִקְרִיב אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ וְהִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ⁸וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ קָרְבָּנוֹ וְשַׁחֲט אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְזָרְקוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶל־קֹדֶשׁ אֶת־דָּמּוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: ⁹וְהִקְרִיב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה חֶלְבּוֹ הָאֵלִיָּה תְּמִימָה לַעֲמַת הָעֶצֶה יְסִירָנָה וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב הַמְכֻסָּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַקֶּרֶב: ¹⁰וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי הַפְּלִיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַכְּסָלִים וְאֶת־הַיֹּתֶרֶת עַל־הַכֶּבֶד עַל־הַפְּלִיֹת יְסִירָנָה: ¹¹וְהִקְטִירוּ הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַה לַחֵם אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה: פ

¹²וְאִם עֵז קָרְבָּנוֹ וְהִקְרִיבֹהּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ¹³וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וְשַׁחֲט אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְזָרְקוּ בְנֵי אֹהֶל־קֹדֶשׁ דָּמּוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: ¹⁴וְהִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ קָרְבָּנוֹ אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה אֶת־הַחֹלֶב הַמְכֻסָּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַקֶּרֶב: ¹⁵וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי הַפְּלִיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַכְּסָלִים וְאֶת־הַיֹּתֶרֶת עַל־הַכֶּבֶד עַל־הַפְּלִיֹת יְסִירָנָה: ¹⁶וְהִקְטִירֵם הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַה לַחֵם אֲשֶׁה לַרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ

כָּל־חֹלֶב לַיהוָה: ¹⁷חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם כָּל־חֹלֶב וְכָל־דָּם לֹא

חֲמִישִׁי תֹאכְלוּ: פ

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: ²Speak 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-

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ²דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר: נֶפֶשׁ כִּי-תַחֲטָא בְשִׁגָּגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ וְעָשָׂה מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה:

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.

³If 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. ⁴He 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, ⁵and the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it into the Tent of Meeting. ⁶The 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. ⁷The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense,

אִם הִכֹּהֵן הַמָּשִׁיחַ יִחָטָא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם³
וְהִקְרִיב עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא פָּר
בֶּן־בָּקָר תָּמִים לִיהוָה לְחַטָּאת:⁴ וְהֵבִיא
אֶת־הַפָּר אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
וְסָמָן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר וְשָׁחַט אֶת־
הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:⁵ וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַמָּשִׁיחַ
מִדָּם הַפָּר וְהֵבִיא אוֹתוֹ אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
⁶וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־אֶצְבָּעוֹ בְּדָם וְהִזָּה
מִן־הַדָּם שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת־פָּנָיו
פָּרֶכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ:⁷ וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַדָּם
עַל־קַרְנוֹת מִזְבֵּחַ קֹטֶרֶת הַסִּמִּים 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.⁸ 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;⁹ 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—¹⁰just 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.¹¹ But the hide of the bull, and all its flesh, as well as its head and legs, its entrails and its dung—¹²all 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.

¹³If 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—¹⁴when 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: ⁸ ואת כל-חלב הפר החטאת ירים ממנו את-החלב המכסה על-הקרב ואת כל-החלב אשר על-הקרב: ⁹ ואת שתי הפליות ואת-החלב אשר עליהן אשר על-הכסלים ואת-היתרת על-הכבד על-הפליות יסירנה: ¹⁰ כאשר יורם משור זבח השלמים והקטירם הפהון על מזבח העולה: ¹¹ ואת-עור הפר ואת כל-בשרו על-ראשו ועל-כרעיו וקרבו ופרשו: ¹² והוציא את כל-הפר אל-מחוץ למחנה אל-מקום טהור אל-שפך הדשן ושרף אתו על-עצים באש על-שפך הדשן ושרף: פ

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

rificial 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. ¹⁵The 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. ¹⁶The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting, ¹⁷and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain. ¹⁸Some 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. ¹⁹He shall remove all its fat from it and turn it into smoke on the altar. ²⁰He 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. ²¹He shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the purification offering of the congregation.

²²In case it is a chieftain who incurs guilt by

וְהִבִּיאוּ אוֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד: ¹⁵ וְסָמְכוּ
זִקְנֵי הָעֵדָה אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְשַׁחַט אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:
וְהִבִּיֵּא הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפָּר אֶל־
אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד: ¹⁷ וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶצְבָּעוֹ מִן־
הַדָּם וְהִזָּה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת
פְּנֵי הַפָּרֹכֶת: ¹⁸ וּמִן־הַדָּם יִתֵּן | עַל־קַרְנֹת
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶהֱל
מוֹעֵד וְאֶת כָּל־הַדָּם יִשְׁפֹךְ אֶל־יְסוֹד
מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד:
¹⁹ וְאֶת כָּל־חִלְבּוֹ יָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ וְהִקְטִיר
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ²⁰ וַעֲשֵׂה לִפָּר כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
לִפָּר הַחֲטָאת כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה־לּוֹ וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵהֶם
הַכֹּהֵן וְנִסְלַח לָהֶם: ²¹ וְהוֹצִיא אֶת־הַפָּר
אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְשָׂרַף אוֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר
שָׂרַף אֶת הַפָּר הָרִאשׁוֹן חֲטָאת הַקֹּהֵל
הוּא: פ

²² 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. Yohanan ben Zakkai 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—²³or the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his knowledge—he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. ²⁴He 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. ²⁵The 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. ²⁶All 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.

