The Sacrificial Service
Gestures of Flesh and Spirit

Jonathan Grossman

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Gestures of Flesh and Spirit

translated by

Sara Daniel

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The Sacrificial Service
Gestures of Flesh and Spirit

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In loving memory of our fathers
and Saba and Zadie,

Noé Gidali z"l

Rabbi Jonas Hochman z"l

Barbara and Simcha Hochman
David and Ayelet Ellenbogen
Ariel and Amalia Hochman

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In gratitude to

Rav Dr. Yoni Grossman

For his remarkable contributions to Torah study

Gail and Terry Novetsky

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Foreword

> We shared sweet secrets as we walked along
> the crowd at the House of God. (Ps. 55:15)

It's no secret that the book of *Vayikra* – especially its opening section of sacrificial laws – is intimidating. Many are reluctant to delve too deeply into these chapters, usually for one of two main reasons. The first is that this section seems extremely technical and entirely based on elaborate detail. The second is that this detail is of little relevance today, and there are even certain reservations – sometimes emotional, sometimes moral – toward the idea of slaughtering animals and dashing their blood against the altar. The Talmud depicts with veneration the sheer quantities of blood that flowed while the Passover lambs were being slaughtered: "It is praiseworthy that the sons of Aaron walked in blood up to their ankles" (Pesaḥim 65b), but I am not convinced that this description sounds quite as venerable to the modern ear.

These two reservations pose a special challenge to those who wish to study these chapters. This book, however, is exempt from the second

consideration, given that it explores the dissection of words, not animals. Its purpose is to understand the symbolic meaning of the sacrifices, not to gain any practical understanding of their execution. This book focuses on the intent and consciousness that accompanies these rituals, rather than the blood spilled upon the altar.

Dealing with the first issue – that is, breaking down the intimidating barrier of the difficult, complicated details of the sacrificial laws – is the main objective of this book. Throughout my analysis, my underlying thesis is that these apparently technical details in fact reflect or represent the fundamental, essential religious consciousness of the person who is offering a sacrifice to his or her Maker. The different laws relating to the sacrifices are a window to each offering and its particular meaning. to the various paths available to the person who wishes to approach the Sanctuary. The realm of the offerings momentarily pierces the mystery that veils the world of holiness; each pathway to God paved by the seeker driven by guilt or regret or longing for closeness offers a snatched glimpse of the elusive world of divine immanence.

It goes without saying that the works of many exegetes and scholars contributed to the analysis this book proposes, but two such works were my constant companions: R. David Zvi (Radatz) Hoffmann's commentary on Leviticus, with its sensitive, sharp dialogue between modern and traditional sources, and Prof. Jacob Milgrom's comprehensive, marvelous Anchor Bible commentary on Leviticus, whose breadth and importance cannot be overstated.

This book's sphere is largely based on *peshat*, but I did venture into Midrash Halakha and the premises of these midrashim. As will emerge throughout the book, many halakhic deliberations reflect different readings of the text, and halakhic rulings that initially seem far removed from *peshat* are actually addressing textual subtleties and disparities.

I first explored the material of this book in two courses I taught at Bar-Ilan University and Herzog College. At the end of 2016, a talented, diligent student by the name of Michael Israel approached me with a neat, thorough summary of every class. These notes were an indispensable basis for the reorganization of the material as a 2018–19 series of online lectures for the Israel Koschitzky Torat Har Etzion Virtual Beit Midrash. I am indebted to my teacher, R. Ezra Bick, *rosh yeshiva* of the

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Virtual Beit Midrash, whose skill and guidance has broadened Torah horizons all over the world. This process also gifted me with an excellent editor, Binyamin Frankel, and I am grateful for his careful attention to every word and idea. Warm thanks are due to my friend and neighbor from Alon Shevut, R. Yitzchak Blau, who reviewed the first draft of this book and offered important, helpful insights that were incorporated into subsequent drafts.

This book was originally written in Hebrew (published by Maggid in 2021), and its English translation is dedicated to the memory of Esther Mann Snyder *z"l* by her devoted husband, Haim Shalom, and loving daughters, Lea Cohen and Sharona Adelman, and their families.

Esther was a devoted librarian and scholar who served as the director of Bar-Ilan University's Law Faculty Library for over thirty years. Raised in a rabbinical family in Boston, she deepened her connection to Jewish tradition by earning her bachelor's degree from Stern College. She later completed a Master's in Library Science at Columbia University and, specializing in legal bibliography, was invited to establish the law library at Bar-Ilan University, leading her to make aliya. Years of successfully running the library earned her recognition as an expert, and she was later asked to establish and plan law libraries for other academic institutions.

Alongside her professional achievements, she was a devoted mother who instilled in her children a love of learning and a strong commitment to Jewish values. Her dedication to knowledge, learning, and family guided her work and legacy. May her memory be a blessing.

Likewise, I thank the Hochman and Novetsky families for their support for the publication of this English edition.

I would like to express my gratitude to Sara Daniel for her professional and outstanding translation of the book. Her love for Torah study also enriched the discussions woven into the text, and I deeply appreciate her assistance.

Warm thanks are due to Koren/Maggid Publishers, who took on the publication of this book; to its head, Matthew Miller; to its CEO, Yehoshua Miller; to its Editorial Director, R. Reuven Ziegler, David Silverstein, Ita Olesker, Meira Mintz, and Debbie Ismailoff. Maggid's careful attention to each and every book they publish is not to be taken for granted.

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With a heart bursting with love and gratitude, I wish to thank my dear mother, Rachel Grossman, and my wife Liora and our children, whose constant love and support have allowed me to pursue my studies, writing, dreams, and growth.

During the translation of this book, on the seventeenth of Adar 5784 (2024), my beloved father and mentor, Prof. Avraham Grossman of blessed memory passed away. His rare and noble personality touched everyone he met, and his imprint on my own study and work is ever-present. I hope that the study of this book will also be *le'ilui nishmato*.

Jonathan Grossman
Alon Shvut 2025

> "Israel's altar may not bring God to earth, but it enables man, through his worship, to reach heaven." (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, vol. 1, 251)

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Introduction

FROM PRACTICE TO THEOLOGY

The book of Leviticus poses a special challenge. Not only are the sacrificial laws no longer relevant today, but at first glance, they seem so overly detailed that it is difficult to reconcile such technicality with any kind of spirituality; its problematic, daunting reputation seems all too justified. An impeccable example is R. Joseph ibn Kaspi's explanation of why he omits the book of Leviticus from his commentary on the Torah:

> All that this book includes was said from God to Moses in the month of Nisan, at the beginning of the second year after they left Egypt. It concerns mainly practical laws and little virtue; therefore it does not befit me to speak about the book at all.
> (*Mishneh Kesef*, part I, 155).

