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בס"ד

Parashat Vayiqra Part II The Five Basic Categories of Sacrifices

This study is a discussion of the five basic categories of sacrifices that are described in Leviticus 1-7. It will focus on name derivations and the prominent characteristics of each and include some general remarks on sacrifices.

1. *ʿOlah*: “ascend.” The distinctive feature of this sacrifice is that it was completely incinerated on the altar (excluding the hide, which was given to the officiating priest), thus often translated as burnt-offering. It may have been called *ʿolah* in the Torah because all of it ascended the altar. Or, more likely, its name may reflect the fact that in the rising smoke it totally “ascended” to G-d. It was the first class of sacrifice recorded in Leviticus, undoubtedly because it was all given to G-d. An *ʿolah* was optional for an individual except when undergoing the purification process for certain conditions (the skin diseases of *saraʿat* and unnatural genital flows) and for the Nazirite. The Sages posited that one should volunteer an *ʿolah* to atone for those unintentional transgressions for which a sacrifice was not mandated.

An *ʿolah* could be brought from the herd (bovine) or from the flock (sheep or goats), but it had to be male. Perhaps because it is completely given to G-d it should represent the prominence widely associated with strength and vigor. A dove or pigeon could also be presented as an *ʿolah*. In those cases it could be of either gender, a leniency perhaps related to the generally understood assumption that birds were an option for the poor. The daily communal sacrifices of one animal from the flock each morning and one each afternoon, as well as the two extra sacrifices from the flock every Shabbat were *ʿolot*. The sacrifices for all festivals and the New Moon were mostly *ʿolot* (Num. 28-29). When an *ʿolah* and another sacrifice were prescribed for an occasion, the *ʿolah* was usually offered first.

2. *Minha*: “tributary gift” to G-d. This term was widely used in diplomatic contexts to signify a tributary gift from a dependent to a superior. Elsewhere in Tanakh, it was applied to sacrificial gifts to G-d of both agricultural produce and animals (Gen. 4:3-4; 1 Sam. 2:15-17), implying acknowledgment of His sovereignty. In legislation of specifically sacrificial content, however, a *minḥa* refers exclusively to a grain offering.

Since the *minḥa* was elaborated immediately following the *ʿolah*, the Sages have taken it as a category of offering that was the common man’s substitute for an *ʿolah* (BT *Men.* 110a). An individual of modest means who desired to present an offering at the sanctuary had an option. This would be somewhat similar to the measure-of-flour option the Torah prescribed for the indigent in place of an animal for *ḥattat* (Lev. 5:11). That this concept is not explicitly mentioned with the *minḥa* as it is with the *ḥattat* may reflect the intention not to minimize the value of the *minḥa* and to maintain a degree of equality between donors of both. It may also have been intended to create an aura of equivalence between animal and grain offerings, thus promoting the widespread substitution of the latter for the former. Concerning *ḥattat*, however, because it was a mandatory offering, the option for the poor had to be explicitly stated.

Generally, a *minḥa* was comprised of *solet* (choice wheat flour) with olive oil mixed in and some frankincense spice (*lebona*) added. It could be offered raw, oven-baked, or fried. If oven-baked it could be a thick or thin preparation; if fried, it could be prepared either on a griddle or in a pan. *Menahot* had to be unleavened. A fistful was burnt on the sacrificial altar, and the remainder eaten by male priests within sanctuary precincts. Leviticus 6 mandates that a priest’s own *minḥa* is to be

completely burnt, perhaps to assure that a priest did not profit from his own offering.

Following several general laws (which we summarized at the end of our *Vayiqra Part I* study), the *minḥa* section concludes with instructions for offering מִנְחַת בְּכוֹרִים (offerings of first fruits). In contrast to the previously listed varieties of *minḥa*, all of which were specified to be from *solet*, the latter term is not mentioned in this case. This is an especially telling detail given the significant textual distance from the prior mention of it. Also, the *minḥat bikurim* was prescribed to be offered “parched in fire” (not ground into flour). The Sages identified it with the communal *omer* offering of Leviticus 23:10, presented as parched sheaves brought from the first barley of the new harvest, the earliest-ripening grain in Israel. Ibn Ezra, partly basing himself on the opening word וְאִי (“and if”), implying in *peshat* a voluntary offering, understood *minḥat bikurim* to refer to an individual’s private first-fruit offering of barley.

3a. Shelamim: from “*shalem*” or “*shalom*.” There are many interpretations of this designation reflecting the various meanings its root word has. Each interpretation connotes a different motive the donor may have had to bring this sacrifice. Perhaps *shelamim* expressed one’s sense of personal “well-being,” and his appreciation of it, before G-d. Perhaps it reflected the donor’s desire for “wholeheartedness” with G-d. It may have been intended to be a gift of “greeting” to G-d, tendered upon arriving to “visit” Him. Some take it as referring to “completeness” in the sense of inclusiveness, being that the altar, donor, and priest all share in it. Some theorize that it was so named because it reflects amity and unity, in that the priest and donor and the donor’s guests share together in it.

Male or female animals were acceptable for this offering but not birds. We will proffer an explanation shortly. Except for certain fat and internal organs that were placed on the altar, the remainder, almost the whole animal, was permitted to be eaten. Priests received the breast and the right thigh, and the balance went to the donor. Any ritually pure person was permitted to partake of it, thus allowing the donor to share it with family and friends. Its eating was permitted during the day of the offering, the succeeding night, and the day following. Eating from

it was not restricted to sanctuary precincts. Thus, it was the most common type of sacrifice.

Since a *shelamim* was usually brought to be eaten by the donor and his circle, it is understandable that it could be brought from whichever gender he chose; in a way, he was sanctifying what was to be his meal by first offering the animal on the altar. A bird may not yield the donor a sufficient quantity for a dignified meal, thus causing resentment or disappointment, feelings that do not bring honor to the sanctuary program, and may therefore have been excluded from this category.

The frequently-used Scriptural term *zebah* (*zebahim*), which means “the slaughtered” or “the sacrifice,” when used alone usually refers to *shelamim*. Nevertheless, the compound term *zebah shelamim* is attested a number of times in Scripture.

The *todah* or “thanksgiving offering” appears to be best classified as a subdivision of the *shelamim* category. A *todah* had to be accompanied with four types of grain loaves (Talmud: ten loaves of each type), three of the four unleavened and one leavened. Although within the *shelamim* category, the *todah* was exceptional in that the time frame during which it was permitted to be eaten was limited to the day of its offering and the immediately following night. The laws requiring it to have significant bread accompaniment and a severely restricted time frame for eating it tended to encourage the donor to invite many people to the celebratory meal to commemorate the occasion for which the thanksgiving was brought. One of each type of bread loaf was *terumah laHashem*, and given to the priest, while the rest were eaten by the donor and his guests.

An individual’s *’olah*, *minḥa* and *shelamim* (except in several particular cases not referred to in these chapters), were voluntary offerings. Although their names may connote certain purposes or circumstances, and expiation was mentioned in connection with the *’olah*, the specific reasons why one may choose to bring these offerings are not spelled out. We know that prior to the Torah’s legislation there were well-established notions as to when such offerings were appropriate and at the time of the Lawgiving the people undoubtedly had such traditions. But perhaps, in accordance with the view that the Torah intended to minimize the sacrificial

cult (see our study *Maimonides on Sacrifices Part I*), it did not formalize such prescriptions in order to weaken the hold over the masses and lessen the appeal of such worship. Indeed, the literary formulations of these categories, together with their subcategories, are all initiated with וְאִם (“and if”) and וְכִּי (“and when”), indicating that the laws are addressing what is clearly a donor’s free-willed choice to bring a sacrifice.

In Numbers 15, supplementary prescriptions are given for *’olah* and *shelamim*. They are to be accompanied with a *minḥa* mixed with oil, and with wine libations of specified measures. The mandated sacrifices of first-born animals, tithed animals and the *Pesaḥ*, although certain unique laws applied to each, are all considered *shelamim*.

3b. Regarding the *Todah* Sacrifice from Psalms, Ibn Ezra and the Midrash. In Psalm 50, G-d is quoted as saying to Israel:

Not for your *zēbahim* will I rebuke you or for your *’olot*, which are continually before Me. I will not take from your property a bull...a he-goat...for Mine are...the animals of thousands of mountains...for Mine is the world and its fullness.... Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of he-goats? Sacrifice a *todah* offering...then call upon Me in the day of distress...I will rescue you and you shall honor Me. (Ps. 50:8-15)

The end of the psalm states: “Who sacrifices a *todah* honors Me” (v. 23). The thanksgiving offering, which is an expression of gratitude to G-d for His favorable intervention and which entails a celebration with others thus spreading the word of His care and compassion, is a most praiseworthy endeavor.

On verse 8 of that psalm, Ibn Ezra comments: “[G-d’s statement] ‘I will not rebuke you if you do not offer Me *zēbahim* and *’olot*,’ is as elaborated in Jeremiah, when Hashem said, ‘add your *’olot* to your *zēbahim* and eat the meat thereof (Jer. 7:21)” That passage, in the context of G-d chastising Israel, continues: “For I spoke not unto your fathers...on the day that I brought them forth from the land of Egypt, concerning *’olah* or *zabah*. But just...hearken to My voice that I may be your G-d and you may be My people, and that you shall go in the path that I command you...” (Jer. 7:22-23).

In the following Psalm, after expressing regret for his iniquity, the psalmist says to G-d: “For You do not want a *zēbah*, else I would give it...an *’olah* You do not desire; True sacrifice to G-d is a humbled spirit; a humbled and crushed heart, G-d, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:18-19). In the concluding verse of that psalm (21), G-d is described as accepting *zibḥe sedeq*, *’olah* and *khalil* (sacrifices offered in righteousness, the burnt-offering and whole offering). That the latter verse should not contradict the preceding verses and the prior psalm, Ibn Ezra defines *zabah* of 51:18 as ‘a sin-offering’ and *zibḥe sedeq* of verse 21 as ‘*shelamim*’ (related to the *todah* offering, the most prominent of the *shelamim*), while the *’olah* he limits to the daily *tamid*, thus differentiating it from the other *’olot* and sin-offerings of verses 18-19. The term “*khalil*” (complete), also cited as desirous by G-d, Ibn Ezra interprets as referring to the priest’s grain offering of Leviticus 6:15-16, which in the latter context is described as “*kalil*.” The difficulties are evident, and it appears that Ibn Ezra’s explanation requires some tweaking, but the point is that ultimately G-d desires a very limited number of sacrifices.

Some Sages, reinforced by these psalms, considered the thanksgiving offering, as well as thanksgiving prayers, so special that they gave them extraordinary praise. They proclaimed: “In the time to come (לְעֵתֵי לְבוֹא) all sacrifices will be annulled except for that of the thanksgiving, which will never be annulled, and all prayers will be annulled (perhaps: become unnecessary) except for the thanksgiving prayer, which will never be annulled” (*Lev. Rabbah* 9:7, 27:12; *Tanhuma Emor* 14, *Midrash Tehillim*, Buber ed. on 56:13; *Yalqut Shimoni* on Neh. 12:31).

Many have seen the elaboration of the basic concepts expounded in these midrashic statements as intended to provide moral instruction and promote greater attention to the laws of social justice but essentially focused on לְעֵתֵי לְבוֹא (“the time to come”), not part of established halakha. The propelling force to interpret sacrifices as dispensable surely stemmed in great part from the prophets who consistently railed against their misconstrual and downgraded their worth as compared to the values of righteousness and justice. The Scriptural vision of an ideal society that mankind would ultimately reach undoubtedly played a role. In Genesis, the Garden of Eden was described as a totally vegetarian habitat. Isaiah, in his

allegories, views the future in such terms: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the beast of prey and the fatling together, with a little boy to herd them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw” (Isa. 11:6-7, NJPS). Other aspects of this topic will be discussed in our study *Maimonides on Sacrifices, Part I*.

4. *Hattat*: “sin-offering” or “purgative.” This sacrifice is designed to provide atonement to an individual for an unintentional transgression; with few exceptions that we will discuss shortly, a sacrifice does not play a role in atonement for an intentional transgression. An unintentional transgression results from ignorance or forgetfulness of the law or of the circumstances of the case. The Sages understood the standard *hattat* as limited to major offenses, those that, had they been violated intentionally, would render the perpetrator culpable of the Divine punishment of *karet* (being “cut off” from the nation). One who sins through carelessness and inadvertence, although lacking full awareness of what he was doing, indicates laxness as concerns his responsibilities. The procedures of purification through the *hattat* prompt the individual to ennoble his inner character and “cleanse” his subconscious and not rationalize away what might be considered a minor transgression because it was performed without intention. The law requires full conscientiousness!

As the purpose of the sanctuary is to bring the whole nation to a state of constant awareness of G-d in all spheres of life, the goal is frustrated by all wrongdoing, however and wherever it is committed. Thus, all wrongdoing is perceived as defiling the sanctuary and the *hattat* also serves to bring purification and atonement to it. This goal is a mandatory part of the unintentional sinner’s repentance process. (We will touch upon several aspects of the symbolism associated with the *hattat*’s purificatory function in our *Parashat Shemini Part III* study.)

Four classes of *hattat*, varying in accordance with the offender’s status and without reference to the particular transgression, are itemized. Those of:

- a) the high priest

- b) the whole community of Israel (explained by the Sages as based on a high court directive)
- c) the chieftain (which included the king when there was one)
- d) any individual.

From the sanctuary’s perspective, lapses of the first two classes constitute a graver offense than the others because they affect the spiritual welfare of the whole nation; accordingly, they defile the sanctuary in a more profound manner than other transgressions. They call for a more elaborate purification ritual. Thus, the *hattat* for the first two classes requires a young bull, a blood-sprinkling ritual on the *parokhet* veil in the *Ohel Mo`ed*, upon the incense altar as well as upon the bronze altar, and the incinerating of the complete bull on the ash heap outside the camp.

The rites for the last two classes of *hattat* are significantly less – blood is placed on the bronze altar and only the fat is burned and in the standard manner. After all, the chieftain is not an official religious leader. In recognition of his leadership status, albeit not in the spiritual realm, he brings a male goat, while the private individual brings a female goat or ewe. Male priests eat from these latter two sacrifices within sanctuary precincts.

Besides transgressions of commission the Torah specifies four classes of transgressions of omission that require a *hattat* offering for expiation:

- a) One who withheld testimony despite having heard an adjuration to testify. Although such a transgression is usually intentional, this may be considered a type of negligence. The violator may not have yet gotten around to testifying, perhaps he intended to do so but inadvertently missed the deadline. Maybe he was aware that others also knew what he knew about the case at hand and was not aware of the necessity of his testimony. Some consider this rather ambiguous case “the exception that proves the rule” that a *hattat* expiates only unintentional sins (see our discussion on *Asham Gezelot* in the next section).
- b) and c) Various cases of one having been ritually impure in a span of forgetfulness (and, the Sages expound, having then entered the sanctuary or partaken of sacral items.)

d) One who inadvertently violated an oath. Depending on financial ability, one either brings a female sheep or goat, two birds, or a measure of flour. In the latter case, oil and frankincense are not added, reflecting the somber nature of the offering.

5. **Asham**: “guilt-offering.” In this category there are three specific classes of violations, and the sacrifice brought in each case is a ram.

a) **Asham Me'ila** – an unintentional misappropriation of sanctuary property for personal use. The violator makes full restitution and pays a penalty of one fifth in addition to bringing the sacrifice.

b) **Asham Talooy** – a “contingency” *asham*, applicable when one has a doubt if he committed an unintentional transgression. (Had he been certain that he did transgress unintentionally, he would have been required to bring a *hattat* sacrifice.)

c) **Asham Gezelot** – a trespass against G-d in that one lied, under oath, defrauding his fellow man in a monetary case concerning any type of offense against another person. The Torah gives examples of such a deception: It may involve a deposit, a loan, a stolen article, withheld wages, or finding a lost article. The itemization is followed by a second itemization as regards the fundamental responsibility of the perpetrator to repay the victim (Lev. 5:21-24). There also are general statements in this relatively brief passage to insure that no case is excluded and to emphasize the importance of bringing justice in such a case, as the guilty party has caused a monetary loss to another. When the defrauder who swore falsely chooses to repent, he restores the lost capital to the owner, adds a fifth as penalty, and brings an *asham* sacrifice. Although the sin was intentional, the violator who came forth on his own to repent by making restitution and paying a penalty is allowed the atonement sacrifice, an exception to the rule that only unintentional transgressions can be expiated through sacrificial service.

Some have seen a justification to permit a sacrifice in the latter case since when restitution is possible, in a way, the transgression may be deemed as not yet finalized (see BT *Mak.* 15a בִּטְלוֹ לֹא בִּטְלוֹ). However, this explanation is not

compelling, especially since the defrauder has sworn falsely. Ultimately, it appears that the Torah prescribed such an exception to provide incentive to the perpetrator to make restitution to his fellowman and receive atonement. Sometimes an individual might consider the repentance ritual indispensable to forgiveness, and, if unavailable, might remain in his sinful state. He is thus offered the possibility of sanctuary expiation if he confesses to his crime and makes restitution. This emphasizes the superseding importance the Torah places on sympathy for one who suffered an injustice at the hands of his fellowman in relation to ritual regulations, important as the latter may be.

Numbers 5:5-10 contains a supplement to this *asham gezelot* legislation, which we will discuss in our study on *Parashat Naso*.

The *olah*, *mincha*, *hattat* and *asham* are *qodesh qadashim*, that is, most-holy, and more stringent regulations were applied to these sacrifices. Slaughtering for these had to be done in the courtyard area north of the altar – a regulation the Torah mentions only with the flock but construed as applying to the other species as well. Some have explained the reason to be that there was no other convenient area in the courtyard near the altar to be designated for the slaughter, as tradition placed the ramp on the south side, the laver was on the west, and the east was the side that people entered from. However, there very likely was a symbolic reason attached to the north.

Shelamim, on the other hand, are *qadashim qalim*, holiness of a “lighter” character. This distinction appears to explain the variation in the order of their presentation. In the first subsection (Lev. 1-5), which was formulated from the donor’s perspective, after *olah* and *mincha* – most-holy offerings brought voluntarily – comes *shelamim*, as it is also brought voluntarily. *Hattat* and *asham*, which presuppose major transgression, understandably are last. In the second subsection (Lev. 6-7), however, which focuses on the priests’ service, the most-holy offerings of *olah* and *mincha* remain in their order but the *hattat* and *asham*, as most-holy, are explicated before the lighter-holiness *shelamim*.