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

מִצֻּוֹת יְהוָה אֲלֵהֶיוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ בְּשֹׁגְגָה וְאִשָּׁם: ²³ אוֹ-הוֹדֶעַ אֵלָיו חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא בָּהּ וְהֵבִיא אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׁעִיר עִזִּים זָכָר תָּמִים: ²⁴ וְסָמָךְ יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ הַשְּׁעִיר וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁחַט אֶת־הָעֹלָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה חֲטָאת הוּא: ²⁵ וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחֲטָאת בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וַיָּנִתֵן עַל־קֶרְנֹת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־דָּמּוֹ יִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יִסּוֹד מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה: ²⁶ וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵלְבֹו יִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כַּחֲלֵב זֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן מִחֲטָאתוֹ וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: פ

וְאִם־נִפְשׁ אֶחָת תִּחַטָּא בְּשֹׁגְגָה מֵעַם 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—²⁸or 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. ²⁹He 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. ³⁰The 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. ³¹He 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.

³²If the offering he brings as a purification offering is a sheep, he shall bring a female without blemish. ³³He 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. ³⁴The 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. ³⁵And 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.

לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ וְאִשָּׁם: ²⁸אוֹ הַדָּע אֵלָיו
חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְהֵבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׁעִירַת
עִזִּים תְּמִימָה נִקְבָּה עַל־חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר
חָטָא: ²⁹וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הַחֲטָאת
וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַחֲטָאת בַּמָּקוֹם הָעֶלְיָה:
³⁰וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּמָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְנָתַן עַל־
קֶרְנֵת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֶלְיָה וְאֶת־כָּל־דָּמָהּ יִשְׁפֹּךְ
אֶל־יִסּוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ³¹וְאֶת־כָּל־חִלְבֶּהּ יֹסִיר
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוֹסֵר חֶלֶב מִעַל זֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים
וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ
לַיהוָה וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: פ
³²וְאִם־כֶּבֶשׂ יָבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ לַחֲטָאת נִקְבָּה
תְּמִימָה יְבִיאנָהּ: ³³וְסָמָךְ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל
רֹאשׁ הַחֲטָאת וְשָׁחַט אֹתָהּ לַחֲטָאת
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׁחַט אֶת־הָעֶלְיָה: ³⁴וְלָקַח
הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחֲטָאת בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְנָתַן עַל־
קֶרְנֵת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֶלְיָה וְאֶת־כָּל־דָּמָהּ יִשְׁפֹּךְ
אֶל־יִסּוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ³⁵וְאֶת־כָּל־חִלְבֶּהּ יֹסִיר
בְּאֲשֶׁר יוֹסֵר חֶלֶב־הַכֶּשֶׂב מִזֶּבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים
וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עַל אֲשֵׁי
יְהוָה וְכִפֹּר 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.

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-

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;

²Or 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;

³Or 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 בִּי־תִחַטָּא

וְשָׁמְעָה קוֹל אֱלֹהִים וְהָיָא עֵד אוֹ רֹאֵה
אוֹ יָדַע אִם־לֹא יִגִּיד וְנִשְׁאַ עֲוֹנוֹ:

² אוֹ נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּגַּע בְּכָל־דְּבַר טִמְאָה
אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת חַיָּה טִמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת
בְּהֵמָה טִמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת שְׂרָץ טִמְאָה
וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָיָא טִמְאָה וְאָשָׁם:

³ אוֹ כִּי יִגַּע בְּטִמְאָת אָדָם לְכָל טִמְאָתוֹ
אֲשֶׁר יִטְמָא 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.

⁴Or 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—

⁵when he realizes his guilt in any of these matters, he shall confess that wherein he has sinned.

⁶And 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.

⁷But 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. ⁸He 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. ⁹He shall sprinkle

או נפש כי תשבֹעֶ לְבַטָּא בְשִׁפְתָּיִם
לְהִרְעֵ | או לְהִיטִיב לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִבְטָא
הָאָדָם בְּשִׁבְעָה וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא יֵדַע
וְאָשָׁם לְאַחַת מֵאלֵהֶם:

וְהָיָה כִּי־יֵאָשֵׁם לְאַחַת מֵאלֵה וְהִתְוֹדָה
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ: ⁶וְהָבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ
לִיהוָה עַל חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא נִקְבָּה
מִן־הֶצֶאן כִּשְׁבָּה אוֹ־שְׁעִירַת עֲזִים
לְחֲטָאת וּכְפָר עָלָיו הִכֵּן מִחֲטָאתוֹ:

⁷וְאִם־לֹא תִגְיַע יָדוֹ דֵּי שָׁהּ וְהָבִיא אֶת־
אֲשָׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא שְׁתֵּי תְרִים אוֹ־שְׁנֵי
בְּנֵי־יוֹנָה לִיהוָה אֶחָד לְחֲטָאת וְאֶחָד
לְעֹלָה: ⁸וְהָבִיא אֹתָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן וְהִקְרִיב
אֶת־אֲשֶׁר לְחֲטָאת רֹאשׁוֹנָה וּמֶלֶךְ אֶת־
רֹאשׁוֹ מִמוֹל עֲרָפוֹ וְלֹא יַבְדִּיל: ⁹וְהִזָּה

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.¹⁰ 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.

