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The 'Olah Offering: Providing Access to God

6: 8-13

The 'Olah offering DIG: Explain how the Sages read Hosea 14:2 to mean that prayer could substitute for sacrifice. Beginning with Cain and Abel, why do you think God chose animal sacrifice to restore broken relationships? Couldn't God forgive sins without sacrifice? Why do you think God demanded an offering without spot, defect, disease or deformity? Why the laying on of hands? Why sprinkle the blood? Why complete burning? How does the aroma pleasing to God foreshadow Messiah (Ephesians 5:2; Phil 4:18).

REFLECT: Why do you think God put so much emphasis on blood? What lessons can be learned about the priests having to take out ashes and clean the altar? How would you define sacrifice? How do your sacrifices define your value system? What sacrifices have you, or can you, make for God (Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:15)? In your experience, how has God reconciled you to Himself? By what sacrifice?

Parashah 25: Tzav (Command) 6:1 to 8:36

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Moshe, Aaron, and Aaron's sons - the priests.

The Scene is the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai.

The Main Events include ADONAI's instructions for the 'olah (burnt) offering, grain offering, purification offering, guilt offering, and peace offerings; dressing Aaron and his sons in priestly garments, anointing the Tabernacle, and dedicating all that was in it; the seven-day period while the priests remained inside the Tabernacle courtyard; and Aaron and his sons doing all that YHVH had commanded by the hand of Moshe.

Parashah Tzav is almost a repeat of *parashah vaYikra* (to see link click [Aj](#) - The Burnt Offering). But it gives us the opportunity to examine some of the daily, seemingly insignificant tasks of **the priests**. This underscores the fact that the book of **Leviticus** was

a training manual for **the priests**. There was one major difference, however, between the two portions. When **Moshe** was finished instructing **the priests** about the sacrifices and preparing **them** to function as **priests** in the newly constructed **Tabernacle**, **ADONAI** told **him** to dedicate **them** into this ministry by holding a formal anointing service.⁶⁰

The burnt offering from the perspective of the priests.



The continual offering: **ADONAI** said to **Moshe**, “Give **Aaron** and his sons **this command: This is the Torah for the burnt** (Hebrew: ‘*Olah*) **offering**. The word Holocaust is derived from the Greek *holokauston*, a translation of the Hebrew word ‘*olah*, meaning *what goes up*, or, **the burnt sacrifice offered** whole to **YHVH**. This word was chosen, and gained wide usage, because, in the ultimate manifestation of the Nazi killing program - the extermination camps - the bodies of the victims were consumed whole in the crematoria or open fires, as if they had been **offered** up as **a burnt offering** to **YHVH**. **It is what goes up** (Hebrew: ‘*Olah*) **on its firewood upon the bronze altar all night long, until morning** when the sacrifices were reduced to ashes, in this way the fire of the altar will be kept burning (6:8-9 NIV). The definite article indicates that we are speaking of **the continual burnt offering** originally introduced in **Exodus 29:38-42a**. You will recall **its offering** consisted of two **lambs**, one offered at sunrise at the first sacrifice of the day, and the other offered in the afternoon as the last sacrifice of the day. The result was that **a lamb** was to be **continuously** (Hebrew: *tamid*) on **the bronze altar**. In the same way that **the twelve loaves of the bread Presence** were **continuously** before **YHVH**, and **the menorah continuously burned** before **God**, **a single lamb** was to be continuously on **the altar** before **God**. **Hence the Sages refer to the continual burnt offering as the tamid.**

The morning routine in **the Temple** began with collecting **the ashes** from the previous day's sacrifices. *Parashah Tzav* indicates that the **ashes** were to be changed every morning, getting ready for another day's activity. It was the first daily responsibility of **the priest** on duty. **The priest shall then put on his simple white linen clothes, with linen undergarments next to his body, and shall remove the ashes of the burnt of 'olah offering that the fire had consumed on the bronze altar and place them beside it (6:10 NIV).** **The priesthood** rose before dawn, cleared **the ashes**, stoked **the fire**, slaughtered a single **lamb**, applied its **blood** to **the altar** and then placed **the lamb** upon **its** flames. In conjunction with the morning slaughter of **the lamb**, the morning incense was offered on the golden altar, and the menorah was trimmed, refueled and relit within the Holy Place. This morning service was referred to as **shacharit**, which means *morning*.

