The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Command Aaron and his sons thus:

This is the ritual of the burnt offering: The burnt offering itself shall remain where it is burned upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it.

THE DISPOSITION OF SACRIFICES (6:1–7:38)

The rituals for each of the various sacrifices outlined in chapters 1–5 are presented in chapters 6 and 7. These chapters also offer us a unique glimpse into the participation of the priesthood in the sacred meals within the precincts of the sanctuary.

The important Hebrew word torah, which appears in these chapters, derives from the verb רָתַן, “to cast, shoot”—an arrow, for instance. The verb, in one of its forms, means “to aim, direct toward”—hence “to show the way, instruct.” The word torah here is limited to the content of the instruction.

THE BURNT OFFERING (olah) (vv. 1–6)

For the preparation and presentation of this offering, see Lev. 1.

2. where it is burned

On top of the altar grill, where the firewood was placed.

all night until morning

The daily burnt offering consisted of two yearling lambs, one offered in the morning and one in the evening.

The morning burnt offering, with its accompanying grain offering and libation, were the first offerings placed on the altar of burnt offerings each day. The evening burnt offering and its accompaniments were the final offerings each day.

The evening offering was left burning on the altar during the night. First thing in the morning, the ashes of the previous day’s sacrifices were removed and new firewood was added. Although the same altar was used for other sacrifices during the day, it was logical to provide instructions for tending the altar at this point, because public worship began and concluded each day with the burnt offering.

In this parashah, we can see why the book is thought to be a manual for kohanim. How the kohen carries out his part of the sacrificial service is the focus of most of the text.

Nehama Leibowitz suggests that chapters 1–5 are addressed to the Israelite public. Therefore, they begin with voluntary offerings (olah, minhah, and sh’lamim) and continue with those that apply only to certain individuals in certain circumstances (e.g., the purification offering of the kohen). Chapters 6–7 are directed to the officiating priests. For that reason, the sequence of offerings is changed, beginning with the offerings that have the highest degree of sanctity (“most holy”) and continuing with those of a lesser level of sanctity.

CHAPTER 6

2. Command Aaron . . . This is the ritual of the burnt offering

The Talmud reads the Hebrew word torat (“ritual of”) as “Torah for”: “In our day, the study of Torah takes the place of bringing animal offerings” [BT Men. 110a]. If so, then why command Aaron? Because Aaron might be reluctant to tell the people that the study of Torah is equivalent to bringing sacrifices. That would make the role of the kohanim less prominent, as it would present the people with an alternative form of worship [Hatam Sofer].

the fire on the altar is kept going on it

The last Hebrew word can also be read “within him” (instead of “on it”). This prompted the comment that the fire on the altar must be paralleled by a fire in the heart of the officiating priest, whose enthusiasm for the sacred nature of the work must never be lost. The congregation, for its part, must recognize its responsibility to see that the enthusiasm and dedication of the clergy are never extinguished.
The priest shall dress in linen raiment, with linen breeches next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and place them beside the altar. 4He shall then take off his vestments and put on other vestments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a pure place. 5The fire on the altar shall be kept burning, not to go out; every morning the priest shall feed wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat parts of the offerings of well-being. 6A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out.

And this is the ritual of the grain offering: Aaron’s sons shall present it before the L ORD, in front of the altar. 8A handful of the choice flour and oil of the grain offering shall be taken from it, with all the frankincense that is on the grain offering, and this token portion shall be turned into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odor to the L ORD. 9What is left of it shall be eaten by Aaron and his sons; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes, in the sacred precinct; they shall eat it in the enclosure of the Tent of Meeting. 10It shall not be baked with leaven; I have given it as their portion from My gifts; it is most holy.

4. take off his vestments  The priestly vestments were to be worn only in the sanctuary precincts (Exod. 28:43).

outside the camp to a pure place  Called “the ash heap” in 4:12. The spot near the eastern side of the altar where the ashes were dumped is called “the place for the ashes” in 1:16.