¹¹And 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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.

¹⁴And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

¹⁵When 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

מִדָּם הַחֲטָאתָ עַל־קִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהִנֵּשְׂאָר
בָּדָם יִמָּצֵה אֶל־יְסוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ חֲטָאת הוּא :
וְאֶת־הַשְּׂנִי יַעֲשֶׂה עֹלָה כַּמִּשְׁפֵּט וְכִפֹּר
עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן מִחֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־חֲטָא וְנִסְלַח
לּוֹ : ס

שביעי ¹¹ וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׂגִּי יָדוֹ לְשְׁתֵּי תְּרִים אוֹ
לְשְׁנֵי בְּנֵי־יוֹנָה וְהֵבִיא אֶת־קֶרְבָּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר
חֲטָא עֲשִׂירֵת הָאֶפֶה סֵלֶת לְחֲטָאת לֹא־
יָשִׁים עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וְלֹא־יִתֵּן עָלֶיהָ לְבֹנָה
כִּי חֲטָאת הִיא : ¹² וְהֵבִיאהּ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן
וְקִמֵּץ הַכֹּהֵן מִמֶּנָּה מְלֹא קֶמֶצוֹ אֶת־
אִזְכָּרְתָּהּ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עַל אֲשֵׁי יְהוָה
חֲטָאת הוּא : ¹³ וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל־
חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־חֲטָא מֵאֲחַת מֵאֵלֶּה וְנִסְלַח
לּוֹ וְהִיתָה לְכֹהֵן כַּמִּנְחָה : ס

¹⁴ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר :

¹⁵ נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תִמְעַל מְעַל וְחָטְאהָ בְּשִׁגְגָה

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. ¹⁶He 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.

¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸He 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. ¹⁹It is a reparation offering; he has incurred guilt before the LORD.

²⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²¹When

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-

מִקְדָּשִׁי יְהוָה וְהֵבִיא אֶת-אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה
אֵיל תָּמִים מִן-הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְכָּךְ בְּסֶף-
שְׁקָלִים בְּשֶׁקֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְאִשָּׁם: ¹⁶וְאֵת
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא מִן-הַקֹּדֶשׁ יִשְׁלַם וְאֶת-
חֲמִישְׁתּוֹ יוֹסֵף עָלָיו וְנָתַן אֹתוֹ לַכֹּהֵן
וְהִכָּהוּ יִכְפֹּר עָלָיו בְּאֵיל הָאֲשָׁם וְנִסְלַח
לוֹ: פ

¹⁷וְאִם-נִפְשׁ כִּי תַחֲטֹא וְעָשִׂתָּה אַחַת
מִכָּל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ
וְלֹא-יָדַע וְאִשָּׁם וְנִשָּׂא עֹנּוֹ: ¹⁸וְהֵבִיא אֵיל
תָּמִים מִן-הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְכָּךְ לְאִשָּׁם אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן
וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל שְׁגִגָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-שָׁגָג
וְהוּא לֹא-יָדַע וְנִסְלַח לוֹ: ¹⁹אִשָּׁם הוּא
אִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁם לַיהוָה: פ

²⁰וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ²¹נִפְשׁ
כִּי תַחֲטֹא וּמַעֲלָה מַעַל בִּיהוָה וְכִחֵשׁ
בַּעֲמִיתוֹ בִּפְקֻדֹן אוֹ-בִתְשׁוּמַת יָד אוֹ בְגָזֹל

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 safe-keeping, 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, ²²or 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—²³when 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, ²⁴or 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. ²⁵Then 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. ²⁶The 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־עַמִּיתוֹ: ²² אִי־מֵצָא אֶבְדָּה וְכָשַׁח בָּהּ וְנִשְׁבַּע עַל־שֹׁקֵר עַל־אֲחַת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָאָדָם לְחֵטָא בְּהִנָּה: ²³ וְהָיָה כִּי־יִחְטֹא וְאָשָׁם וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הַגְּזֻלָּה אֲשֶׁר גָּזַל אוֹ אֶת־הָעֶשֶׂק אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂק אוֹ אֶת־הַפְּקֻדֹן אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִיד אֹתוֹ מִפְּטִיר אוֹ אֶת־הָאֶבְדָּה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא: ²⁴ אוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבַּע עָלָיו לְשֹׁקֵר וְשָׁלַם אֹתוֹ בְּרִאשֹׁו וּחֲמִשְׁתָּיו יִסֹּף עָלָיו לְאֲשֶׁר הָיָה לוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ בְּיוֹם אֲשֻׁמָּתוֹ: ²⁵ וְאֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ יָבִיא לַיהוָה אֵיל תַּמִּים מִן־הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְפָּךְ לְאָשָׁם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: ²⁶ וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִסְלַח לוֹ עַל־אֲחַת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לְאֲשָׁמָה 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.”

and seizes him by his genitals, ¹²you shall cut off her hand; show no pity.