Apparently, there was stiff competition for that sooty job. Even though the job was earthy and mundane, it seems like many of the priests wanted to do it. How many today run to get the job of emptying wastebaskets at their place of worship? Is there stiff competition to making sure that there is always enough toilet paper? I think you see the point. Just as **the priests** vied for the task of taking **the ashes** out, likewise, it would behoove us to want to serve **Him** to jump at even the most menial task.

For a moment, imagine the dismay that the Jews must have felt at the destruction of the future Temple (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**). Their means of sacrifice - the sacred worship of **ADONAI** - was gone. How were they to sacrifice? How were they to draw near to **the LORD**? How were they to make atonement, and how were their prayers to be heard (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Bn - Solomon's Prayer of Intercession**). The destruction of the Temple was a religious crisis.

The Sage's answer to the crisis was twofold. The Oral Law (see **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**) states that one who studies the mitzvot of a particular sacrifice is credited with having brought the sacrifice and having their sins forgiven (Megillah 31a). More significantly, prayer was, and still is, regarded as a sufficient substitute for sacrifice. **The Sages point to Hosea 14:2 as evidence that prayer is an adequate substitute for sacrifice. Take words with you, and return to ADONAI; say to Him, "Forgive our guilt, and receive us graciously; that we may present the bulls/fruit of our lips" (Hosea 14:2).**

In **Hosea 14:2**, the Hebrew word for **fruit** (*parim*) is grammatically irregular and could possibly be read as **bulls**. **The Sages saw here a formula from heaven to compensate**

for the loss of the Levitical sacrificial system. “Take words with you,” was understood to mean “to pray.” And the words, “return to ADONAI,” was understood to mean “repent.” Thus the Sage’s explanation, the one who prays and repents has his **guilt removed and is received graciously**. His prayers are counted as the “bulls of the lips,” as they say. According to Judaism, that act of prayer became a compensation for the loss of sacrifice, and the three daily times of prayer (sunrise, afternoon and the overnight burning of the last offering) with their prescribed liturgy became the substitute for the daily ‘olah offering.⁶¹

Modern Judaism stresses the fact that instead of “salvation,” one’s relationship with God has to be based on three elements: repentance (*teshuvah*); good deeds resulting from repentance (*tzedaka*) and a life of devotion (*kavanah*). Judaism believes that in the same way that ADONAI saved the children of Isra’el in the past as a nation, He also promises to restore Isra’el as a nation, meaning collectively, not individually. In the Oral Law the rabbis taught, “The rest of the prayer: [Accept my] song, petition, supplication before You for Your people Isra’el, which are in need of salvation (Yoma 70a). Thus, today, Jews believe that all Isra’el will have a **place in the world to come**. Their only hope is in **Yeshua Messiah** as **their Redeemer**, and an honest presentation of the Gospel, otherwise **they** will be eternally lost.

From ashes to ashes: Then he is to take off these clothes and put on others, carry the ashes outside the camp to a place that is ceremonially clean (6:11). The priest wore his regular priestly linen when removing the ashes from the altar. But when he removed the pile of ashes from beside the altar to go outside the camp, he had to change into regular clothes. The holy and the common must not be confused (10:10). The lesson to be learned from this is that all ritual or ministry assignments should be carried out in a worthy manner, and we should humble ourselves for the glory of God, to perform demanding tasks. Moreover, the removal of the previous day’s ashes and changing clothes reminds us of the necessity of not letting the residue of the previous day affect our present lives. Yeshua taught on this principle from another angle. He taught us **not to worry** (carry the ashes from yesterday into our present day) because **each day has enough trouble of its own** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dt - Do Not Worry About Your Life, What Your Will Eat or Drink, or What You Will Wear**).⁶²