6. perpetual fire . . . on the altar, not to go out  The requirement to keep the fire burning at all times is also implied in verse 2. Perpetual fire expressed the Israelites’ devotion to God by showing that they were attendant on Him at all times in the sanctuary.

3. The first act of the kohen every morning is to put on ordinary clothes and remove the ashes of the previous night’s sacrifice. This ensures that he never forgets his link to the ordinary people who spend their days in mundane pursuits (Simhah Bunem). Why were the ashes treated with such reverence? It symbolizes the idea that what was holy yesterday must be treated with respect today as well.
like the purification offering and the reparation offering. Only the males among Aaron’s descendants may eat of it, as their due for all time throughout the ages from the Lord’s gifts. Anything that touches these shall become holy.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 13 This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the Lord on the occasion of his anointment: a tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it in the evening, shall be prepared with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well soaked, and offer it as a grain offering of baked slices, of pleasing odor to the Lord. And so shall the priest, anointed from among his sons to succeed him, prepare it; it is the Lord’s—a law for all time—to be turned entirely into smoke. So, too, every grain offering of a priest shall be a whole offering: it shall not be eaten.

11. **Only the males among Aaron’s descendants** Any foods brought for sacrifices could be eaten only by the priests themselves. Other food-stuffs collected for their support and other forms of priestly revenue could be used to feed their families.  

**Due** Hebrew: hok (fem. hukkah), which signifies a law ordained by written statute. By extension, it connotes one’s lawful share or amount, a rightful due.  

**Anything that touches these shall become holy** The condition of holiness, unlike that of impurity, was not regarded as contagious. Thus it would be better to translate: “Anyone who is to touch these must be in a holy state.” Only consecrated persons may have contact with sacrificial materials. This notion reinforces the opening of the verse: Only Aaronide priests may partake of the sacrifices. An act of consecration is required.

12. **ephah** See Comment to Exod. 16:36.  
**The Grain Offering of the High Priest** (vv. 12–16)  

13. **offering** Hebrew: korban; see D’rash to 1:2.  

**on the occasion of his anointment** The rite of anointing (unction), described in 8:10ff., was essential to the status of the High Priest. The altar, too, was anointed.  

**regular** Hebrew: tamid, used for the most part to characterize regular daily offerings.

14. **every grain offering of a priest** Every offering of grain brought by a priest on his own behalf, or on behalf of the priesthood, in expiation or as a voluntary offering, was to be burned entirely on the altar. This affirms the rule that priests could benefit only for services undertaken on behalf of other Israelites, not on their own behalf. When the offering served only the priests themselves, the usual share of the priests had to be surrendered to God.
17 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 

18 Speak to Aaron and his sons thus: This is the ritual of the purification offering: the purification offering shall be slaughtered before the Lord, at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered: it is most holy. 

19 The priest who offers it as a purification offering shall eat of it; if any of its blood is spattered upon a garment, you shall wash the spattered part in the sacred precinct. 

20 Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy; and if any of its blood is spattered upon a garment, you shall wash the spattered part in the sacred precinct, in the enclosure of the Tent of Meeting. 

21 An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; if it was boiled in a copper vessel, [the vessel] shall be scoured and rinsed with water. 

22 Only the males in the priestly line may eat of it: it is most holy. 

23 But no purification offering may be eaten from which any blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting for expiation in the sanctuary; any such shall be consumed in fire.

This is the ritual of the reparation offering: it is most holy. 

THE PURIFICATION OFFERING (battat) (6:17–23) 

18. The burnt offering (olah) was to be slaughtered at the northern side of the altar (1:11). Here we are informed that this rule also applies to the purification offering. 

most holy The purification offering is in the category of offerings that are “most sacred” (kodesh kodashim). This category, first encountered in 2:3, is mentioned in 6:10; it recurs in 6:22 and in 7:6. 