¹³You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. ¹⁴You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller. ¹⁵You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶For everyone who does those things, everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the LORD your God.

¹⁷Remember what Amalek did to you on your

בִּמְבִשְׁוֹ: ¹²וְקָצַצְתָּ אֶת־כַּפֶּהָ לֹא תַחֲסֹ עֵינֶיהָ: ס

¹³לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָךְ בְּכִיסֶּךָ אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן גְּדוֹלָה וְקֹטְנָה: ס ¹⁴לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָךְ בְּבֵיתְךָ אֵיפָה וְאֵיפָה גְּדוֹלָה וְקֹטְנָה: ¹⁵אֶבֶן שְׁלֵמָה וְצֶדֶק יִהְיֶה־לָּךְ אֵיפָה שְׁלֵמָה וְצֶדֶק יִהְיֶה־לָּךְ לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ¹⁶כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה כָּל עֲשֵׂה עוֹל: פ

מִפְטִיר ¹⁷זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָּךְ עַמְלֶק בְּדֶרֶךְ

IMPROPER INTERVENTION IN A FIGHT (vv. 11–12)

12. cut off her hand In the ancient Near East, it was common to inflict punishment on the part of the body with which an offense was committed. The reason for such a severe punishment is not clear. Some think it may be because of her injuring the man's genitals and threatening his ability to father children, as is stated explicitly in the Middle Assyrian laws.

show no pity This clause is used in cases where one might be tempted to be lenient, in this case because the woman's motive—the defense of her husband—was honorable.

HONEST WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (vv. 13–16)

Only honest weights and measures are permitted. The importance of this principle, so crucial for the justice and stability of commerce within a society, was widely emphasized in the ancient Near East.

13. You shall not have Not only may one not use deceptive weights and measures, one may not even possess them.

pouch Where merchants carried their weights.

alternate weights Literally, “stone and stone.” The weights in question were used on balance scales to determine the weight of money and commodities. The standard weight was the shekel, ap-

proximately 0.4 ounce (11 g), although it varied in different periods. One may not use the large weight to receive more or the small weight to give less. Ancient Babylonian writings contain many accounts about the violation of this norm. Numerous stone and metal weights of the standard shekel and its fractions and multiples have been found in archaeological excavations.

14. alternate measures Literally, “alternate *ephah* measures.” The *ephah* (standing here for all measures) was not a measuring device but a unit of capacity of pottery containers used for grain; see Comment to Exod. 16:36. The size and weight of such large containers made it difficult for buyers or sellers of grain to carry their own jars from place to place to verify the amounts involved in a sale.

15. completely honest Literally, “complete and honest.” In Hebrew, the words appear at the beginning of the verse, where they serve as a contrast to verse 14 and gain an emphatic sense: “only completely honest weights.”

if you are to endure long Long life, for the individual or the nation, is the reward granted by God for obedience to His laws.

REMEMBERING AMALEKITE AGGRESSION (vv. 17–19)

The Amalekites were a nomadic group living in

12. cut off her hand That is, “leave her with diminished financial resources” (*Ha-amek Davar*). The Sages shrank from taking this punishment literally; they substituted a monetary fine for mutilation.

16. your God The Jew who cheats in busi-

ness may no longer call upon “my God.” Such behavior is detestable in God's sight. God will no longer tolerate being associated with that person (Hirsch).

17. The text mentions the predations of Amalek right after discussing just weights and

journey, after you left Egypt—¹⁸how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. ¹⁹Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: ¹⁸ אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל־הַנֶּחֱשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה
עֵיף וַיִּגַּע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: ¹⁹ וְהָיָה
בְּהֵנִיחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל־אֲבִיבֶיךָ
מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה־אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ
נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זִכְרֵ עַמְלֶק
מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: פ

the Sinai desert and the part of the Negeb that was south of the territory of Judah. Nothing is known of them from sources outside the Bible. Israel's experience with them must have been particularly bitter to have led to the resolve to wipe them out. The account in Exod. 17:8–16 offers no explanation for that determination, but Deuteronomy does: The Amalekites staged a sneak attack on the defenseless weak lagging at the rear of the migrating Israelites, an attack that showed Amalek to be uncommonly ruthless, lacking in even the most elementary decency. Conceivably, the Israelites thought that the Amalekites had genocidal intentions, and regarded the command to annihilate them as measure-for-measure punishment.

17. The exhortation to remember is echoed by “Do not forget” in verse 19.

what Amalek did to you There is no indication of what prompted the Amalekites to attack. It has been conjectured that they saw the Israelites as a potential threat to their control of the oases and pasturelands in the Sinai and the Negeb. In view of the Amalekites' later character as marauders, however, it is just as likely that their attack

was a plundering raid on a target of opportunity.

18. undeterred by fear of God The Amalekites are not expected to fear *YHVH*, the God of Israel, whom they do not recognize. That is why the term used here is “fear of God” (*elohim*, the more general term for the deity), meaning fear of the divine. The Bible knows that non-Israelite religions also teach that the gods punish sin; and when it refers to pagans who are or are not heedful of that belief, it uses the more general term “God” (see Gen. 20:11). The Amalekites lacked the basic principles of morality common to all religions.

stragglers Those traveling at the rear would include the sick and weak who could not keep up with the others. Anyone with elementary decency would avoid attacking them.