Because the book of Leviticus is almost wholly devoted to practical laws, R. Joseph ibn Kaspi writes that "it does not befit me to speak about the book at all." This is a bold, provocative statement, and he indeed devotes but a short paragraph to Leviticus before moving on to the book of Numbers. Others are far more subtle and write that the book

of Leviticus is hardly relevant for the individual and speaks rather to a collective audience.[1]

From the outset, I should note my belief that this is a fundamental mistake; in truth, few books serve as a gateway to the religious world – and for communication between a person and their Maker – as the book of Leviticus does. It is this manual of technicalities that has the power to channel sanctity, unmediated. It focuses on holiness itself, not just on its historical or social implications.

This observation applies to the various sections of Leviticus, and it goes without saying that the book's second part – "The Book of Holiness" – expresses the idea of the centrality of holiness with pure, unadulterated clarity. Yet the same is true of the book's opening section of sacrificial laws. Its details are complex indeed, but they are not merely technical; rather, they should be perceived as vehicles for the expression of theological principles. The sacrificial laws are a looking glass for the spiritual experience that transpires in the House of God and the religious consciousness that can be manifested in God's presence. From this perspective, determining the difference between a burnt offering and a peace offering, or between both the latter and a grain offering, or between a grain offering of fine flour and a grain offering baked in the oven means determining the particular spiritual mindset that accompanies and is expressed through each process. Each offering has its own fingerprint, its own unique spiritual gesture.

The chapters of sacrificial law offer a smorgasbord of ritual expressions; furthermore, they detail precisely how to enact each different ritual. One who brings a sacrifice for the purpose of atonement obviously acts with different intent than one who seeks to express joy or thanksgiving. Moreover, the Torah does not merely offer one kind of freewill offering, but three different options – a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a peace offering – so that the person who elects to bring a sacrifice must ascertain precisely what he or she wishes to offer up to God. In order to go down this path, I wish to adopt Milgrom's premise:

1. Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, part 25, on *Parashat Vayikra*, vol. 1, 265–80.

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"Obviously, the ritual complexities of Leviticus 1–16 make sense only as aspects of a symbolic system."[2]

There are several access points to the unique discourse that accompanies and characterizes each offering and its nature. Throughout our analysis, we will consistently note four such keys to each offering: its name, the details of its laws, the linguistic texture and design of its description, and any instances of the offering in biblical narrative. This analysis will illuminate the subtle differences between each kind of freewill offering; it will also help distinguish between the various obligatory offerings.

None of this dispels the notion that the sacrificial world truly transcends the sphere of the individual; sacrifices are indeed fundamentally linked to the Divine Presence in Israel. According to R. Judah HaLevi, the main purpose of sacrifices is to allow the Divine Presence to rest among Israel. This approach is particularly supported by the command for the regular burnt offering, which links the daily morning and afternoon offerings to the Divine Presence in the Sanctuary: "This shall be the regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. There I will meet with you, there I will speak to you, and there I will meet with the Israelites. It will be sanctified by My glory" (Ex. 29:42–43). As we will see, this perspective is also expressed in the sacrificial laws of Leviticus, which supports the argument that sacrifices are not merely for the benefit of the individual's relationship with God, but for collective connection to the Divine as well. Thus, although this book is devoted to the analysis of specific offerings, it is still set against a broader theological backdrop: All sacrifices are ultimately channels of connection with the Divine.

RICH AND POOR; ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

In the classic midrashic work Leviticus Rabba, obvious motifs are accompanied by two surprising recurring themes.[3] The first is special consideration for the poor. The Midrash seems particularly disposed toward the weakest layer of society and repeatedly emphasizes that they are just as welcome in God's presence as the higher, wealthier classes. This is

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2. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, vol. 1, 440–43.
3. See Reizel, *Introduction to Midrashic Literature*, 130–32.

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worth articulating when the topic at hand is sacrifices: When wealthy people are able to bring extravagant, expensive offerings to display their devotion to God, there is certainly a need to assuage fears that those who cannot afford such offerings are not worthy of God's service and blessing. In fact, the Torah itself is sensitive to this need: For various offerings, different sacrificial options are available for different budgets; there are no other biblical commandments for which this is the case. The Midrash is attuned to this sensitivity, and repeatedly emphasizes that God cares about the depth of a person's devotion, not their offering's monetary value. Here is one apt example:

> King Agrippa sought to sacrifice one thousand burnt offerings on one day. He sent for and said to the High Priest: "Let no man other than me bring an offering today." A poor person brought two turtledoves and said to the priest: "Sacrifice these." He said to him: "The king commanded me: Let no man other than me bring an offering today." He said to him: "My lord High Priest, each day I trap four [birds] and I sacrifice two and support myself from two. If you do not sacrifice them, you are cutting off my sustenance." He took them and sacrificed them.
>
> Agrippa had a vision in a dream that the offering of a poor person preceded his. He sent and said to the High Priest: "Did I not command you: Let no man other than me bring an offering today?"… [He repeated the story to him, and the king replied:] "What you did was right." (Leviticus Rabba 3:5)

A second recurring theme is the attitude toward the non-Jew and, more generally, the relationship between Israel and the nations. The Midrash underscores the disparity between Israel and the nations, as is already established in the work's opening chapter:

> What is the difference between prophets of Israel and prophets of the nations of the world? R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina and R. Yissakhar of Kefar Mandi. R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina said: The Holy One, blessed be He, appears to the nations of the world with only truncated speech, as it says: "God happened [*vayikkar*] upon Bilaam" (Num.

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> 23:4). But [He communicates with] the prophets of Israel with complete speech, as it is stated: "He called [*vayikra*] to Moses." R. Yissakhar of Kefar Mandi said: So shall be their reward. "*Vayikkar*" is an expression of nothing other than impurity, as it says: "Who will not be pure due to a nocturnal emission [*mikre*]" (Deut. 23:11). But the prophets of Israel [receive prophecy] with an expression of sanctity, purity, and clarity, with an expression the angels use to laud the Holy One, as it says: "One called [*vekara*] to the other and said: [Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts]" (Is. 6:3).... The Rabbis say: This can be likened to a king who had a wife and a concubine. When he would go to his wife, he would go in public, and when he would go to his concubine he would go in private. So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, appears to the nations of the world only at night, as it is stated: "God came to Avimelekh in a nocturnal dream" (Gen. 20:3).... But [God appears] to the prophets of Israel by day, as it is stated: "[The Lord appeared to him...] and he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1). (Leviticus Rabba 1:13)

At the outset, the midrashic author indicates the difference between divine revelation to Israel and to the nations: Israel's prophets are God's "wife," and the nations of the world are but God's concubines. This paradigm is repeated throughout the Midrash, which does display a complex attitude toward the nations; nonetheless, they are placed far below Israel. This is not the obvious choice. There are other possible models, such as that conveyed in Isaiah's prophecy of universal amity: "As for the foreigners who have come to join the Lord...I shall bring them to My holy mount, show them joy in My house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices are desired on My altar, for My House will be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is. 56:6–7).[4]

Even if it is not the obvious choice, the midrashic decision to underscore the disparity between Israel and the nations here is understandable

4. Marc Hirshman proposes that the disparity between Isaiah's prophecy and the midrash's tone is based on their respective historical contexts (Hirshman, *House of Prayer*).