19. enclosure of the Tent of Meeting The entire courtyard is sacred. See Comment to 6:9. 

20. Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy Rather, anyone who is to touch its flesh must be in a holy state. See Comment to 6:11. 

blood . . . spattered upon a garment Part of the blood of the purification offering was to be placed on the horns of the altar and the rest poured down its side, as ordained in 4:25. Should any sacrificial blood stain a garment, that garment must be laundered, because it would be improper for any of this blood to be used for anything other than its ordained purpose. 

21. An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken Earthenware, being more porous than metal, absorbs particles of the flesh boiled in it. Some of the sacrificial flesh very likely would remain in the vessel. Such flesh would constitute “leftovers of the sacrifice” (notar), forbidden for consumption according to 7:15–17. If other foodstuffs were subsequently boiled in the same vessel, the forbidden sacrificial particles would contaminate the rest. To prevent this, the earthenware vessel had to be broken, because there was no possible way to purify it. 

23. This rule refers to the priestly hattat as set forth in 4:1–12, to the rites prescribed in 8:17 for the investiture of the priests, and to the Yom Kippur ritual in chapter 16.

THE REPARATION OFFERING (asham) (7:1–10) 

1. ritual of the reparation offering The procedures specified in verses 1–6 for the “repayment offering” (asham) correspond to those already mandated for the purification offering in 6:17.
be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and the blood shall be dashed on all sides of the altar. All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail; the fat that covers the entrails; the two kidneys and the fat that is on them at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys. The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as a gift to the LORD; it is a reparation offering.

Only the males in the priestly line may eat of it; it shall be eaten in the sacred precinct: it is most holy.

The reparation offering is like the purification offering. The same rule applies to both: it shall belong to the priest who makes expiation thereby. So, too, the priest who offers a man’s burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he offered. Further, any grain offering that is baked in an oven, and any that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. But every other grain offering, with oil mixed in or dry, shall go to the sons of Aaron all alike.

This is the ritual of the sacrifice of well-being that one may offer to the LORD:

If he offers it for thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unspared from disaster, which produces probably one of the most profound emotions that person will ever know. The Talmud (BT Ber. 54b) identifies the circumstances in which a person...
leavened cakes with oil mixed in, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked. This offering, with cakes of leavened bread added, he shall offer along with his thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being. Out of this he shall offer one of each kind as a gift to the Lord; it shall go to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being. And the flesh of his thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day that it is offered; none of it shall be set aside until morning.

If, however, the sacrifice he offers is a votive and disposition of the grain offerings of both unleavened and leavened cakes that accompanied the animal sacrifice, a matter not taken up elsewhere in Leviticus. It then deals with the animal sacrifice itself, the basic information for which is in chapter 3.

No leaven may be placed on the altar of burnt offerings (Lev. 2:11). Thus only the unleavened cakes are offered on the altar, not the leavened cakes.

with . . . added . . . along with Hebrew: al; literally, “on.” This preposition occurs twice in this verse, where it means “in addition to.”

one of each kind as a gift to the Lord

Sacrificial procedures in biblical Israel, and in the ancient Near East generally, often dictated that the offering first be presented to the deity for acceptance, at which time it belonged entirely to that deity. Only then did the deity grant portions of the offering to the priests and, occasionally, to the donors as well. Consequently, even in this case, in which no part of the leavened grain offering was placed on the altar, it could be considered as an offering to the Lord.

The flesh must be eaten on the day the altar sacrifice is made. If not consumed then, it must be burned. This is yet another difference between the thanksgiving sacrifice (todah) and other shirmim sacrifices.

