

Parshat Vayikra: Leviticus 1:1-5:26

Source: The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary, by Robert Alter, 2004.
The Contemporary Torah, Jewish Publication Society, 2006.

Summary (from reformjudaism.org):

God instructs Moses on the five different kinds of sacrifices that were to be offered in the sanctuary:

1. The olah or "burnt offering" was a voluntary sacrifice that had a high degree of sanctity and was regarded as the "standard" offering. The entire animal, except for its hide, was burned on the altar. (1:1-17)
2. The minchah or "meal offering" was a sacrifice made of flour, oil, salt, and frankincense that was partly burned on the altar and partly given to the priests to eat. (2:1-16)
3. The zevach sh'lamim or "sacrifice of well-being" was a voluntary animal offering from one's herd, sometimes brought to fulfill a vow. (3:1-17)
4. The chatat or "sin offering" was an obligatory sacrifice that was offered to expiate unintentional sins. This offering differs from the others in the special treatment of the blood of the animal. (4:1-5:13)
5. The asham or "penalty offering" was an obligatory sacrifice of a ram that was required chiefly of one who had misappropriated property. (5:1-26)

Leviticus 4:1-10

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר: נָפֶשׁ כִּי-תַחַטָּא בְשִׁגְגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְעָשְׂתָהּ מֵאֲחַת מֵהֵנָּה: (ג) אִם הִכְהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ יַחַטָּא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם וְהִקְרִיב עַל חַטָּאתָו אֲשֶׁר חָטָא פֶּר בֶּן-בְּקָר תַּמִּים לַיהוָה לְחַטָּאת: (ד) וְהֵבִיא אֶת-הַפָּר אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְסָמָךְ אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-רֹאשׁ הַפָּר וְשָׁחַט אֶת-הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: (ה) וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפָּר וְהֵבִיא אֹתוֹ אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: (ו) וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֶצְבָּעוֹ בַּדָּם וְהִזָּה מִן-הַדָּם שִׁבְעַ פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת-פְּנֵי פְרֹכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ: (ז) וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן-הַדָּם עַל-קַרְנוֹת מִזְבֵּחַ קִטְרֹת הַסִּמִּים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֵת כָּל-דָּם הַפָּר יִשְׁפֹךְ אֶל-יְסוֹד מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה אֲשֶׁר-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: (ח) וְאֶת-כָּל-חֵלֶב פֶּר הַחַטָּאת יָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת-הַחֵלֶב הַמְכֹסֶה עַל-הַקָּרֶב וְאֵת כָּל-הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַקָּרֶב: (ט) וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלִיֹּת וְאֶת-הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵיהֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַכֹּסֶלִים וְאֶת-הַיִּתְרֹת עַל-הַכֹּבֵד עַל-הַכְּלִיֹּת וְיִסְרְוּהָ:

JPS Translation	Alter Translation
(1) יהוה spoke to Moses, saying:	(1) And the LORD spoke to Moses,

JPS Translation	Alter Translation
<p>(2) Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of יהוה's commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them—</p> <p>(3) If it is the anointed priest who has incurred guilt, so that blame falls upon the people, he shall offer for the sin of which he is guilty a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to יהוה.</p> <p>(4) He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before יהוה, and lay a hand upon the head of the bull. The bull shall be slaughtered before יהוה,</p> <p>(5) and the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it into the Tent of Meeting.</p> <p>(6) The priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before יהוה, in front of the curtain of the Shrine.</p> <p>(7) The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense, which is in the Tent of Meeting, before יהוה; and all the rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.</p> <p>(8) He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails;</p> <p>(9) the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys—</p>	<p>(2)saying, "Speak to the Israelites, saying, 'Should a person offend errantly in regard to any of the LORD's commands that should not be done and he do one of these,</p> <p>(3) if the anointed priest should offend, incurring guilt for the people, he shall bring forward for his offense that he has committed an unblemished bull from the herd for the LORD as an offense offering.</p> <p>(4) And he shall bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and slaughter the bull before the LORD.</p> <p>(5) And the anointed priest shall take from the blood of the bull and bring it to the Tent of Meeting.</p> <p>(6)And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle from the blood seven times before the LORD against the covering of the shrine.</p> <p>(7)And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense before the LORD, which is in the Tent of Meeting, and all the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the burnt-offering altar which is at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.</p> <p>(8)And all the fat of the bull of offense offering, he shall set aside from it the fat covering the innards and all the fat that is on the innards.</p> <p>(9) The two kidneys and the fat that is on them, which is on the sinews, and the lobe on the liver, together with the kidneys,</p>