19. when God grants you safety Once Israel is securely settled in the Land, with no threat left to its existence, it is to turn its attention to Amalek.

blot out the memory That is, blot out their name, wipe them out. The Israelites are not being commanded here to eradicate all recollection of the Amalekites. Indeed, they are commanded to remember forever what the Amalekites did.

measures, to warn us that when people cheat each other, the national bonds of unity, loyalty, and mutual trust are strained and the nation becomes vulnerable to Amalek (Tanḥ.).

undeterred by fear of God Literally, “not fearing God.” In Hebrew, this phrase follows “you were famished and weary”; to whom does it refer? To Amalek? Or to the stragglers who had lost faith—thus becoming vulnerable to Amalek? If the former, “fearing God” means having empathy for the powerless who are at your mercy (as the Egyptian midwives who “feared God” spared Israelite babies in Exod. 1:17).

18. surprised you Hebrew: *korkha*, which the Midrash relates to the word for “cold” (*kor*). The Israelites, leaving Egypt on the way to Sinai, had been confident and enthusiastic. The real sin of Amalek was that he robbed them of their idealism, teaching them that the world could be an unreliable and dangerous place.

19. The commandment to blot out the name and the memory of the wicked may be thematically related to the commandment earlier in the chapter to perpetuate the name of the man who died childless.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

25:19. blot out . . . Amalek This verse is the source for the custom of drowning out the name of Haman (by tradition a descendent of Amalek) with raucous noise during the reading of *M'gillat Ester* on *Purim*.

הפטרת פרשת זכור

HAFTARAH FOR PARASHAT ZAKHOR

1 SAMUEL 15:2–34 (*Ashk'nazim*)

1 SAMUEL 15:1–34 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* first presents Saul's battle against the Amalekites. Then it describes how God rejected him as king for disobeying the divine command of utter extermination of that nation and its livestock. (Centuries earlier, according to Exodus, "Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim" [17:8]. Later, with God's help, "Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword" [17:13]. That event was inscribed in a document in which the Lord stated, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" [17:14].)

In Deut. 25:17–19, read as the concluding (*maftir*) Torah selection on *Shabbat Zakhor*, the Israelites are called upon to remember Amalek's surprise attack against "all the stragglers" who made up the weary and famished rearguard of the people during the wilderness trek from Egypt. In Deuteronomy, it is the people who must remember the enemy and destroy it—not God. It must be done "when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you [*oy'vekha mi-saviv*]."

The Book of Samuel seems to suggest that this time had come, for the summary of Saul's battles (1 Sam. 14:47) states that the king "waged war on every side against all his enemies [*saviv b'khol oy'vav*]." It is in this context that the battle against Amalek is mentioned (v. 48).

The *haftarah*, which follows in chapter 15, provides a fuller, theological perspective that blends the two Torah traditions. God announces that He will now requite the Amalekites for their actions against the Israelites "on their way up from Egypt," a requital that Saul and the nation must exact (15:2–3). God's own vendetta against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14) is thus combined here with the people's responsibility to destroy Amalek for having attacked Israel "on your journey, after you left Egypt" (Deut. 25:17,19). Saul's incom-

plete execution of God's command, together with the subsequent inquest and judgment against him through Samuel, constitute the successive sections of the *haftarah*.

The *haftarah's* repeated use of the words *kol* (voice) and *shama* (hear, obey) highlights its emphasis on obedience. The punishment for not obeying the divine word is rejection. Samuel states: "Because you [Saul] rejected the LORD's command, / He has rejected you as king" (1 Sam. 15:23). This strident and striking language alludes to the onset of the monarchy. After the people had first requested a king, and Samuel had resisted, a divine oracle had declared: "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king" (8:7, cf. v. 21). The issue in both cases is the authority of divine sovereignty—unmediated by a human king, in the first instance; distorted by the human king, in the second. The people reject God in the first case; God rejects the king in the second (15:23,26). Indeed, it seems that God can accept the substitute of human kingship so long as divine authority remains in place. It is just this that Saul has challenged by his decision to revise or reinterpret the divine command.

There is great pathos in this *haftarah*—first, because Saul's sin is not a flagrant rejection of divine authority and second, because his repeated confessions and appeals for divine forgiveness are rejected. The reader is confronted with the austerity and stringency of God's demands and the brutality demanded of the Israelite nation. Mercy is prohibited; no one and nothing may be "spared." The war against the Amalekites is presented as a just war, punishing an offense centuries old. Rejection or reinterpretation of the absolute orders is completely out of the question. Whether as an actual event or as a literary case setting an exam-

ple, 1 Sam. 15:1–34 confronts us with a fierce and uncompromising theology. Its liturgical recitation, yearly, requires repeated moral and theological reflection.