Except in the case of a thanksgiving offering (todah), the flesh of shirmim sacrifices may be eaten until the third day, a rule also stated in 19:5–8. There were no restrictions regarding where the donor of a shirmim could eat his or her portion of the offering, so long as no person in an impure state partook of the flesh (v. 19).

should bring a todah: when one has safely completed a dangerous journey, recovered from illness, been released from confinement, or survived other dangers. The custom continues to this day in the Gemel blessing offered in the synagogue, during the Torah reading, by a worshipper who has avoided or survived misfortune. The talmudic text states that people “need” (tzrikhin) to bring a todah rather than “are obliged” to bring one, perhaps to suggest that the grateful individual brings the todah to fulfill a psychological need rather than to meet a religious obligation.

Several commentators connect the requirement that the todah be eaten on the day it is offered and on the following evening to the fact that it is brought in response to a miracle in the life of the donor. Abravanel says that if it must be consumed in a single day, the owner will invite more people to share it, thus publicizing the miracle more widely. “On being asked what prompted this feast, the host will recount some good fortune and the divine wonder it represents.” We should have confidence that each new day will produce its own miracle. Therefore, the feast celebrating a miraculous event should be confined to one day and not extended into the next. Tomorrow will bring its own miracle (Yitzhak Meir Alter of Ger). “In time to come, there will be no sacrifices except for the offering of thanksgiving, and there will be no prayers except for prayers of thanksgiving” (Lev. R. 9:7).
or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten on the morrow. 17 What is then left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be consumed in fire on the third day. 18 If any of the flesh of his sacrifice of well-being is eaten on the third day, it shall not be acceptable; it shall not count for eating organ fat (heilev) or any impure creature, and eats flesh from the Lord’s sacrifices of well-being, that person shall be cut off from his kin. 19 Flesh that touches anything impure shall not be eaten; it shall be consumed in fire. As for other flesh, only he who is pure may eat such flesh. 20 But the person who, in a state of impurity, eats flesh from the Lord’s sacrifices of well-being, that person shall be cut off from his kin. 21 When a person touches anything impure, be it human impurity or an impure animal or any impure creature, and eats flesh from the Lord’s sacrifices of well-being, that person shall be cut off from his kin.

22 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Speak to the Israelite people thus: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. 24 Fat from animals that died or were torn by beasts may be put to any use, but you must not eat it. 25 If anyone eats the fat of animals from which gifts may be made to the Lord, the person who eats

freewill offering Hebrew: n’davah, which also serves as a general term for many types of voluntary contributions to the sanctuary. Like the todah, it expresses gratitude to God and is often mentioned together with the vow (neder). 18. Because the sacrificial meat was left uneaten for an improper length of time, the sacrifice itself was not efficacious. In this verse, the penalty for eating flesh remaining from the sh’lamim sacrifice after the third day is stated merely as “bearing one’s guilt,” whereas in 19:5–8 the same offense brings on the penalty of being cut off from the religious community. 19. Beginning with this verse, the text deals more explicitly with the subject of impurity, a concern particularly relevant to the sh’lamim, because parts of it were handled by ordinary Israelites outside the sanctuary. 23. You shall eat no fat See Comment to 3:3. 24. Fat from animals that died An animal torn by beasts (i’refah) and the carcass of a dead animal (n’velah) are forbidden in their entirety (Exod. 22:30, Lev. 17:15). Hence, any part of such an animal would also be forbidden. It is likely that this seemingly superfluous rule was included here for emphasis, to reinforce the ban on eating organ fat (heilev) (see 3:16). 25. from which gifts may be made This clarifies the provisions of verse 23. The heilev of large and small cattle is forbidden, because such animals are of the kind offered as sacrifices.
And you must not consume any blood, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. Anyone who eats blood shall be cut off from his kin.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: The offering to the Lord from a sacrifice of well-being must be presented by him who offers his sacrifice of well-being to the Lord: his own hands shall present the Lord’s gifts. He shall present the fat with the breast, the breast to be elevated as an elevation offering before the Lord; the priest shall turn the fat into smoke on the altar, and the breast shall go to Aaron and his sons.