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in light of the fundamental challenge inherent in the sacrificial laws of Leviticus. In the ancient world, sacrifice was universal to all religious worship. *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* defines "*korban*," "offering," as "one of the most common ritual acts in most world religions." Even the minor qualification, "most," which implies that a few religions (such as Buddhism) do not practice actual sacrifice, can be challenged given that they do offer up gifts as expressions of devotion and veneration, so that even if the religion does not officially recognize sacrifice as part of its ritual worship, the notion of sacrifice and "sacrificial models" are nonetheless given expression in the practical, popular sense.[5]

Ancient peoples offered sacrifices to their gods before Israel came into being, before the time of Abraham and Moses. This raises the question as to the nature of the sacrifices described in such depth and detail in the Torah and their relation to parallel acts of sacrifice in other religions. The author of the Midrash is well aware of this question, and therefore takes pains to point out that the superficial similarities to other nations' sacrifices do not reflect a fundamental similarity. Israel's sacrifices (and revelations) are inherently superior to those of other nations, and this is expressed in the Torah itself. These differences and similarities are beyond the scope of this book, but extensive studies have been devoted to the topic.[6] For now, I will note one fundamental difference – an idea that will continue to inform my entire analysis.

IS THE OFFERING "CONSUMED" BY THE ALTAR?

One fundamental principle of biblical sacrifices is that offerings are not cooked before they are offered up on the altar; rather, they are roasted

5. Werblowsky, "Sacrifice," 58–59.
6. See, for example, Tzvi Weinberg's dissertation *The Offering in Israel*. He notes in his conclusion that "the similarity between Israel's sacrificial laws and [the offerings of] the nations is most salient in details that are not significant enough to assume a fundamental similarity between them" (p. 186). Some scholars do believe that there are broader connections between the biblical sacrifice and the nations' sacrifices. On the theory of Canaanite influence on biblical sacrifice, see especially Gray, *Legacy of Canaan*; van den Branden, "Lévitique"; Dussaud, *Les Origines*. For theories of Mesopotamian influence, see Thompson, *Penitence and Sacrifice*; Leslie, *Canaanite Background*. Others claim that despite these similarities, the biblical offering has unique features that reflect its vast theological difference (Albright, *Archeology*).

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by its fire. This idea is by no means obvious, as is evident from the story of Eli's sinful sons:

> This was how the priests would deal with the people: Whenever someone offered a sacrifice, the priest's boy would come along as the meat was boiling, a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would stab it into the cauldron, kettle, pot, or vat, and the priest would snatch whatever came up on the fork. This was how they treated every Israelite who came there to Shilo. Even before they burned off the fat, the priest's boy would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, "Hand over some meat to roast for the priest – he won't accept boiled meat from you, only raw." And if the man would say to him, "Let them first burn off the fat, then take as much as you want," he would reply, "No, hand it over at once – if not, I will take it by force." (I Sam. 2:13)[7]

The narrative's main point is that Eli's sons are not willing to wait until the meat has been offered on the altar before they take their priestly portion, but what is interesting for our purpose is that from the dialogue between the priest's boy and the sacrificing Israelites it can be understood that the sacrifices were usually boiled before they were offered on the altar.[8] Intriguingly, there is no mention of cooking the meat before it is offered in Leviticus; on the contrary, there is every indication that the meat should be offered while it is still raw, before it is fit for human

7. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of verses from the Tanakh are based on *The Koren Tanakh*, Magerman Edition (2021).
8. Some attempt to prove that this was Israelite practice based on the Gideon narrative: "Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. He placed the meat in a basket and poured the broth into a pot. He brought it out to Him under the terebinth and served it" (Judges 6:19). The "broth" indicates that the meat was already cooked (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 66). This is tenuous proof, however, given that Gideon was not sure whether his visitor was human or not, so he presumably prepared an "offering" that would be fit for human consumption as well.

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consumption.[9] This is no trivial detail; it offers a glimpse into what made biblical sacrifices unique in the ancient world.

There is room to understand why the priests at Shiloh boiled the sacrificial meat before offering it on the altar; this improved the meat's texture and flavor and made it tastier, which would have resulted in a far superior gift to God.[10] Even so, according to biblical law, meat is not placed on the altar as food ready to eat, but as raw material. This reflects a central characteristic of the Israelite offering: Even if the altar "consumes" the offering, it is not considered God's food.[11] In contrast to the prevalent belief in ancient times that the gods subsisted on offerings from their worshippers and blessed those who served them food,[12]

9. It is no coincidence that the verb "cook" is used in conjunction with the Passover offering; whether tradition holds that it is cooked or roasted is a famous dispute. What is relevant for our purposes is that in Deuteronomy (16:7), it is presented as eaten by those who bring the offering ("You shall cook and eat it at the place that your Lord God will choose"). "Cooking" the meat – which implies stewing or boiling – makes it edible for human consumption.
10. On cooking the meat of offerings in ancient Chinese ritual, see Boileau, "Cooking and Sacrifice." He cites ancient texts that explicitly show that the sacrificial meat was cooked in water before being offered to the gods. On sacrificial preparation in ancient Egypt, see Weinberg, *Sacrifice in Israel*, 81–91. In Mesopotamia, some cuts of meat were cooked before being offered up, while others were offered raw (Weinberg, ibid., 99).
11. See especially De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 2, 449–50. Anderson rejects this distinction between Israel and the nations and argues that there are biblical hints that offerings were indeed intended for God's consumption, based on phrases such as "the Lord's table" or "the Lord's bread" and the fact that offerings consisted of bread, oil, and wine, like a human meal (Anderson, *Sacrifices and Offerings*, vol. 2, 15). While the language sometimes does convey the sense that God "eats" the offerings, Milgrom argues that this is purely metaphoric (*Leviticus*, vol. 1, 44), and while the divine fire does "consume" the offerings, there is never any sense that God needs this food: "Were I to hunger, I would not tell you, for Mine is the world and all that fills it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls? Do I drink the blood of he-goats? Offer to God a thanksgiving sacrifice; pay your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:12–15). This is a clear distinction from other ancient religious cultures.
12. See many examples in Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*, vol. 1, 398–403. On what differentiates biblical sacrifice from pagan sacrifice, he writes: "No convention has mythological basis: no conventions are explained by events in divine life or are related to any aspect of divine life… this cultic ritual is not rooted in divine life or in the nature of divine being, but in the person's relationship to God: reverence,

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no such notion is evident in Leviticus, and there is no indication that the offering should be precooked. (The cooked grain offerings are an exception to this rule, and we will discuss them in the relevant chapter.)