According to a rabbinic tradition, Saul himself began this process by trying to undermine the divine order through legalistic and moral reasoning (see BT Yoma 22b; Eccles. R. 7:16). On the basis of the biblical rule requiring the sacrificial slaying of a heifer to atone for an unknown homicide (Deut. 21:1–9), he argued that innumerable innocent animals would be required to atone for the deaths of Amalekites. Moreover, he added, even if the adults were deserving of death, why include children in the proscription? According to this tradition, a divine voice then reproved him in the words of Ecclesiastes, “Do not be overly righteous” (7:16). The answer challenges the moral soul of the tradition.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH
TO THE CALENDAR

Parashat Zakhor (Deut. 25:17–19) is the second of four special Torah passages added to the regular *Shabbat* portion in the weeks before *Pesah*. It is recited on the *Shabbat* before *Purim*, even if *Purim* were to fall on the following *Shabbat*. (For details on the scheduling of the special Torah portions, see the introduction to the *haftarah* for *parashat Sh’kalim*.) In it, the Israelites are enjoined to remember (*zakhor*) what Amalek did to the people on their way out of Egypt, and to “blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”

That same remembrance and that act of destruction are articulated in the *haftarah*. Indeed, because this *haftarah* is recited just before *Purim*—when the scroll of Esther is read and Haman the Agagite’s evil plots against the Jews of Persia are recalled—later generations could read into the assertion of divine remembrance an assurance that God remains steadfast to punish Amalek in all generations.

The link between 1 Sam. 15 and the scroll of Esther was drawn already in biblical times. Just as Saul is the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, so Mordecai’s lineage is traced to the line of Saul’s father (Esther 2:5). Just as the Israelite king defeats Amalek and its king, Agag, so the latter-day hero of the Jews foils the plots of Haman “the Agagite” (Esther 3:1,10). Amalek became a symbol of all the enemies of the Jews in all generations. In early midrashic homilies and in liturgical poetry composed for this *Shabbat Zakhor* in late antiquity, the foe was identified with Edom (the genealogy in Gen. 36:12 gave added proof). Through that identification, Amalek served as a symbol for Rome and for Christianity as well.

As a counterpoint, “Amalek” was later reinterpreted in terms of the evil inclination (cf. *Zohar* 3:281b) and religious failure. As a result, the eradication of Amalek became a process of psychospiritual development in certain circles. This more personal reading of the tradition, however, never displaced the national-historical one, and the two remain in tension. The carnival quality of *Purim* celebrations may dangerously mask the serious moral issues. Vengeance is not just the Lord’s; it is also enacted by people.

15 Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over His people Israel. Therefore, listen to the LORD’s command!

טו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-שָׁאוּל אֲנִי
שְׁלַח יְהוָה לְמַשְׁחֹךְ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-עַמּוֹ
עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דְּבָרִי
יְהוָה: ס

1 Samuel 15:1–3. According to an early rabbinic tradition, the Israelites were commanded to do three things when they came into the Land:

establish a king, build the Temple, and destroy Amalek (Tosef. Sanh. 4:5; Sifrei Deut. 67).

²“Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I am exacting the penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them on the road, on their way up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack Amalek, and proscribe all that belongs to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!”

⁴Saul mustered the troops and enrolled them at Telaim: 200,000 men on foot, and 10,000 men of Judah. ⁵Then Saul advanced as far as the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the wadi. ⁶Saul said to the Kenites, “Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt.” So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites.

⁷Saul destroyed Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt, ⁸and he captured King Agag of Amalek alive. He proscribed all the people, putting them to the sword; ⁹but Saul and the troops spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value. They would not proscribe them; they proscribed only what was cheap and worthless.

¹⁰The word of the LORD then came to Samuel:

¹¹“I regret that I made Saul king, for he has

* ² כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת פָּקַדְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה עַמֶּלֶךְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם לוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעֵלְתּוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם: ³ עַתָּה לֵךְ וְהִפֵּיתָה אֶת-עַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָחַרְמְתָם אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וְלֹא תַחֲמֹל עָלָיו וְהִמַּתָּה מֵאִישׁ עַד-אִשָּׁה מֵעַלְל וְעַד-יוֹנֵק מִשּׁוֹר וְעַד-שֶׂה מִגְּמָל וְעַד-חֲמֹר: ט

⁴ וַיִּשְׁמָע שָׁאוּל אֶת-הָעָם וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּטָלָיִם מֵאֲתַיִם אֶלֶף רִגְלֵי וַעֲשָׂרַת אֲלָפִים אֶת-אִישׁ יְהוּדָה: ⁵ וַיָּבֹא שָׁאוּל עַד-עִיר עַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּרֶב בִּנְחָל: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל-הַקִּינִי לְכוּ סְרוּ רְדּוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלֹקֵי פֶן-אֶסְפָּף עִמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עֲשִׂיתָה חֶסֶד עִם-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵלְוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּסֵּר קִינִי מִתּוֹךְ עַמֶּלֶךְ:

⁷ וַיֵּךְ שָׁאוּל אֶת-עַמֶּלֶךְ מִחֻילָה בּוֹאֵךְ שׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם: ⁸ וַיִּתְּפֹשׂ אֶת-אַגַּג מֶלֶךְ-עַמֶּלֶךְ חַי וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעָם הַחֲרִים לְפִי-חֶרֶב: ⁹ וַיַּחֲמֹל שָׁאוּל וְהָעָם עַל-אַגַּג וְעַל-מִיטֵב הַצֹּאֵן וְהַבָּקָר וְהַמִּשְׁגִּים וְעַל-הַכְּרִים וְעַל-כָּל-הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחֲרִימָם וְכָל-הַמְּלָאכָה נִמְבָּזָה וַנִּמָּס אֹתָהּ הַחֲרִימוּ: פ