Keep the fire going: After the instructions regarding the proper procedure for the removal of the ashes, the text returns to what truly is the main concern of the passage: the maintenance of the flame upon the bronze altar. The last menial daily job of the priesthood was to make sure that the fire did not die out. The fire on the bronze altar

must be kept burning; it must not go out, even on Shabbat, because evil doesn't take any day off. It was **the priest's** duty to keep **the fire lit** with the carcass of **the lamb** smoldering on top of **it**. Thus, **the priests** needed to perform **their** duties diligently. The mitzvah focuses on the most difficult part of the task, keeping **the fire burning** all night long. **Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the 'olah offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it (6:12)**. The animal was cut up, salted, and entirely **burned**. **The 'olah sacrifices** were only offered during daylight hours and were left to burn during the night. Therefore, **the priesthood** needed to be present in **the Tabernacle** around the clock, tending to **the sacrifices** and ensuring that **the fire** for **the bronze altar** would never go out. The sacrifices were to be reduced to ash by morning. Armed with forks, shovels, and tongs, **they** stoked **the fire**, and raked the coals.

And **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** repeats again for **the third time: The fire must be kept burning on the bronze altar continuously, it must not go out (6:13)**. After all the day's sacrifices had been brought, **a second lamb** of **the daily tamid offering was brought**, typically during the ninth hour of the day (or 3 pm). During the sacrifice of these two **lambs**, prayers were offered. During the Second Temple period, the daily prayer of the *Amidah* was offered by **the priesthood** and the attending worshipers in conjunction with the two sacrifices. Therefore, the time of the morning and afternoon sacrifices came to be regarded as the established times for prayer. The book of **Acts** makes three references of the daily *tamid* sacrifices and in one instance explicitly identifies it was the time of prayer (**Acts 2:15, 3:1 and 10:3**).

Try to imagine the night shift in the Temple. Unlike the daytime when the courts were full of the noise of worshipers, the glad songs of the Levites and the braying of animals, the nighttime service must have seemed strangely quiet and reverent. The only illumination other than the stars and moon was the ever hungry flame of the fire on **the bronze altar**. Apparently, early on in the development of the Temple liturgy, **the night shift** developed **their** own particular worship service. **Psalm 134** refers to the worship service of **the night-crew** that tended the altar flames. **Come, bless ADONAI, all you servants of ADONAI, who serve each night in the house of ADONAI. Lift your hands towards the sanctuary, and bless ADONAI. May ADONAI, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Tziyon.**⁶³

The Messianic significance: On the one hand, the total devotion, commitment and surrender to **Messiah** is seen in the fact that **the fire** was to **be kept burning continuously**. But on the other hand, **the continual fire** reminds us that the forgiveness of

ADONAI is always available to save, and to bless, and to hear. **He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Isra'el will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:3b). For the generations to come, the burnt offering was made continuously on the bronze altar at the entrance to the Tabernacle before YHVH (Exodus 29:42a; Leviticus 6:13; Numbers 28:10).**

The **lamb** was placed on **the altar** for the morning offering at **9 am**, and it was the exact time that the Roman soldiers were pounding the nails into the wrists of **Yeshua** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lu - Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of Man**), and at **3 pm**, when the afternoon sacrificial **lamb** was placed on **the altar**, it was the exact time when **Messiah** died (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lv - Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God**). Thus, as **the 'olah offering** was to display a total commitment to **God**, **Messiah** displayed a total commitment to **the Father** on the cross.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Messiah's** sacrifice finished/ completed the payment for our **sin** so that I could draw near to **You**. I don't have to worry if **You** will remember my sin. For once I've repented and chosen to love **Yeshua** as my **Lord** and **Savior (Romans 10:9-10)**, I am saved from sin's penalty and you canceled my **sins as far away as east is from the west**. Since **east and west** are always going opposite directions, our **sins** will never be remembered. How gracious you are! **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so ADONAI has compassion on those who fear Him (Psalms 103:11-13)**. Your **compassion** and mercy are wonderful! **Your** deep and tender love is beyond my comprehension. I desire to love **You** back in deep appreciation for all **You** have done for me. I pray in **the Name of the One** sitting at **Your** right hand. Amen*