The distinction between offerings in the Torah and in the rest of the ancient world is aptly reflected in the description of Noah's offerings after the Flood. The story of the Flood is also found in many extra-biblical traditions, the most famous being two Akkadian myths: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Atra-Hasis*. A broader discussion of the biblical and Akkadian flood narratives is beyond the scope of this book;[13] what is relevant is a comparison of the heroes' offerings to the deity that saved them. The Babylonian flood myth, *Atra-Hasis*, describes: "He brought them out to the four winds and offered up a offering / he offered libation on the top of the mountain / he nourished the gods / burned incense of reed and cedar. The gods smelled the sweet savor, and swarmed like flies to the offering."[14] Desperately starving because they have wiped out most of the humans who feed them with sacrifices, the gods pounce on Atra-Hasis's offering.

Needless to say, there is no biblical account of God's hunger or thirst, nor any description of God needing any kind of food. In the parallel scene in Genesis, after Noah safely leaves the ark, "Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of each of the kinds of pure animals and pure birds, sacrificed burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled the fragrant aroma and said in His heart, 'Never again will I curse the land because of man'" (Gen. 8:20–21). The similarity between the scenes underscores their difference: Both deities "smell" the offerings' savory aroma, but whereas this aroma stirs the Akkadian gods to fall upon the

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sanctification, honor, love, joy, gratitude for God's kindness toward society and the individual – these are the ideals that sustain it, that give it meaning" (ibid., 532).

13. A more comprehensive comparison between the narratives reveals that the context of the biblical account is moral, whereas the Akkadian context is the selfish nature of the gods. See, for example, Grintz, *Genesis*, 42–45; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 39–62; Frymer-Kensky, "Babylonian Flood"; Davidson, "Genesis Flood Narrative."
14. *Atra-Hasis*, Tablet III, lines 249–54; Shifra and Klein, *In Those Distant Days*, 127.

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meat hungrily, the biblical God is merely inspired to bless Noah. He has no need to eat the meat on the altar.[15]

Perhaps all this is obvious to the modern reader raised with abstract monotheistic beliefs, but during the biblical era, this characterization of God was both a revelation and a revolution. Beyond the new perception of divinity, this scene portrays an entirely new concept of worship. An offering is not brought in order to provide God's needs, but rather to allow each of the worshippers to express themselves before their Maker, to approach Him and become close to Him. The offering is not accompanied by formulaic verbal content; this non-verbal content is its main objective. The living, evolving relationship between a person and God forms the basis for the sphere of action and interaction that constitutes every offering. The act of sacrifice is what tells the story, which is rooted in the experience of the sacrifice bringer, not in God's need for food. This is the premise that lies at the heart of this analysis of the sacrificial chapters of Leviticus.

15. See especially Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 53–56. Intriguingly, the "sweet savor" in the Babylonian version is from the incense, whereas in Genesis the meat itself has a delicious aroma. Some claim that the assumption is that Noah burns incense in Genesis as well, but this seems contrived: Roasting meat produces a mouthwatering aroma in itself. We will discuss this in the context of the addition of frankincense to the grain offering. Some argue that the Ancient Egyptians believed that gods were nourished by the scent of the offerings and not the actual flesh (see Weinberg, *Sacrifice in Israel*, 284).

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Chapter 1

The Significance of Offerings

Before we delve into the actual text, I want to begin with a fundamental question: If the offering is not intended as food for God, then what *is* its purpose? What religious function do offerings serve?

The Rema, R. Moses Isserles, devoted a whole book to this question, *Torat HaOla*, in which he surveys different approaches to the nature and purpose of sacrifices. Also worthy of note is R. Menahem Kasher's extensive survey in his work *Torah Shelema*,[1] as well as Jacob Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus.[2] All three offer indispensable, largely accurate insight into the nature of biblical sacrifice. After a brief survey of these approaches, I will offer a fourth possibility, which I will adhere to throughout my own analysis.

1. Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, part 25, on *Parashat Vayikra*, vol. 1, 265–80.
2. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, vol. 1, 440–43.

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1. A POLEMIC AGAINST PAGAN WORSHIP

One prominent approach, already firmly rooted in midrashic literature, perceives the sacrificial world as a necessary response to the pagan world of Israel's time. In ancient culture, ritual worship without sacrifice was unfathomable, much as a religion without prayer would be today. Thus, the Torah embraced and institutionalized this aspect of worship, but deliberately diverted it away from the idea that offerings were food for the gods or ritual safeguards from demons and evil spirits. This seems to be illustrated in the following midrash:

> R. Pinḥas said in the name of R. Levi: This is like a king's son who was coarse and used to eating impure carcasses. The king said: "This one will frequent my table, and on his own he will be restricted." So too, Israel eagerly served idols in Egypt and brought offerings to the satyrs, as it is stated: "They shall no longer slaughter their offerings to the satyrs [*se'irim*]" (Lev. 17:7). These satyrs are nothing other than demons, as it is stated: "They would slaughter to demons" (Deut. 32:17).... The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "At all times, let them sacrifice their offerings before me in the Tent of Meeting, and they will separate themselves from idol worship and will be saved." That is what is written: "Any man from the house of Israel." (Leviticus Rabba 22:8)

The quote from Leviticus 7:17 is mentioned in the context of the peace offering, but Rambam applies this theory to all offerings (see *Guide for the Perplexed*, III:32, 46). He proposes, for example, that the Torah commands the sacrifice of oxen and sheep because idol worshippers were careful not to sacrifice these animals. Another classic example of his theory concerns the prohibition of adding honey and the obligation to add salt:

> Because idol worshippers would never offer up unleavened bread, and because they would often offer up sweet things and season their offerings with honey, as mentioned above,[3] and because

3. He is referring to III:29.

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> there is no mention of salt in any of their offerings, the Law therefore prohibited the offering of any leaven or honey and commanded to always add salt.[4]

This is a bold stance that assumes that all offerings are purely polemical and have no inherent value of their own; had oxen and sheep been the usual pagan sacrifices, the Torah would have prohibited the sacrifice of those animals. Famously, many challenge this reading as one that devalues the Torah's eternal nature; as Ramban sharply criticizes: "But these words are mere expressions, healing casually a severe wound and a great difficulty, and making the table of the Eternal polluted.... Far be it that they should have no other purpose and intention except the elimination of idolatrous opinions from the minds of fools!" (on Lev. 1:9). It is worth noting that Rambam himself claims elsewhere that the sacrificial world is too deep and profound to be fully understood: "All the offerings are considered statutes. The Sages said that the world continues to exist in merit of the sacrificial service" (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Me'ila* 8:8).[5]

Although this approach might indeed be too limited to apply to the sacrificial world in general, it certainly has the power to illuminate specific details. It may well be that certain aspects are intended to differentiate biblical offerings from pagan offerings and to educate the people to a decidedly different sacrificial paradigm. The biblical sacrificial world is a silent revolution that pours new content into traditional ritual vessels. Robertson Smith points out three unique purposes that the biblical offering serves: It expresses partnership with God; it can be a gift; and it effects atonement.[6] The fact that he does not mention that these offer-

4. *Guide for the Perplexed*, III:46.
5. R. Tzadok of Lublin perceived this as the way the world was designed, not as a retrospective response; the concept of sacrificial service was a *tikkun* for the sin of the Golden Calf, because holiness and light and spiritual progress are achieved only in the wake of sin and darkness and failure (see *Likutei Maamarim, Derasha LeSiyum Shas* [Bnei Berak, 1973], 240).
6. Smith, *Lectures*. The various offerings are divided up among these roles: the peace offering shows partnership; the burnt offering is the ultimate gift; the purification and sin offerings provide atonement.

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ings were believed to "feed God" or "drive away demons and evil spirits" shows the dramatically different nature of the Israelite sacrificial world.[7]

2. SUBSTITUTION OFFERING

Unlike the claim that sacrifices are purely polemical, one notable positive explanation is that the animals offered up to God are substitutions for the person offering the sacrifice. When people sin, they need something to offer up to God in place of their own selves, so they offer an animal instead. The ultimate model for this approach is the ram that replaces Isaac at the very last moment. After all, one of the leading objectives of that episode is to explain that animal sacrifices must replace human sacrifices – that the phrase "a burnt offering in place of his son" (Gen. 22:13) is no incidental detail, but the main point.[8] This implies that all burnt offerings are "in place" of people, especially given that the binding narrative describes how Abraham sanctifies Israel's future site of sacrifice through this act: "To this day, it is said: On the mountain of the Lord He will be seen" (22:14).

Ramban is a prominent proponent of this approach. Based on the requirement that the entire burnt offering must be consumed with fire – "The priest shall then burn it all on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering of fire" (Lev. 1:9) – he writes:

> This is a far more accurate reason for the offerings: Since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech, and action, God commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it to contrast with his sinful act. He should confess his sin verbally to contrast with his [evil] speech, and he should burn the innards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which do all his work. He should sprinkle the blood upon the altar, which is

7. The great biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann takes pains to prove this in his monumental work *The Religion of Israel*.
8. See further in Grossman, *Abraham*, 348–52.

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> analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that his own blood should really be spilled and his own body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body. (Ramban on Lev. 1:9)

While Ramban's views are more complex than this comment, it is a convenient working example for discussion: He posits here that a sinner's own blood ought to be spilled, but an animal can be offered instead.

This idea is prevalent among modern scholars as well,[9] but it is insufficient in itself. First, it renders the act of sacrifice upon the altar as secondary, as it focuses upon the death of the animal – "that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life" – whereas the biblical text seems to place utmost importance on the fact that the sacrifice is consumed by the fire of the altar. While the formulation can be adjusted to reflect this by explaining that it is the animal being sacrificed *to God* and not just its death that constitutes the substitutive act, this still seems unsatisfactory. The tone of the verses describing the peace offering does not seem to be one of "blood for blood."[10] Even the classic *ḥatat* – the purification offering – is not portrayed as an act of atonement, but as a means of purifying the Sanctuary; the element of substitution is less relevant. On the other hand, the requirement of laying hands upon the offering does create a sense of transferal. The animal is going to the altar on behalf of its owner; this aspect is in harmony with the theory of substitution.

9. See, for example, in Janowski, *Heilsgeschehen.*
10. R. Jacob ben Asher, Baal HaTurim, writes similarly of the peace offering: "The fat that covers the entrails – this comes to atone for the sin of ingratitude and rebellion: 'Jeshurun grew fat and kicked'…" (on Lev. 3:3). This is problematic, however, given that the peace offering is not an offering of atonement for sin.

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3. MANIFESTING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

The most famous proponent of the third approach is R. Judah HaLevi (see *HaKuzari*, II:25–26). He believes that the purpose of offerings is to bring the Divine Presence into Israel's midst. When sacrifices are offered, the Sanctuary becomes a resting place for the Divine Presence. Perhaps this sounds somewhat tautological: "Why is there a need to offer sacrifices in the Sanctuary? In order for the Sanctuary to be a place where sacrifices are offered." Yet as we will see in our discussion of Leviticus 6–7, especially the law of the burnt offering, this is evident in the text itself.[11] At Mount Sinai, God's glory takes the form of a blazing, consuming fire (Ex. 24:17), and Israel's offerings upon the altar sustain this divine fire and keep it burning in their midst. We will return to this idea and its role in our discussion of the eighth day of consecration.

A related idea is that the purpose of offerings is to restore spiritual order. This approach is not formulated in terms of the Divine Presence, but it also holds that the world of holiness is inherently related to different levels of differentiation and order, and offerings serve to maintain this order and thus allow holiness to be an integral part of life in Israel.[12]

4. RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EXPRESSION

In addition to the central theories mentioned above, many other ideas have been suggested over the generations. I wish to focus on a specific aspect that I consider to be one of the main objectives of the sacrificial world, especially freewill offerings.

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11. R. Judah HaLevi's general approach is to prefer straightforward, honest worship of God to sophisticated, philosophical views; he reiterates this in his discussion of sacrifices and the Sanctuary (see *HaKuzari*, II:26). For a discussion of his ambivalence toward philosophy, see, for example, Urbach, *Pillars of Jewish Thought,* vol. 1, 263–67. He also discusses R. Judah HaLevi's approach to sacrifices (275–76).
12. "Order, grading, and hierarchy are central organizing principles in the Levitical system. In this way the cult seeks to integrate all aspects of Israel's life and bring them under God's rule. Sacrifice plays a role in that enterprise by summing up and reflecting the values and hierarchies found in other areas of life. It also performs the essential task of restoring the order of things when it is compromised by fault of some kind. As such, it preserves and enhances Israel's life before God, which is constantly threatened by the disorder and death associated with impurity and sin" (Jenson, "Sacrificial System," 36).

