

# The Five types of Levitical Offerings – A Side by Side Comparison

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A side-by-side comparison of these five types of Levitical offerings may help to clarify their individual significance:

## **Type 1: Burnt Offering (olah) Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13**

Mitzvot #475

**What:** Bulls, sheep, or goats—males without blemish—were specified. Turtledoves or young pigeons were also acceptable.

**Who:** The worshipper was to kill the olah and skin it (quadrupeds only—birds were killed by the priests.) The priests handled the blood, washing, the complete burning of the sacrifice (the olah was not eaten), and the removal of the ashes.

**How:** The worshipper brought his sacrifice to the sanctuary: bulls to the door, i.e., on the west side of the altar, and sheep to the north side of the altar. He was to place his hand on its head, symbolically transferring guilt, before he slew and skinned it. The priest was then to sprinkle the blood around the altar, wash the entrails and legs with water, and completely burn the whole animal upon the altar. Birds were slain by wringing their necks. The priests drained their blood near the altar, removed the crop and feathers (these were placed on the east side of the altar, where the ashes were gathered), split the bird into two connected halves, and burnt it on the altar.

**Why:** The olah was a voluntary sacrifice made for atonement, homage to Yahweh, and celebration before Him. Total dedication is implied, for the offering was to be completely consumed by fire. Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was called an olah, making the messianic message evident. Through it we are reminded that Yahshua's self-sacrifice for our redemption was not something He had to do, but was something He wanted to do, because He loved us. "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire...Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require." (Psalm 40:6)

## **Type 2: Grain Offering (minha) Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23**

Mitzvot #476-479, 487-490

What: Fine flour was specified (that is, grain that has been crushed to powder and sifted or winnowed to remove the hulls or chaff—as distinct from “meal,” or whole grain). Olive oil, frankincense, and salt were incorporated in the minha. Leaven, or yeast, was specifically excluded, as was honey. The flour could be raw in bulk, or prepared as cakes, loaves, or wafers (in other words, cooked either in an oven, a covered pot, or a flat pan or griddle).

Who: The worshipper was to bring the offering to the priest at the sanctuary. It was he who poured the olive oil and added the frankincense and salt. The priest was to bring the minha to the altar, and was to eat what remained.

How: All of the frankincense was to be applied to the portion of the minha that was to be burned upon the altar. Only a handful was to be burned as a “memorial portion.” The rest was to serve as food for the priests. It was to be eaten in the court of the Tabernacle. Two special cases are mentioned for subsets of the grain offering: (1) the firstfruits offering was not to be burned, but was to be simply waved before Yahweh by the priests. (2) Conversely, on the occasion of the anointing of a new priest, the neophyte was to personally offer about two quarts of baked fine flour, half in the morning and the other half that evening—and this minha was to be completely burned on the altar.

Why: The minha was a memorial of the provision of all our needs by Yahweh. It began with grain, the bounty of the earth—that which sustains us in this world. The addition of oil symbolized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the sprinkling of frankincense onto the portion of the offering that was to be burned on the altar spoke of the purity that God would provide through the sacrifice of Yahshua. Because no blood was shed, atonement was not in view; but the judgment of our works—the separation of the valuable from the worthless—was indicated by the removal of the chaff of the grain.

### **Type 3: Peace Offering (selem) Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:11-34**

Mitzvot #494-499

What: The selem was an animal sacrifice, either from the herd (cattle) or the flock (sheep or goats). It could be either male or female, but it had to be without blemish or defect. Also, if the reason for the selem was thanksgiving, unleavened cakes and leavened bread were to be included. The grain portion was to be prepared with oil.

Who: The worshipper and his family were to share the sacrifice with the priests, the latter receiving the breast and the right thigh. The fatty portions were to be removed and burned on the altar in honor of Yahweh by the priest.

How: The unusual thing about the selem was that the rules for eating “leftovers” varied depending on the purpose of the peace offering. If it was brought as an expression of thanksgiving, then the meat had to be eaten on the day of the sacrifice—spontaneity and immediacy were required. However, if the selem accompanied a vow, the sacrifice could also be eaten on the second day, an indication that both the vow and its fulfillment were taken seriously. But in no case was the meat to be eaten after the second day—three-day-old leftovers were to be completely burned with fire, a picture of judgment.