Alter Translation Notes:

1. **And the LORD spoke to Moses.** As Jacob Milgrom observes, this introductory formula marks the beginning of a new category of offerings, those offered to expunge the effects of an inadvertent offense.
2. **offend errantly.** The Hebrew adverb *bishegagah* has the sense of “unintentionally,” “by mistake.” The concern throughout this section is to preserve the purity of the place of the cult. The inadvertent “offense” does not at all imply an ethical transgression but rather the unwitting violation of a prohibition (“any of the LORD’s commands that should not be done”), which, in ancient Near Eastern terms, has the consequence of generating physical pollution that must be cleansed. The rabbis aptly explained that the errancy could result from either ignorance of the law or ignorance of the circumstances of the act committed.
3. **as an offense offering.** The traditional translation of this term is “sin offering.” Milgrom argues in elaborate detail that this is a misrepresentation of the Hebrew *ata’t* and proposes “purification offering” as a precise English equivalent. The verb *ata’* in the *qal* conjugation, as in verse 2 here, means “to commit an offense,” a term probably taken over from the political to the cultic realm (as when a vassal people commits an offense against its overlords by rebelling). The same root in the *pi’el* conjugation means to “remove” or “cancel” (one well-attested semantic function of this conjugation) the offense. The noun *ata’t* is derived from the *pi’el* conjugation and hence the canceling-out effect (“purification”) is in fact implied. But something is lost by using a designation for this offering that is not cognate with the verb “to offend,” and the context makes clear enough that an offense offering is a sacrifice that removes the effects of the offense.
6. **dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle from the blood seven times before the LORD against the covering of the shrine.** This sanguinary business may strike the modern reader as an odd way to purify anything, but throughout the Bible blood has powerfully antithetical valences, alternately identified as the stuff of life and the manifestation of guilt. Perhaps because it was thought to be the very bearer of the life force in animate creatures, it was understood to have what Milgrom vividly calls a “detergent” effect. The sprinkling is of course performed seven times because of the sacredness of the number seven.
7. **the horns of the altar.** Ancient Near Eastern altars in fact have been uncovered that have stone horns carved at each of the four corners. Although no definitive explanation of this general practice has been offered, since the animal’s horn is a recurrent image in biblical poetry for power, the horned altar may be a way of defining this space as a zone of power. Fugitives seeking asylum in the sanctuary would cling to one of the horns of the

altar. all the blood. This phrase obviously means all of the remaining blood since a small amount of the blood has been sprinkled on the altar.

Haftarah: Isaiah 43:21-44:23
Selection: 44:9-17

(9) The makers of idols
All work to no purpose;
And the things they treasure
Can do no good,
As they themselves can testify.
They neither look nor think,
And so they shall be shamed.
(10) Who would fashion a god
Or cast a statue
That can do no good?
(11) Lo, all its adherents shall be shamed;
They are craftsmen, are merely human.
Let them all assemble and stand up!
They shall be cowed, and they shall be
shamed.
(12) The craftsman in iron, with his tools,
Works it over charcoal
And fashions it by hammering,
Working with the strength of his arm.
Should he go hungry, his strength would
ebb;
Should he drink no water, he would grow
faint.

(13) The craftsman in wood measures
with a line
And marks out a shape with a stylus;
He forms it with scraping tools,
Marking it out with a compass.
He gives it a human form,
The beauty of a man, to dwell in a shrine.
(14) For his use he cuts down cedars;
He chooses plane trees and oaks.
He sets aside trees of the forest;
Or plants firs, and the rain makes them
grow.
(15) All this serves man for fuel:
He takes some to warm himself,
And he builds a fire and bakes bread.
He also makes a god of it and worships it,
Fashions an idol and bows down to it!
(16) Part of it he burns in a fire:
On that part he roasts meat,
He eats the roast and is sated;
He also warms himself and cries, "Ah,
I am warm! I can feel the heat!"
(17) Of the rest he makes a god—his own
carving!
He bows down to it, worships it;
He prays to it and cries,
"Save me, for you are my god!"