¹⁰ וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר: ¹¹ נִחַמְתִּי כִּי-הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת-שָׁאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ:

3. Spare no one The Hebrew verb suggests a harsher command: “have no pity.”

4. mustered . . . enrolled The narrative is tightly textured. Not only is the theme of “hearing” or “heeding” (*shama*) repeated throughout the text (vv. 1,14,19,20,22,24); it also appears through puns. Thus the initial command was to “hear” (*sh'ma*) the divine word (v. 1); and Saul proceeds immediately to “muster” (*va-y'shamma*) the troops. Similarly, Samuel says that God “remembers” or “requites” (*pakad'ti*) the crime of the Amalekites (v. 2; the verb פָּקַד serves double duty here). The same verb is used in the reference to Saul’s enrolling the troops (*va-yifk'dem*).

* Ashk'nazim start here.

Telaim In the Negeb (“Telem,” Josh. 15:24).

6. Sauls tells the Kenites to withdraw “from among the Amalekites,” as an act of gratitude for their past favors to Israel. Possibly this refers to wilderness guiding (see Num. 10:29–32); the precise events are nowhere stated. Presumably some Kenites encamped among the Amalekites, an association also found in Balaam’s prophecy (Num. 24:20–21).

11. I regret Hebrew: *nihamti*. This usage sets up an ironic contrast with verse 29. After Saul begs forgiveness, Samuel refuses his appeal, stating that God “does not . . . change His mind [*va-yinna'hem*].” But this change in divine favor

turned away from Me and has not carried out My commands.” Samuel was distressed and he entreated the LORD all night long. ¹²Early in the morning Samuel went to meet Saul. Samuel was told, “Saul went to Carmel, where he erected a monument for himself; then he left and went on down to Gilgal.”

¹³When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have fulfilled the LORD’s command.” ¹⁴“Then what,” demanded Samuel, “is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?” ¹⁵Saul answered, “They were brought from the Amalekites, for the troops spared the choicest of the sheep and oxen for sacrificing to the LORD your God. And we proscribed the rest.” ¹⁶Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night!” “Speak,” he replied. ¹⁷And Samuel said, “You may look small to yourself, but you are the head of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king over Israel, ¹⁸and the LORD sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and proscribe the sinful Amalekites; make war on them until you have exterminated them.’ ¹⁹Why did you disobey the LORD and swoop down on the spoil in defiance of the LORD’s will?” ²⁰Saul said to Samuel, “But I did obey the LORD! I performed the mission on which the LORD sent me: I captured King Agag of Amalek, and I proscribed Amalek, ²¹and the troops took from the spoil some sheep and oxen—the best of what had been proscribed—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.” ²²But Samuel said:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As much as in obedience to the LORD’s command?

כִּי־שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֶת־דְּבָרִי לֹא הָקִים וַיַּחֲרֹ
לְשִׁמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה׃
¹²וַיֵּשְׁבֻם שְׁמוּאֵל לְקִרְאָת שָׁאוּל בַּבֹּקֶר
וַיִּגְדַּל לְשִׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר בֶּאֱשָׁאוּל הַכְּרַמְלָה
וְהָיָה מִצֵּיב לוֹ יָד וַיִּסֵּב וַיַּעֲבֹר וַיֵּרֶד
הַגִּלְגָּל׃

¹³וַיָּבֹא שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
שָׁאוּל בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה הִקִּימְתִּי אֶת־
דְּבַר יְהוָה׃ ¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל וּמָה קוֹל־
הַצֶּאֱזָן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנִי וְקוֹל הַבֶּקָר אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי
שֹׁמֵעַ׃ ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל מֵעֲמָלְקִי הַבִּיאֹם
אֲשֶׁר חָמַל הָעָם עַל־מִיטֵב הַצֶּאֱזָן וְהַבֶּקָר
לְמַעַן זִבְחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֶת־הַיּוֹתֵר
הִחְרַמְנוּ׃ ס ¹⁶וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־
שָׁאוּל הֲרָף וְאֶגִּידָה לָּךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
יְהוָה אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
דִּבֶּר׃ ס ¹⁷וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲלוֹא אָם־
קָטָן אַתָּה בְּעֵינַיִךְ רֹאשׁ שְׁבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אַתָּה וַיִּמְשַׁחְךָ יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃
¹⁸וַיִּשְׁלַחְךָ יְהוָה בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לָךְ
וְהִחְרַמְתָּה אֶת־הַחֲטָאִים אֶת־עַמְּלָק
וְנִלְחַמְתָּ בּוֹ עַד כְּלוֹתָם אֹתָם׃ ¹⁹וְלָמָּה
לֹא־שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה וַתַּעַט אֶל־הַשָּׁלָל
וַתַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינַיִךְ יְהוָה׃ ס ²⁰וַיֹּאמֶר
שָׁאוּל אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל
יְהוָה וְאַלֶּךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְנִי יְהוָה
וְאֶבִּיא אֶת־אֲגַג מֶלֶךְ עַמְּלָק וְאֶת־עַמְּלָק
הִחְרַמְתִּי׃ ²¹וַיִּקַּח הָעָם מִהַשָּׁלָל צֹאן
וּבָקָר רֵאשִׁית הַחֶרֶם לְזִבְחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בַּגִּלְגָּל׃ ²²וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל

הַחֶפֶץ לַיהוָה בַּעֲלֹת וּזְבָחִים
בְּשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה

is precisely what has produced Saul’s despair. Elsewhere, this verb does in fact indicate God’s regret at having created sinful humankind (Gen. 6:6: *va-yinnahem*), as well as God’s merciful forgiveness of penitents (Jon. 4:2: *v’niham*).

21. the best Hebrew: *reishit*. In his second justification, Saul uses a more cultic term for what he earlier called “the choicest” (*meitav*) of the livestock (v. 15).

Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice,
Compliance than the fat of rams.

²³For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim.

Because you rejected the LORD's command,
He has rejected you as king."

²⁴Saul said to Samuel, "I did wrong to transgress the LORD's command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them. ²⁵Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow low to the LORD." ²⁶But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not go back with you; for you have rejected the LORD's command, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel."

²⁷As Samuel turned to leave, Saul seized the corner of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. ²⁹Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind, for He is not human that He should change His mind." ³⁰But [Saul] pleaded, "I did wrong. Please, honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel, and come back with me until I have bowed low to the LORD your God." ³¹So Samuel followed Saul back, and Saul bowed low to the LORD.

³²Samuel said, "Bring forward to me King Agag of Amalek." Agag approached him with faltering steps; and Agag said, "Ah, bitter death is at hand!"

³³Samuel said:

"As your sword has bereaved women,
So shall your mother be bereaved among women."

הִנֵּה שְׁמַעַל מִזִּבְחַ טוֹב
לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים:
כִּי חַטָּאת־קָסָם מָרִי

וְאַנּוֹן וּתְרָפִים הִפְצָר
יַעַן מָאַסְתָּ אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה
וַיִּמְאַסְךָ מִמְּלָכָה: ס

²⁴וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל חָטָאתִי כִּי־
עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת־פִּי־יְהוָה וְאֶת־דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי
יֵרָאֵתִי אֶת־הָעָם וְאַשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם:
²⁵וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא אֶת־חַטָּאתִי וְשׁוּב עִמִּי
וְאַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה: ²⁶וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־
שָׁאוּל לֹא אָשׁוּב עִמָּךְ כִּי מָאַסְתָּה אֶת־
דְּבַר יְהוָה וַיִּמְאַסְךָ יְהוָה מִהָיוֹת מֶלֶךְ
עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס

²⁷וַיִּסַּב שְׁמוּאֵל לָלֶכֶת וַיִּחַזַּק בְּכַנְף־מַעֲיָלוֹ
וַיִּקְרַע: ²⁸וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׁמוּאֵל קִרְעֵה יְהוָה
אֶת־מַמְלְכוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלֶיךָ הַיּוֹם וּנְתָנָהּ
לְרַעְיָה הַטּוֹב מִמָּךְ: ²⁹וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֹא יִשְׁקָר וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא
לְהִנָּחֵם: ³⁰וַיֹּאמֶר חָטָאתִי עַתָּה כִּבְדֹּנִי
נָא נִגַּד זִקְנִי־עִמִּי וְנִגַּד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְשׁוּב עִמִּי
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתִי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ³¹וַיֵּשֶׁב
שְׁמוּאֵל אַחֲרֵי שָׁאוּל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שָׁאוּל
לַיהוָה: ס

³²וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הִגִּישׁוּ אֵלַי אֶת־אַגָּג
מֶלֶךְ עַמְלֶק וַיֵּלֶךְ אֵלָיו אַגָּג מַעֲדֹנֹת וַיֹּאמֶר
אַגָּג אֲכֵן סָר מִרְ־הַמּוֹת: ס
³³וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל

כַּאֲשֶׁר שִׁכְלָה נָשִׁים חֲרָבְךָ
כֵּן־תִּשְׁכַּל מִנָּשִׁים אִמְךָ

32. with faltering steps Hebrew verbal stem: *ma-ad* (to falter).

Ab, bitter death is at hand Hebrew: *akhen sar mar ha-mavet*. The word *sar* (rendered as "at hand") is very likely a mistaken scribal doubling

(dittography) of the similar-looking word *mar* (bitter). In fact, a word for *sar* is missing in the ancient Greek translation (Septuagint). On this basis, the king simply and poignantly cried: "Surely, death is bitter!"

And Samuel cut Agag down before the LORD
at Gilgal.

³⁴Samuel then departed for Ramah, and Saul
went up to his home at Gibeah of Saul.

וַיִּשְׁטֹף שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־אַגָּג לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
בְּגִלְגָּל: ס
³⁴ וַיֵּלֶךְ שְׁמוּאֵל הָרְמָתָה וַיֵּשְׁאוּל עֲלֶיהָ
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ גְּבֵעַת שְׁאוּל: