

**PARASHAH**

**VAYIKRA**

# ***A. Contrast with Pagans***

- Pagans regularly set food and drink on their god's table
- Thus all food gifts brought as sacrifices are conspicuously removed from the tent, YHWH's purported domicile, thereby erasing any suspicion that Israel's God consumed the sacrifices (see Psalm 50).
- No Honey, Leaven, No Sacrifices done at night.
- Temples defiled by demonic powers
- Tabernacle defiled by the sins of Israel.
- The Priestly family banned all food rites inside the shrine
- All sacrifices were to be offered on the outer altar in the open courtyard (see fig. 2), visible to all worshipers and removed from the tent, YHWH's purported domicile. The text specifically prohibited the burnt offering (flesh), the cereal offering (bread), and all libations (drink) on the inner altar
- (the frankincense, a precious spice, offered with the bread of the Presence, is not placed on the bread, as is the case with other cereal offerings (Lev 2:1\*, 15\*; 6:8\*)  
Exod 30:9\*)

# Silence in the Tabernacle while the service was being conducted

- conducted in silence. The lack of speech can be best explained as the concerted attempt of the priestly legists to distance the rites of Israel's priest from the magical incantations that necessarily accompanied and, indeed, empowered the ritual acts of his pagan counterpart. Kaufmann's insight can be supplemented and confirmed by the parallel phenomenon of Moses, the putative father of Israelite prophecy, who is also constrained to silence during his performance of a miracle. In the instance of the plagues, Moses not only acts without speech, but on four occasions, when he accedes to Pharaoh's plea to request their cessation, he leaves Pharaoh's presence and prays to God in private—so that he should not be taken for a heathen **magician**.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Moses' intercessory prayers for Israel are always in private, again in order to dissociate himself from his pagan counterpart. Thus all of the biblical narratives on Moses and Aaron agree that, in the initial stages of the formation of Israelite cult and prophecy, the actions of the divine representative, whether in sacrifice or in miracle, were performed in total silence<sup>6</sup>

# Elitist Priest of other nations

- There is one other elitist aspect of Israel's priesthood (as represented by the priestly sources) that cannot be gainsaid: its strict hereditary character. Even non-priestly sources indicate that everywhere in Israel a member of the tribe of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob, was the preferred priest. It is also possible that the hereditary model was less a result of elitism than it was an antidote to the excesses that occurred in religions that depended on laypeople to act as priests. Egypt provides a telling example: "Because of its lay character and the ever recurring 'rotation' in the life of the priest, the Egyptian clergy was open to committing abuses of every sort."<sup>9</sup> To be sure, Israel's priests were on occasion guilty of corruption, venality, and assorted human failings. Still, a consecrated class of individuals who from childhood could be trained according to the high standards demanded by the Priestly texts stood the best chance of resisting abuses that flourished outside the sanctuary.

# One Hand vs Both hands on the Korban

- Leviticus 1:4 You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you.
- Leviticus 16:21 Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task.

# The Cereal Offering

## Chapter 2

- For the poor, offering up an animal sacrifice could be very costly. To allow all Israelites access to God through the sacrificial system, the priestly legislator created an alternative sacrifice for the poor: the cereal offering. Support for this position is the attested practice in the nearby Mesopotamian cult, which explicitly labels cereal as the offering of the poor: “The widow makes her offering to you [plural] with cheap flour, the rich man with a lamb.”<sup>2</sup>

# *The Poor Person's Sacrifice*

- In the Mesopotamian cult, cereal offerings were offered up to the gods by totally burning them on improvised altars. In the biblical version, however, it is forbidden to burn the cereal offering except for a token portion (v. 2\*).
- Based on the difference between the Mesopotamian and the Israelite practice, the biblical command that the cereal offering go to the priest may spring from a polemic against contemporaneous pagan practice.

# Leaven

- **[2:11\*] Leaven is the arch-symbol of fermentation, deterioration, and death, and hence taboo on the altar of blessing and life. Wine, the epitome of fermentation, is never burned on the altar hearth, but is poured on the altar base, and so the prohibition against “turning into smoke” any fermented substance has not been transgressed.**



# Salt

- **[2:13\*] Salt was the preservative par excellence in antiquity. Moreover, its preservative qualities made it the ideal symbol of the perdurability of a covenant.<sup>7</sup>**
- The apostles are called “the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:17\*). In other words, they are said to be the preservers, the guardians, of God’s word and the teachers who protect and preserve the world against moral decay.
- **Leviticus 2:13 You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.**

# Chapter 3

## Free will offering

- The votive offering is brought following the successful fulfillment of a vow. “Jacob then made a vow, saying, ‘If I return safe to my father’s house—the Lord shall be my God’ ” (Gen 28:20–22\*).
- Finally, there is the thanksgiving offering. The rabbis derive from Psalm 107 that four occasions require a thanksgiving offering:
  - safe return from a desert journey (vv. 4–8\*),
  - release from prison (vv. 10–16\*),
  - recovery from illness (vv. 17–22\*),
  - safe return from a sea voyage (vv. 23–25\*).<sup>2</sup>

# Chapter 3

## Free will offering

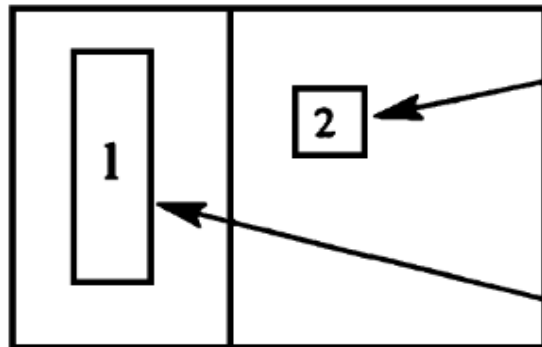
- **[3:4\*] Kidneys are frequently associated with the heart as the seat of thoughts, emotions, and life; like the blood, the proverbial life force, they must be returned to their creator.**
- The caudate lobe is a fingerlike projection from the liver. It was used extensively in the ancient Near East for divination, as was the entire liver (hepatoscopy). Possibly, its consignment to the altar also disqualified the entire liver for divinatory purposes.

# The Purification Offering

## Chapter 4

- This chapter and the next concern themselves with the two expiatory sacrifices: the purification offering (4:1–5:13\*) and the separation offering (5:14–26\*). These sacrifices, in contrast to the preceding ones (chaps. 1–3), are mandatory. They expiate for sin: the violation of prohibitive commandments or the violation of sanctums.
- The violation of a prohibitive commandment pollutes the sanctuary, and unless the sanctuary is purged by a purification offering the community is in danger that their God will be forced to abandon the sanctuary.

- Thus the first principle: Blood is the ritual cleanser that purges the altar of impurities inflicted on it by the offerer.
- If an individual has accidentally violated a prohibition, the priest purges the outer (sacrificial) altar with the blood of the offerer's purification offering (4:27–35\*). If the entire community has accidentally violated a prohibition, the priest purges the inner (incense) altar and the shrine, the outer room of the tent, with the blood of the purification offering brought by the community's representatives (4:13–21\*). If, however, individuals have brazenly violated prohibitions, then, once a year, on Yom Kippur, the high priest purges the entire sanctuary, beginning with the inner and holiest area containing the ark. In this case, the purification offering is not brought by the culprits—deliberate sinners are barred from the sanctuary—but by the high priest himself



**INVOLUNTARY, COMMUNAL VIOLATION (Lev 4:13-21)**

**INVOLUNTARY, INDIVIDUAL VIOLATION (Lev 4:27-35)**

**BRAZEN AND UNREPENTED VIOLATION (Lev 16:11-19)**

# Demonic powers

- This graded impurity of the sanctuary and its purgation leads to the second principle: A sin committed anywhere will generate impurity that, becoming airborne, penetrates the sanctuary in proportion to its magnitude. Israel's neighbors also believed that impurity polluted the sanctuary. For them, however, the source of impurity was demonic. Therefore, their priests devised rituals and incantations to immunize their temples against demonic penetration.

# Decree that affects the whole Kehilah

- **[4:13–21\*] The purification offering of the high priest and the community comprise a single case. The high priest has erred in judgment, causing him to “harm the people” (v. 3\*) whereby, in following the high priest’s ruling, the people also err. Because both their errors comprise inadvertent violations of prohibitive commandments (vv. 2\*, 13\*) which pollute the tabernacle shrine, each party is responsible for purging the shrine with the blood of a similar sacrifice—a purification-offering bull.**
- How is it possible for the entire people to err simultaneously? The thesis that vv. 1–21\* form a single case, propounded above, whereby the high priest’s erroneous decision causes the whole community to err, makes this eventuality highly plausible. For example, if the high priest declares the new moon on the wrong day, festivals falling in the ensuing month will be observed by everyone on the wrong day.

# Chapter 5 Verb 'ašam

- The verb 'ašam describes the syndrome of sin, guilt, and punishment. It has a psychological dimension. Wrongdoing creates guilt and fear of punishment, and conversely suffering reinforces the feelings of guilt. Thus we find one word bridging all expiatory offerings: 'ašam.
- For involuntary sin 'ašam, “remorse,” is sufficient. For a deliberate sin, the remorse must be verbalized, the sin articulated, and responsibility assumed. Before transgressors may approach God for expiation, they must first make restitution to the people they wronged. In civil justice matters people take priority over God—a startling innovation.
- The repentance of sinners, through remorse ('ašam) and confession, reduces intentional sin to an inadvertence, which is then eligible for sacrificial expiation. Confession is then the legal device fashioned by Israel's priesthood to transform deliberate sins into inadvertencies, thereby qualifying them for sacrificial expiation. The priestly legists have postulated a new category of jurisprudence: verbalized repentance as a factor in the mitigation of divine retribution (see further on the priestly contribution to the doctrine of repentance, 5:20–26, Theme A).
- In vv. 1–4\* the confession is made to God because the offense is to God alone. If the tangible damage is done to a person, it is likely that the confession was made to the injured party.



# 5:14–16\*: Sacrilege

- **Selected Theme**
- ***Sacrilege against Sanctums***
- “Sacrilege” is the legal term for the wrong that is redressed by the reparation offering. Its antonym is “sanctify,” as in “you committed sacrilege against me ... you did not sanctify me” (Deut 32:51\*).
- The common denominator of all instances of sacrilege is sin against God. It falls into two major categories: the sacrilege against sacred space and the violation of the sacred oath. Although the two types of sacrilege may seem quite distinct, they are integrally related. When a sacred oath is broken, the violated sanctum is none other than the Deity himself. YHWH’s name, by which an oath is taken, is called a sanctum, God’s “holy name.” Moreover, desecration of sanctums is simultaneously desecration of the covenant, because reverence for such sanctums is presumed in the covenantal relationship.

# Hittite text

- Actually pinpoints both kinds of sacrilege as responsible for the plague that befalls the Hittite kingdom. The key passages follow:
- Now a plague has been rampant in the Hatti land since the days of my father, and we have never performed the offerings to the river Mala....
- The Hattians as well as the Egyptians were under oath to the Hattian Storm-god, the Hattians ignored their obligations; the Hattians promptly broke the oath of the gods ... has this perhaps become the cause of the anger of the Hattian Storm-god, my lord? And (so) it was established.