And the right thigh from your sacrifices of well-being you shall present to the priest as a gift; he from among Aaron’s sons who offers the blood and the fat of the offering of well-being shall get the right thigh as his portion.

For I have taken the breast of elevation offering and the thigh of gift offering from the Israelites, from their sacrifices of well-being, and given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as their due from the Israelites for all time.

Those shall be the perquisites of Aaron and the perquisites of his sons from the Lord’s gifts, once they have been inducted to serve the Lord as priests: these the Lord commanded to be given them, once they had been anointed, as a due from the Israelites for all time throughout the ages.

The donor of the sh’lamim had to personally participate in the presentation of the offering. Because nonpriests could not actually place sacrifices on the altar—indeed, they were banned from the adjacent area—the rite of “presentation” (t’nufah) afforded them some measure of participation in sacrifices of lesser sanctity such as this one.

The offering was raised up, in dedication to God. “Elevation offering” here is the designation for t’nufah, derived from the verb henif (lift, raise).

The priest was entitled to take the breast and the right thigh of the sacrificial animal only after God’s share of the offering (i.e., the fatty portions) had been burned on the altar.

See Comment to 7:14.
37 Such are the rituals of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the purification offering, the reparation offering, the offering of ordination, and the sacrifice of well-being, with which the Lord charged Moses on Mount Sinai, when He commanded that the Israelites present their offerings to the Lord, in the wilderness of Sinai.

8 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Take Aaron along with his sons, and the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull of purification offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; 3 and assemble the whole community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

4 Moses did as the Lord commanded him. And when the community was assembled at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, 5 Moses said to the community, “This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.”

6 Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. 7 He put the

SUMMARY (7:35–38)
37. Such are the rituals All of the rituals set forth in chapters 6–7.

the offering of ordination This probably refers to the grain offering burned on the altar by the High Priest, prescribed in 6:12–16. The ordination rites are presented in chapters 8–9.

38. This verse asserts that in the wilderness of Sinai, the Israelites already had worshiped God with sacrifices.

THE INITIATION OF FORMAL WORSHIP (8:1–9:24)

Chapters 8 and 9 offer a detailed description of the religious celebrations that mark the beginning of formal worship in ancient Israel. The origin of Israelite worship was of great importance to the priesthood because of the formidable role priests occupied in this area of Israelite life.

CONSECRATION OF PRIESTS AND TABERNACLE (8:1–36)

2. anointing oil See Exod. 30:22–25.

3. assemble the whole community The actual place of assembly was in the outer section of the courtyard, not directly in front of the tent. Only priests were permitted to advance beyond the altar of burnt offerings, which stood in the courtyard about halfway between the outer gate and the entrance to the tent proper.

6. washed them with water Washing is a universal feature of religious ritual. Beyond the obvious hygienic advantages of water, its use in ritual also serves as symbolic purification.

7. The High Priest wore a total of eight vest-
tunic on him, girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him, girding him with the decorated band with which he tied it to him. He put the breastpiece on him, and put into the breastpiece the Urim and Thummim. And he set the headdress on his head; and on the headdress, in front, he put the gold frontlet, the holy diadem—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

10Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and all that was in it, thus consecrating them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointing the altar, all its utensils, and the laver with its stand, to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Moses then brought Aaron's sons forward, clothed them in tunics, girded them with sashes, and wound turbans upon them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

14He led forward the bull of purification offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands

ments, four of which were unique to him (see Exod. 28 and 39).

8. breastpiece Made of wool and linen, with gold threads woven into the fabric, and 12 gem stones were set into the cloth, with the name of a different tribe of Israel engraved on each stone.

Urim and Thummim These were flat stones used for the casting of lots. The act of casting lots was the only form of divination permitted in ancient Israelite official worship, which normally objected to the use of omens for predicting the future.

9. headdress Ordinary priests wore turbans; only the High Priest wore the royal headdress.

10–12. In these verses we read of two parallel acts: the consecration of Aaron, the High Priest, and the consecration of the altar and the tabernacle with its vessels. Both were accomplished by the same means—anointing with the same oil. In this way Aaron, too, became a sacred vessel.

13. After the sons of Aaron were robed, the sacrifices of ordination commenced.

14. Large cattle were used in purification offerings when the entire community, or the High Priest in particular, were affected.

had been consecrated for special responsibility. Throughout the Bible, it refers only to a human priest or king. The prophets' vision of the Messiah was of a good and benevolent king who would earn peace and prosperity for the people by serving God wholeheartedly (see Isa. 11:1–9). Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism as a rule did not conceive of the Messiah as a superhuman redeemer.
upon the head of the bull of purification offering, 15 and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it in order to make expiation upon it.

16 Moses then took all the fat that was about the entrails, and the protuberance of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar. 17 The rest of the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its dung, he put to the fire outside the camp—as the LORD had commanded Moses.

18 Then he brought forward the ram of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the ram’s head, 19 and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar. 20 The ram was cut up into sections and Moses turned the head, the sections, and the suet into smoke on the altar; 21 Moses washed the entrails and the legs with water and turned all of the ram into smoke. That was a burnt offering for a pleasing odor, a gift to the LORD—as the LORD had commanded Moses.

22 He brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the ram’s head, 23 and it was slaughtered. Moses took some of its blood and put it on the ridge of Aaron’s right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 24 Moses then brought forward the sons of Aaron, and put some of the blood on the ridges of their right ears, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their feet.

15. he consecrated it in order to make expiation upon it  Expiatory sacrifices required an altar.

18–21. The function of this sacrifice was to evoke a favorable response from God before making an approach with other sacrifices.

23. blood . . . Aaron’s right ear  Dabbing sacrificial blood on certain extremities of the body is essentially a rite of purification. In this manner Aaron and his sons were purified as they entered into their new status.

24. the rest of the blood Moses dashed against every side of the altar  This is similar to what occurred during the covenantal ceremony at Sinai (Exod. 24:6–8). In the ordination of the priests, the sacrificial blood served a dual function. It purified the priests and also bound them in a covenant of service to God in the tabernacle.
right feet; and the rest of the blood Moses dashed against every side of the altar. 25 He took the fat—the broad tail, all the fat about the entrails, the protuberance of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat—and the right thigh. 26 From the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of oil bread, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat parts and on the right thigh. 27 He placed all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and elevated them as an elevation offering before the Lord. 28 Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering for a pleasing odor; it was a gift to the Lord. 29 Moses took the breast and elevated it as an elevation offering before the Lord; it was Moses’ portion of the ram of ordination—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

30 And Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it upon Aaron and upon his vestments, and also upon his sons and upon their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

31 Moses said to Aaron and his sons: Boil the flesh at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination—as I commanded: Aaron and his sons shall eat it; 32 and what is left over of the flesh and the bread you shall consume in fire. 33 You shall not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the

**27. all these** Included here among the parts of the sacrifice burned on the altar was the thigh, which belonged to the priests (Lev. 7:32). In the rites of ordination, the priests surrendered their own portion to God, because it would have been improper for them to benefit from what was offered on their own behalf. Moses, however, received his portion.

**30.** A mix of anointing oil and sacrificial blood was sprinkled on Aaron and his sons and on their vestments. This completed their ordination.

**31.** Moses instructed Aaron and his sons on how to dispose of Moses’ own portion of the sacrifice. It was vital to the efficacy of the ordination sacrifice that the priests actually partake of it.

**33.** The priests were not inside the tent but,
day that your period of ordination is completed. For your ordination will require seven days.  

34Everything done today, the LORD has commanded to be done [seven days], to make expiation for you. 35You shall remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days, keeping the LORD’s charge—that you may not die—for so I have been commanded.  

36And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD had commanded through Moses.

rather, near its entrance, in the inner section of the tabernacle courtyard. They were not to leave this sanctified area for seven days, to avoid contact with anything or anyone impure.

35. the LORD’s charge To follow the instructions given on this occasion.

33. seven days These days parallel the seven days of Creation. The existence of the tabernacle and its capacity to atone for human sinfulness and imperfection make it possible for an imperfect world to survive in the sight of a just God. The Midrash emphasizes that “if God demands absolute justice, there can be no world. If God desires a world, there cannot be absolute justice” (Lev. R. 10:1).  

36. As is often true, the parashah concludes on a positive note—in this case, by highlighting the priests’ faithful obedience to God.
The prophet Jeremiah delivered a Temple sermon (Jer. 7:1–20), in which he announced God’s judgment of doom upon the Temple and upon the nation for the people’s moral sins and for pagan worship. The first part of this haftarah follows that sermon as part of a series of prophetic rebukes. The last part of this haftarah skips ahead to the end of chapter 9 to conclude the reading on a positive note of religious instruction. The haftarah does not fulfill the usual requirement of having at least 21 verses. The Talmud justifies this situation with the laconic comment that “the topic is concluded” (BT Meg. 23b).

Rhetorical forms of negation and contrast emphasize the theme of proper action that dominates the haftarah. Thus, in the opening critique of the nation, God first says “I did not speak with them or command them” concerning sacrifices. This is contrasted with the positive assertion about “what I commanded them” to do (vv. 22–23). In this rebuke, unbidden and excessive offerings are juxtaposed with the command to follow the divine way. Similarly, at a later point, God maligns the people’s idolatrous and heinous acts of child-sacrifice, emphasizing in counterpoint that “I never commanded” such behavior (v. 31). A further example of this structure occurs in the concluding instruction of the haftarah. In it the prophet contrasts self-glorification through money and might with acts of kindness and justice. The rhetorical phrasing sharply juxtaposes false and worthless assertions of glory (al yithallel) with their positive counterpart (yithallel) and teaching (9:22–23). The harsh condemnation of cultic activity found in 7:21–22 goes far beyond the rejection of sacrifices found in 6:19–20. The people are told, in a mocking fashion, to act in a manner that blatantly contradicts the law in the Torah, which states explicitly that the burnt offerings (olot) are to be entirely consumed upon the altar (Lev. 1:1–9). Thus it is best to follow those commentators who regard Jeremiah’s words as an altogether ironic “instruction,” implying that the people may as well desecrate the burnt offering (olah) for all that it is worth, because God did not command them about burnt offerings or sacrifice during the wilderness sojourn.

This interpretation has evoked consternation and perplexity for generations of interpreters, because Lev. 7:37–38 (at the end of the parashah) states explicitly that the cultic instructions were given during the Sinai sojourn.

A solution to the problem posed by this apparent contradiction between Jeremiah and the Torah was proposed by Radak: Only the Decalogue (and not the sacrificial cult) was commanded at Mount Sinai, to teach the nation that the unconditional obligations of morality constitute the cornerstone of the Covenant. In this sense Jeremiah’s words are historically accurate and reinforce a central covenantal concern. In light of the centrality of the Decalogue, the prophet’s point would then be that voluntary (individual) sacrifices offered by people who commit acts of disobedience to the divine are as good as worthless. In fact, he suggests, they are no more efficacious than if they were offered incorrectly.

Strikingly, the final verse of the haftarah (9:23) echoes the prophet Hosea’s statement of what God desires (“I desire goodness, not sacrifice; / Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings,” Hos. 6:6). One can hardly avoid the conclusion that the Sages selected Jeremiah’s teaching in 9:22–23 as a climax to the haftarah in light of the earlier haftarah verses emphasizing God’s will and the nullity of sacrifices. Indeed, by concluding the haftarah on this note, rabbinic tradition provides a strong contrast to the teachings of the parashah, and a sharp qualification of its status.
Both the parashah and the haftarah refer to the olah (burnt offering) and to the zevah offering. Jeremiah stresses that the people were “not commanded” to offer sacrifices when they came out of Egypt. By contrast, the priestly rule ends with the specific emphasis that its regulations were “commanded” by God in the wilderness of Sinai (Lev. 7:38).

It may have been just this critique of sacrifices that attracted the Sages to Jeremiah’s word. In the years following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), the prophet’s statement that the Sinaitic covenant did not enjoin sacrifices would assuage Jewish fears that without the cult of ritual sacrifice their relationship with God was permanently impaired. Indeed, responding to just this anxiety, Yoḥanan ben Zakkaiah radically reinterpreted Judaism for a later generation when he remarked that acts of loving kindness would effect atonement “just as” the ancient sacrifices did (ARN B 4). Similarly, Jeremiah earlier emphasized that the covenantal virtues of kindness, justice, and equity are the very basis for knowing God, and for imitating His ways. The prophet’s teachings would resonate in subsequent centuries.
them, but they will not respond to you. Then say to them: This is the nation that would not obey the Lord their God, that would not accept rebuke. Faithfulness has perished, vanished from their mouths.

29 Shear your locks and cast them away,
Take up a lament on the heights,
For the Lord has spurned and cast off
The brood that provoked His wrath.

30 For the people of Judah have done what displeases Me—declares the Lord. They have set up their abominations in the House which is called by My name, and they have defiled it.

31 And they have built the shrines of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in fire—which I never commanded, which never came to My mind.

32 Assuredly, a time is coming—declares the Lord—when men shall no longer speak of Topheth or the Valley of Ben-hinnom, but of the Valley of Slaughter; and they shall bury in Topheth until no room is left.

33 The carcasses of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off. And I will silence in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride. For the whole land shall fall to ruin.

8 At that time—declares the Lord—the bones of the kings of Judah, of its officers, of

29–34. Lament and judgment for apostasy. Two crimes are named: setting abominations in the Temple and sacrificing children. Both are mentioned in connection with Manasseh (2 Kings 21:4–7). The language of this statement of doom (“For the Lord has spurned [ma-az] and cast off [va-yittosh] / The brood that provoked His wrath [evrato]”) is similar to the language bespeaking the divine rejection of the shrine of Shilo in Ps. 78:59. The common phraseology clearly derives from a rhetorical tradition of doom sayings.

33. Exposure of the dead was considered a great dishonor and desecration throughout the ancient world. The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, recording his action against Susa, the capital of

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the priests, of the prophets, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be taken out of their graves and exposed to the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven which they loved and served and followed, to which they turned and bowed down. They shall not be gathered for reburial; they shall become dung upon the face of the earth. And death shall be preferable to life for all that are left of this wicked folk, in all the other places to which I shall banish them—declares the LORD of Hosts.

9

Thus said the LORD:
Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom;
Let not the strong man glory in his strength;
Let not the rich man glory in his riches.

But only in this should one glory:
In his earnest devotion to Me.
For I the LORD act with kindness,
Justice, and equity in the world;
For in these I delight
—declares the LORD.

Elam, states that he “ravaged, tore down, and laid open to the sun” the tombs of the former kings of that place. In ancient Judah, during the same period, Josiah desecrated the tombs of the shrine of Bethel and exposed the bones (2 Kings 23:16).

Jeremiah 9:23. kindness, justice, and equity
Hebrew: besed, mishpat, and tz’dakah. The last two terms constitute a pair that recurs frequently in the Bible as both a human and a divine ideal (see, e.g., Gen. 18:19). The triad of elements is also found elsewhere for God (Ps. 33:5, 89:15) and for mortals (Isa. 16:5). This verse shows the link between these divine attributes and the covenant ideal. The triad is also recited as a core element of the covenant espousal in Hos. 2:21. Both texts link this brief covenantal summary to knowledge of God. See also Maimonides, Guide III:53.