

Kinds of Sacrifices

The sacrifices are symbolic of eating at God's table, of benefiting from His bounty. The gifts of creation, animal and vegetable. They are also means of our correcting any imbalance in our relationship with Heaven. Each kind of sacrifice has its own significance.

The first mentioned is the Olah, the burnt offering that is completely consumed. An expression of total devotion to the Master of the Universe. This has to be of the best. Cain's sacrifice failed because he brought "from the fruit of the earth." Whereas Abel brought "the best and the fattest of the flock."

Then comes the Minha, the "ease offering" which is vegetable, not animal. This was the popular sacrifice, almost everyone, no matter how poor or distressed, had this way of connecting with God and participating in the Temple service. The Olah and the Minha represent the public the ceremonial that recognizes the Divine and the ceremonial that recognizes and validates the people. The two pillars of religious life.

The Minha was linked to the Shelamim, peace offerings which "brought peace to the world" because the sacrifices themselves were shared with priests, family and friends. They were voluntary and each person gave what he could or wanted to.

Finally come the sin offerings, for actions that transgressed the laws though guilt by intent, uncertainty or accident. Asham, Asham Talui, Shogeg.

In all these one in a sense deserves Divine Wrath, even for negligence or unintentional actions that forethought might have avoided. but offers something instead. However, these also require compensation, admitting one's error and asking for forgiveness from whoever one wronged. There was no such thing as automatic forgiveness. The sacrifices were ways of showing one had accepted one's position in the human world and now wished to rectify spiritually. To cleanse, to substitute the gift, in order to start again.

The sacrifices recognize the world of God and the world of human beings and the desire to try to reconcile them both.