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After exploring various theories, Zvi Weinberg writes: "I believe it is correct to point to a single motive: The worshipper – individual or collective – seeks closeness to God, in order to receive His grace: (1) either because he has lost it (and thus offers a purification or guilt offering); (2) or to increase it (and thus offers a burnt, peace, or grain offering)."[13] I concur with this idea, but I wish to formulate it differently.

As background for the analysis below, it is worth mentioning the French Jewish sociologist David Émile Durkheim, who asserts that it is incorrect to analyze the religious world merely as a philosophical and theological system; rather, religious practices and rituals have their own weight. He points out that many believers testify that their religion is essentially expressed through the practice of normative actions, which is far more relevant in their daily lives than any religious philosophy. I wish to employ this premise in our attempt to perceive the practical act of offering sacrifices as a religious "social fact," albeit deviating from Durkheim's perception that ritual supersedes religious experience; with respect to the latter, I favor Rudolph Otto's belief that religious experience invokes great awe, wonder, and a sense of the beyond.

R. Yehoshua b. Levi claims that "prayers were established instead of daily offerings,"[14] and over the course of the talmudic passage, it emerges that even the opposing view (that prayers were established by the Patriarchs) agrees that the prayer times and orders were based on the sacrificial service.[15] This reveals a fundamental element of the sacrificial act. Offering a sacrifice is to be perceived as an act of expression, a non-verbal gesture. This gesture is a convention, and all participants are aware of its meaning. When a lover gets down on one knee and holds out a ring, his gesture expresses intense emotion, and his intentions

13. Weinberg, *Sacrifice in Israel*, 330.
14. Berakhot 26b.
15. The talmudic discussion continues: "According to R. Yosei b. R. Ḥanina, who instituted the additional prayer? It is not one of the prayers instituted by the forefathers. Rather, even according to R. Yosei b. R. Ḥanina, the prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs and the Sages based them on the laws of the offerings." Avraham Shammah pointed out to me that the capacity of prayer to replace offerings is already evident in Tanakh; see Ps. 141:2: "Accept my prayer like incense before You, my lifted hands like the evening offering"; Prov 15:8; and Solomon's prayer at the new Temple.

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are clear; his girlfriend knows that she must respond to his proposal of marriage before he even utters a word. When the Sages identify the prayer service as a verbal substitute for the sacrificial service, they are essentially stating that offerings have always been a convention, a gesture that expresses a certain meaning, religious experience, or expectation.

The connection between offering and prayer may even have common linguistic roots. In biblical Hebrew, the root A-T-R means "pray" (in *kal* form) and "to accept a prayer" (in *hiphil* – see Genesis 25:21 for both forms). In Ugaritic and Arabic, however, the root A-T-R means "to slaughter," "to offer up," and some suggest that the biblical word also originally connoted some act of sacrifice or ritual to God in an expression of prayer.[16] Even if this is not the case, the different Semitic meanings point to a common semantic root.

Though the biblical offering is a gesture that conveys a concrete meaning, it is not accompanied by any official verbal formula – and this is revolutionary. Extant ritual texts show that ancient people placed great importance on the verbal formulations that accompanied ritual sacrifices. One striking example is the following Egyptian daily temple sacrifice. These are the instructions to the ministering priest:

> The beginning of the utterances of the sacred rites which are carried out for the House of Amon-re, King of the gods, in the course of every day by the major priest who is in his day's service.
>
> The Utterance for Striking the Fire. Words to be spoken: "Welcome, welcome in peace, O Eye of Horus,[17] who art glorious, unharmed, and youthful in peace! It shines forth like Re upon the horizon.... The Eye of Horus drives away enemies for Amon-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, wherever they may be. An offering which the king gives: I am pure"....

16. See further in Hamori, *Women's Divination*, 46. The most intriguing verse in this context is in Ezekiel: "Each man had his censer in his hand, and a dense (*atar*) cloud of incense was ascending" (8:11), although this root also appears in the literal sense of "prayer" in 35:13.
17. The incense smoke (and other offerings) is called "the Eye of Horus" in these texts.

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> The Utterance for Breaking the Clay.[18] Words to be spoken: "The clay is broken; the cool waters are opened; the veins of Osiris are drawn. I have certainly not come to drive the god from his throne; I have come to put the god upon his throne. Thus,thou abidest upon thy great throne, O Amon-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands. I am the one whom the gods inducted. An offering which the king gives: I am pure."[19]

This text continues with further ritual statements, but this excerpt suffices to convey the feel and tone of the Egyptian rite. In the Ancient Near East, the ritual text was of supreme importance, sometimes more so than the ritual itself. This should come as no surprise; after all, a gesture can be interpreted in various ways, but the verbal formula pinpoints its particular meaning. The act of breaking the clay is open to interpretation – until the priest declares that it represents the flow of the cool waters from the god's veins to the Nile. Just as the bridegroom betroths his bride with a binding legal verbal statement as he places a ring on her finger beneath the bridal canopy, it is the verbal statements that accompany ancient sacrificial rites that define the meaning and purpose of these rites.

Given the prominence of verbal formulas in most ancient cultures, their complete absence from the biblical sacrificial laws is striking. With the exception of the priestly confession during the Temple purification ritual on Yom Kippur, there are no other speeches associated with the regular sacrificial service. (The bringing of the first fruits and the tithe declaration merit separate discussion.) This is even more surprising in light of the Torah's reservations toward mystical or pagan perceptions of offerings; one might have expected more emphasis on the proper intentions than on practical rites.

Yehezkel Kaufmann aptly explains that the verbal formulas of pagan rituals were essentially spells and divinations – not prayers but incantations. He believes that due to a determination to prevent this kind of religious expression, the Torah omits any kind of speech that might

18. Breaking the clay seals the temple doors.
19. *ANET*, 325 (John Wilson's translation).

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be mistaken for mystical incantations that have any bearing on reality. Worship of the God of Israel consists of actions, not words: "The priestly temple is the kingdom of silence."[20] Israel Knohl adds that this silence reflects an abstract concept of divinity: "Silence characterizes a person's stance before the sublime, mysterious divinity that dwells in the Sanctuary."[21]

Thus, the offering became a wordless expression of religious experience, a gesture never articulated in precise verbal form. Although the opposite might seem true at first glance, this is essentially a richer, more abstract form of communication than a verbal formulation.[22]

Moreover, unlike a verbal prayer, an offering is also a gift, something that is transferred from the worshipper to a Higher Authority. Moshe Halbertal points out that the two most prevalent terms for offerings in the Torah – "*korban*" and "*minḥa*" – are from the same semantic field. "*Korban*" is from the root K-R-B, meaning "to draw near"; "*minḥa*" comes from "*noḥ*," meaning "to place." When someone brings an offering, they "draw near" and "place" the offering before God. One does not merely "give" an offering to God; to "give" assumes acceptance.[23] The sacrificial terminology has profound significance: An offering is part of a dialogue; there is no guarantee that God will accept what the worshipper places before Him. This is not a theurgical pagan rite that forces some kind of procedure upon reality. It is a display of will – of both the worshipper and God.

It is no coincidence that the first instance of sacrifice in the Torah tells of both acceptance and rejection. Abel's offering is accepted; Cain's is not. Elsewhere, I propose that the fact that no explicit reason is given for Cain's rejection is part of the narrative objective: Cain's face falls not just because he is rejected, but because he doesn't understand why.[24] This communicates an important element of sacrifice: There is

20. *The Religion of Israel*, vol. 2, 476.
21. Knohl, *Biblical Beliefs*, 120. A turning point occurred when the Sages instituted that a shift of Israelites would recite the Act of Creation at the time of the priestly watch in Jerusalem (see Mishna Taanit 4:2).
22. See a similar direction in Wenham, "Theology."
23. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 10.
24. For further reading, see my analysis in Grossman, *Creation*, 139–63.

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no guarantee that an offering will be accepted; it depends on whether God finds the bringer worthy.[25] Ramban aptly notes that the name "God" does not appear in the context of the sacrificial world, but the particular Tetragrammaton (translated as "Lord") does.[26] The sacrifice bringer is not standing before the remote, eternal ruler of all worlds; rather, they are seeking an intimate encounter with the God of Israel, known by His personal name.

The offering signifies the living dialogue between the human and the Divine that transpires beside the altar. This transferal is regulated by clear, firm rules, which stem from the real concern that the offering might not be accepted. This is not merely because, in the words of Japanese author Haruki Murakami, "There's an essential order you have to follow in everything. It's a way of showing respect, following everything in the correct order,"[27] but because the detailed sacrificial laws serve to reassure the worshipper that they are doing all that they can to ascertain that "it be accepted on his behalf" (Lev. 1:4). As Halbertal neatly puts it: "The sacrificial ritual is a protocol that serves as a safeguard from the risk of rejection."[28]

The worshipper's mindset and fear of rejection is expressed in the blessing for the Temple service in the *Amida* prayer. Some read the main theme of this prayer as a request for the rebuilding of the Temple and renewal of its service, based on its conclusion: "May our eyes witness Your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are You, Lord, who restores His Presence to Zion." Yet this blessing was apparently recited even when the Temple still stood (without its conclusion, of course):

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25. The Sages were stringent about sacrificial flesh being flung, not placed; some even claim that this is why there was a space between the ramp and the altar (see Zevaḥim 62b; Rambam, *Hilkhot Beit HaBeḥira* 2:13). The Sages based this on the juxtaposition between the offering of the limbs and the dashing of the blood. The idea behind this concept may be to maintain a gap between the worshipper and the burning fire; in the end, the human cannot fully reach divine glory, and there will always be an unbridgeable gap.
26. Ramban on Lev. 1:9; see also his commentary on Gen. 7:1; Ex. 18:13.
27. Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*.
28. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 15. He argues that because humanity received animal sacrifice from God, this generated a cycle of gift-giving that the worshipper longs to be a part of (ibid., 11–12).

> The appointed priest said to [the priestly watch]: Recite a single blessing of the *Shema* blessings that accompany *Shema*. And they recited a blessing, and then they recited the Ten Commandments, *Shema*, *VeHaya im Shamoa*, and *VaYomer*. They then blessed the people with three blessings: True and Firm, and *the blessing of the Temple service*, and the Priestly Benediction. And on Shabbat, the new priestly watch would add one blessing recited by the outgoing priestly watch. (Mishna Tamid 5:1)[29]

The blessing of the Temple service was also recited by the High Priest at the end of the Torah reading on Yom Kippur (Mishna Yoma 7:1) and when the king blessed the people during *Hak'hel* (Mishna Sota 7:7). In the words of Yitz Landes: "These sources show that the Sages understood that the blessing of the Temple Service recited in the Temple was the same as the blessing in the *Amida* prayer. This shows that according to the Sages, there was liturgical continuity after the destruction of the Temple."[30]

If we omit the components of this blessing that were added after the Temple's destruction (about the restoration of the Temple service and the acceptance of prayer in place of offerings), this results in the following blessing (based on the prayer we recite today):[31]

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29. Rambam discusses this in *Mishneh Torah* but replaces the priestly blessing with the blessing for peace (*Hilkhot Temidin UMusafin* 6:5). Yitz Landes suggests that this mishna's model of sacrifices accompanied by blessings and prayer was based on Aaron's blessing during the days of the Sanctuary consecration (Landes, *Development of Birkat HaAvoda*, 14–16).
30. Landes, *Development of Birkat HaAvoda*, 18.
31. There are two different formulas for the ancient blessing for the Temple service of different origins that developed in two different ways (see further in Landes, *Development of Birkat HaAvoda*, 51–96), but this does not affect our discussion. Ehrlich claims that the blessing "Find favor… and establish in Zion," which is one version, could have been recited when the Temple still stood, for it could be a prayer for the continual Divine Presence (Ehrlich, "Dwelling Place," 8–9). On the attempt by the *Geonim* and *Rishonim* to determine the original version of the blessing, see Landes, *Development of Birkat HaAvoda*, 11.

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> Find favor, Lord our God, in Your people Israel, and accept in love and favor the fire offerings of Israel. May the service of Your people Israel always find favor with You.[32]

The repetition of the phrase "find favor" at the blessing's beginning, middle, and end creates an intense prayer for the acceptance of Israel's offering with love and favor. Ezra Fleischer surmises (based on ancient liturgical poems) that the blessing's original conclusion was: "Blessed are You…who finds favor with [Israel's] service."[33] Similar language is used in the Torah itself in a sacrificial context: "That it be accepted (*venirtza*) on his behalf" (Lev. 1:4).

This prayer reflects the fear of rejection and asks that God find favor and accept the worshipper's offering and their deeds in general, even beyond the Temple's bounds: "May the service of Your people Israel always find favor with You." In our own time, when the Temple has not yet been rebuilt and offerings have not yet been reinstated, we recite this blessing with yearning for the return of the Divine Presence and pray that our prayers will be accepted as if they were offerings.