Why: The selem was always voluntary. It was offered as a spontaneous expression of praise to Yahweh, as a way to express one’s thanksgiving for answered prayer, to underscore the seriousness of a vow the worshipper was taking, or as a freewill offering to show one’s devotion.

#### **Type 4: Sin Offering (chata’t) Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30**

Mitzvot #480, 481, 491, 492

What: If a priest’s sin or that of the whole congregation is in view, a young bull was sacrificed.

For a ruler of the people, a male goat was slain. For an individual, a female goat or lamb was specified.

Who: The chata’t was brought by the guilty party, when he became aware of his transgression, to the priest to be sacrificed.

How: A sin offering was to be eaten only by the priests, and then only if they themselves were not culpable in the sin for which the chata’t was being offered. The meat belonged to the individual priest who performed the offering. The fatty parts were removed and burned on the altar in homage to Yahweh, but the carcass was taken out of the camp and burned there. Blood from the sacrifice was to be sprinkled seven times before the veil (that is, outside the door of the sanctuary), or applied with the priest’s finger to the horns of the altar.

Why: Blood sacrifices like the chata’t speak of atonement for sin, for the life is in the blood. Ultimately, Christ’s sacrifice is in view, but the specific animals to be brought by the different classes of Israelites are instructive of how our position in this world relates to our sin and its consequences. Bulls (brought by the priests or by the congregation at large) indicate false doctrines that lead to sin and death. Male goats represent the sins of those in positions of

temporal authority—who exercise human governance in this world—surrogates for the coming King. And female goats or sheep (brought by ordinary citizens) speak of failure to heed the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

### **Type 5: Trespass Offering (asham) Leviticus 5:1-19; 7:1-10**

Mitzvot #482-486, 493

What: Depending on the financial status of the worshipper, either a female lamb or goat, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons were to be offered. And if he was too poor even for that, he was to bring a tenth of an ephah (about two quarts) of fine flour, but unlike the *mincha*, no oil or frankincense was to be added.

Who: The *asham* was to be eaten by the priests. As with the *chata't*, the priest personally officiating was entitled to the meat and hide from the sacrifice (after removing the fatty parts, which, as always, were burned on the altar as Yahweh's portion). Grain offerings, however, were to be shared among all the priests.

How: The little details concerning the *asham* conspire to teach us about Yahweh's grace and mercy. As with the *olah*, here is sliding scale of sacrifice value based on one's wealth or lack of it. We are specifically instructed not to remove the head of a sacrificed bird from its body. We are told not to add oil or frankincense to a grain *asham*. All these things underscore the fact that even though Yahweh is perfect and holy, requiring absolute perfection of those who would approach Him, His entire agenda is focused on providing that perfection for us— regardless of our station in life—with His whole being, head and heart, and even if we have sinned purely by accident and never even realize our trespass!

Why: The *asham* is provided for our "mistakes," our offenses in holiness (as the *chata't* covers our "sins," our lapses in behavior). As we walk through this world, it is practically impossible to remain perfectly set apart from it (as Israel was supposed to be) or to fulfill our mandate to be called out from within it (as the *Ekklesia*, the Church, is supposed to be.) Yahweh made us. He knows our frailty. He realizes that any perfection we have must be provided by Him, for it is not something we can muster in our fallen state, no matter how hard we try, no matter how much we would like to. That cloak of perfection is freely bestowed upon us through the sacrifice of His Messiah, *Yahshua*. All we have to do is put it on.

Thus we have seen five types of sacrifices or offerings described in detail in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. But we should be familiar enough with Yahweh's patterns by now to expect not five, but seven. I believe the sixth category of offerings is the "drink offering" or

nesek. This offering was most fully described in this passage: “When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to Yahweh, from the herd or the flock, then he who presents his offering to Yahweh shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; and one-fourth of a hin [about a quart] of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb. Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin [about one and a half quarts] of wine as a sweet aroma to Yahweh. And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to Yahweh, then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil; and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin [about half a gallon] of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.” (Numbers 15:2-10)

#### **Type 6: Drink Offering (nesek) Numbers 15:2-10, 28:7**

(Not specifically addressed by Maimonides)

What: Wine was to be offered up in conjunction with any animal sacrifice, whether an olah, asham, chata't, or selem. It would accompany the grain component that was mixed with oil, and there was to be the same amount of wine as there was oil. The amount of wine (and oil) varied with the size of the sacrificial animal, about a quart for a lamb or goat, up to twice that amount for a bull.

Who: As with most offerings, the worshipper would supply the wine and the priest would attend to its ritual.

How: The wine was to be poured out at the time of the sacrifice, presumably upon the altar, for the libation was said to be a “sweet aroma to Yahweh.”

Why: Although the Torah says nothing about what the pouring out of wine might mean, all four Gospels tie it directly to the blood of Yahshua that was poured out for us at Calvary. The fact that the same amount of oil and wine were specified ties Yahshua's blood to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Torah is full of descriptive terminology for various facets of sacrifice and offering, many of which we haven't explored. They aren't necessarily all separate things, however, but may be used to emphasize one feature or another. For example, Moses used several of these terms in

giving this instruction to the Israelites about to enter the Land: “But you shall seek the place where Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your [1] burnt offerings, your [2] sacrifices, your [3] tithes, the [4] heave offerings of your hand, your [5] vowed offerings, your [6] freewill offerings, and the [7] firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

Olah: a burnt offering, the whole sacrificial animal being completely consumed by fire. This is one of the basic types of Levitical sacrifice we’ve already reviewed.

Zebah: a sacrifice—an offering that is killed as an act of worship, expiation, or propitiation to a deity; meat that is killed for consumption at a feast. Zebah is a catch all term for any animal sacrifice.

Ma’aser: the tithe, the tenth part, goods or money given as an offering. This was a special class of offering designed to fund the operation of the temple and feed the poor. See Mitzvot #394, 397, 399, and 402-425.

T’rumah: an offering, a contribution, a heave offering. T’rumah was also the word used for the tithe the Levites paid to the Aaronic priesthood from the tithes they had received from the people of Israel.

Neder: a vow or the votive offering that consecrates it. This would be a subset of the selem, or peace offering.

Nedabah: a freewill offering, that which is voluntary, not compulsory, and is prompted only by the impulse of the donor. This is a descriptive term for the voluntary nature of the peace offering (selem) as well as the burnt offering (olah).

Bekor: firstborn animals or men, set aside to Yahweh. This, I believe, represents the seventh and final classification of offerings to Yahweh.

### **Type 7: Firstborn Offering (bekor) Exodus 13:11-13, Leviticus 27:26, Numbers 3:40**

Mitzvot #368-371, 403, 410, 413

What: The firstborn male of every Israelite family belonged to Yahweh, as did every animal owned by an Israelite. Clean animals (sheep, goats, cattle, etc.) were to be sacrificed. Donkeys (and presumably other unclean animals such as horses or camels) were to be substituted with lambs, or their necks were to be broken. But clean animals were to be eaten.

Who: Firstborn male children belonged to Yahweh, but they were to be redeemed by paying the Priestly tribe of Levi five silver shekels. The tribe of Levi thus were Yahweh's designated substitutes for the firstborn of the other eleven tribes.

How: The whole scenario was based on the original Passover, when the firstborn males of all the households that weren't sheltered by the blood of the lamb were slain. According to Exodus 13, the slaying of the firstborn animals was designed to elicit questions from Israelite children about the meaning of the rite, giving parents the perfect opportunity to explain Yahweh's deliverance—both past, present, and future.

Why: The slain firstborn son was a metaphor for Yahweh's own "firstborn," who would be slain to save men from the consequences of their own transgressions, just as the Passover lamb's blood was shed to identify those who were under God's protection. The picture couldn't be any clearer if God Himself had painted the blood on the tree and its crosspiece with His own hands. As a matter of fact that's precisely what He did—on the tree of life on the Mount of Olives.