In a certain sense, this blessing serves as the conclusion of the *Amida* prayer. Even without settling the broader dispute regarding when the *Amida* prayer was instituted (Elbogen and Heinemann argue that the prayer was already recited while the Temple still stood; Levine and Fleischer claim it was only instituted in Yavneh after the destruction), it is clear that from its inception, the *Amida* prayer had a precise order and number of blessings. David Henshke has shown that initially, the *Amida* prayer ended with *Modim*, the blessing of thanksgiving, followed by the priestly blessing; the blessing for peace and the conclusion are later additions.[34] This is evident from the description of the Rosh HaShana prayer:

32. If this blessing was indeed recited when the Temple still stood, this explains why we pray that God will find favor with the "fire offerings of Israel."
33. Fleischer, "Prayers," 245–52. Shulamit Elitzur also favors this version, as it forms an *inclusio*, with the conclusion echoing the beginning (Elitzur, "Early Benedictions," 27–28).
34. Henshke, "*Amida*," especially 362.

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> The order of blessings: One recites *Avot* and *Gevurot*…then the blessing for the Temple service, and thanksgiving, and the priestly blessing – according to R. Yoḥanan b. Nuri. R. Akiva said to him…. One recites *Avot*, and *Gevurot*…and then the blessing for the Temple service, and thanksgiving, and the priestly blessing. (Mishna Rosh HaShana 4:5)

In this quote I have omitted the mishnaic debate regarding the order of the blessings for holiness and their accompanying shofar blasts in the *Amida* of Rosh HaShana, for what is relevant to our discussion is that both opinions hold that the *Amida* ends with the priestly blessing, and there is no mention of the blessing for peace.[35]

Henshke adds that this frames the priestly blessing at the end of the *Amida* as a kind of dialogue, as if God is responding to Israel's prayer with a blessing. This illuminates the *Amida* sequence further: If this prayer is essentially a list of requests that ends with a blessing of thanksgiving and then God's response, then the ultimate request before the thanksgiving conclusion is: "Find favor, Lord our God, in Your people Israel, and accept in love and favor the fire offerings of Israel." The entire *Amida* sequence builds up to this blessing because it is the key to Israel's dialogue with God: Only if God finds favor and accepts Israel's offering (and prayer) does the offering achieve its purpose. If not, then the offering is all in vain; no such dialogue takes place.

The world of offerings invites the worshipper to choose a certain path of interaction with God. The range of freewill offerings shows that there are various forms of religious expression, as we will discuss extensively below. The experience of offering a burnt offering is not the same as the experience of offering a peace offering; both are different from bringing a grain offering. All reflect different needs and channels of expression. Each offering is a different form of communication with God. The worshipper in the Temple barely opens his or her mouth; few offerings are accompanied by verbal prayers (first fruits and the tithe declaration are notable exceptions, and the only instances in Leviticus are the confession

35. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the blessing *Sim Shalom* is a kind of request for the fulfillment of the priestly blessing, so it can be read as a kind of appendix to it.

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pronounced in conjunction with a variable purification offering and during the Yom Kippur service). Expression in God's presence is through gesture that signifies a person's desire, intention, and mindset.

Similar to the institutionalized prayer service, wherein words were initially composed to express certain intentions that then served to guide the worshipper as to what intentions ought to be communicated to God, the sacrificial world is first and foremost a form of expression that was channeled into particular models that act as spiritual guides for the worshipper. Obligatory offerings are not voluntary forms of expression, but part of a broader system that requires and conducts a person's communication with God; they should be perceived as a form of religious expression that guides and encourages a person to take responsibility for their life and – as we will yet argue in the context of the variable purification offering – their failures as well. When someone sins, their sin will weigh down on them until it becomes too heavy to bear, but the purification and guilt offerings allow them to confess their sin and atone for it, to fix the damage done to the Divine Presence's manifestation in Israel and their own life as well.[36] Offerings facilitate a sincere, complex dialogue with God and provide reassurance that the worshipper has found favor with their Maker. It is for this reason that each offering has its own specific guidelines – each kind of offering conveys its own particular expression to God.

The opening of the sacrificial chapters is what invites this reading: "Speak to the Israelites. Say: When one of you brings an animal offering to the Lord" (Lev. 1:2). The sacrificial world does not begin with a commandment, but with an invitation: "When." If someone wishes to bring an offering to the Lord, they are welcome to do so, but in a certain way. We will soon argue that this formulation shows that offerings were common practice before these laws were given; indeed, worship in the ancient world was heavily based on sacrifice, and the Torah embraces this "social fact." By that, I do not wish to claim, as Rambam does, that

36. As mentioned, some modern scholars perceive offerings as rites that restore world order, because sin disrupts world harmony and sacrifices correct this imbalance. See, for example, Gorman, *Ideology*; Jenson, "Sacrificial System," 25–40. I do not believe that the sacrifices of *Parashat Vayikra* function on a cosmic level; perhaps there is more room to consider this in *Parashat Tzav*.

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the Torah institutionalizes offerings only to combat problematic forms of worship; on the contrary, I believe that the Torah channels the deep human desire for connection and living dialogue with God by making full use of this form of expression. After all, Cain and Abel offer sacrifices without any divine command, as does Noah, and these offerings indeed lead to connection between the human and the Divine: "The Lord smelled the fragrant aroma and said in His heart, 'Never again will I curse the land because of man'" (Gen. 8:21). Thus, in addition to the polemical element pointed out by Rambam, the institutionalization of sacrifices is founded on an appreciation that the believer yearns to communicate with God, and the best way to do so is through the act of giving. A person is granted the privilege of giving to God, and in return, they receive God's favor and blessing.

Ultimately, all the aforementioned explanations illuminate different facets of the sacrificial world; there is room for them all. Rambam's approach does not contradict Ramban's. On the contrary, the idea that the Torah reshapes the world of sacrifice to combat pagan ideas of feeding the gods and driving away demons makes room for psychological theories of how the sacrificial world facilitates a deeper, truer form of connection with God. If the focus of offering sacrifices is indeed on the worshipper's psychological process, then Ramban's approach can be taken further, and offerings can be perceived as gifts offered up in the hope that they will be accepted, thus resulting in a living dialogue with God – a particular request, followed by a prayer for acceptance, followed by thanksgiving, followed by divine blessing.

All this, however, applies to the offerings described in the first chapters of Leviticus, in *Parashat Vayikra*. As we'll see, *Parashat Tzav* introduces a paradigm shift, when the text introduces the concept of the regular burnt offering and the altar fire that must never go out. The collective burnt offering and the ever-burning hearth transcend the sphere of the individual and reflect the Divine Presence within the camp, as per R. Judah HaLevi. The fire and smoke and blood of the sacrificial world and its silent yet vibrant gesture for divine favor is far greater than any one definition or another: "Turn it around and around, for everything is in it."

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