

Offerings

a resource for Tikkun Leyl Shavuot

Prayer on entering
a place of study

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ
ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
שֶׁתְּאִיר עֵינַי בְּמַאֲוֵר תּוֹרַתְךָ
וְתַצִּילֵנִי מִכָּל מְכַשׁוֹל וְטַעוֹת ...
כִּי ה' יִתֵּן חֲכָמָה
מִפִּי וְדַעַת וְתְבוּנָה

An invitation to learn

The tradition of studying together on Tikkun Leyl Shavuot – the eve of Shavuot – epitomises the Jewish passion for, and commitment to communal learning. The model of Chavruta – exploring Jewish texts with a partner or a group – creates a space for reflection, growth, participation, diversity and tolerance. Through this resource we hope to bring together the tradition of Tikkun Leyl Shavuot and the model of Chavruta to supplement your learning event.

These pages contain six sources which address the theme of 'Offerings' – exploring the relationship between intention and ritual, God and scripture, and the ultimate value of making offerings. Each source consists of either one or two texts, plus some discussion questions to get the conversation flowing.

It is not necessary to explore every text, nor to answer every question. You may wish to study with a partner or in a group (or both) and the session may last for twenty minutes or for hours on end ... the decisions are yours! However you choose to learn or teach the material, we hope that you will find it both stimulating and illuminating.

chavruta@limmud.org

May it be Your will

God, my God, and the God
of my ancestors,

that you guide my eyes with
the light of Your Torah

and save me from stumbling
and making mistakes ...

For God gives wisdom

and from God's mouth
come knowledge and
understanding.

THE FIRST OFFERINGS

Genesis 4:1-5

¹The man knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said "I have gained a son from God". ²And she bore a second time his brother, Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain worked the land. ³After some time Cain brought fruit of the ground as an offering to God. ⁴And Abel, too, brought the choicest of his flock and their fat. And God paid heed to Abel and his offering. ⁵And to Cain and his offering, he did not pay heed. And Cain was upset greatly and his face fell.

Definitions of words with the Hebrew root .ק.ר.ב.

קָרָבָן	sacrifice	קָרוֹב	relative	קָרָב	battle
קָרֵב	interior	קָרְבָּה	proximity	מִקְרָב	close associate
קָרוֹב	nearby	קָרְבִי	combat	בְּקָרוֹב	soon
לְקָרֵב	to bring closer	לְהִתְקָרֵב	to approach		Morfix.com

בראשית ד:א-ה

¹וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתְּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-ה': ²וַתִּסְּף לְלֶדֶת אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: ³וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיֵּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַה': ⁴וְהָבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֲלִבְהֵן וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל-הָבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ: ⁵וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו:

Points to consider

Why did Cain and Abel bring offerings to God?

What makes an offering worthy or unworthy? How did Cain know that God had not paid heed to him and his offering?

HEAR MY VOICE

Jeremiah 7:22–23

²²For I did not speak to your fathers, nor commanded them, on the day that I brought them out from the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

²³For I commanded them this thing,

saying: ‘Hear my voice, and I shall be your God, and you shall be my people. And you shall walk on each path that I shall command to you, in order that it will go well for you.’

ירמיה ז:כב-כג

²²כִּי לֹא־דַבַּרְתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא צִוִּיתִים בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצִיאִי אֹתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־דַּבְּרֵי עוֹלָה וְזֹבַח: ²³כִּי אִם־אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה צִוִּיתִי אֹתְכֶם לֵאמֹר שְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְהִיִּיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי לְעַם וְהִלַכְתֶּם בְּכָל־הַדְרָד אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָכֶם:

Moses Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 Chapter 32

These verses have been difficult for all those whose words I have read or heard. They say: “How can Jeremiah say that God did not command us concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices, seeing as most of the commandments concern precisely this?”

The intention of these verses is as I have explained to you, that He is saying: “The primary intention was only that you will know Me and not serve beings other than Me. I will be your God and you shall be My people. I commanded this – to make offerings and bring them to the Temple – only for the sake of this goal... Yet you have ignored this objective and taken hold of that which is only the means of obtaining it, since you have doubted My existence.”

Points to consider

How do you understand the opening passage from Jeremiah? Do you agree with Maimonides' interpretation?

If ritual sacrifice was once the mechanism through which the Israelites came to know God, what might we replace it with today?

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Exodus 30:11–16

¹¹God spoke to Moses, saying: ¹²When you take a census of the Israelites to register them, each shall pay to God a ransom for his life when he is registered, so that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled. ¹³This is what each who is registered shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight – twenty gerahs to the shekel – a half-shekel as an offering to God.

¹⁴Each who is registered from the age of twenty years up, shall give God's offering. ¹⁵The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving God's offering to atone for yourselves. ¹⁶You shall take the atonement money from the Israelites and assign it to the service of the Tent of Meeting; it shall be to the Israelites a reminder before God, as atonement for yourselves.

שמות ל:יא-טז

¹¹וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ¹²כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְקֻדֵיהֶם וְנִתְּנוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ לַה' בְּפֻקֹד אֹתָם וְלֹא־יְהִיָּה בָהֶם נֶגֶף בְּפֻקֹד אֹתָם: ¹³זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָל־הָעֶבֶר עַל־הַפְּקֻדִים מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל תְּרוּמָה לַה': ¹⁴כָּל הָעֶבֶר עַל־הַפְּקֻדִים מִבְּנֵי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה יִתְּנוּ, תְּרוּמַת ה': ¹⁵הָעֶשִׂיר לֹא־יִרְבֶּה וְהַדֵּל לֹא יִמְעִיט מִמַּחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתֵת אֶת־תְּרוּמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם: ¹⁶וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־כֶּסֶף הַכֶּפָּרִים מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל־עֲבֹדַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם:

Points to consider

Why might the half-shekel have been an appropriate offering in the event of the census? When might money be an appropriate offering today?

Why is it important that each of the Israelites offered the same amount?

YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY ONE

Genesis 22:1–3

¹Sometime afterwards, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him: “Abraham,” and he said: “Here I am”. ²And He said: “Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will tell you.” ³And Abraham rose early in the morning...

בראשית כב:א-ג

¹וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי: ²וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנְךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־אֵל־אַרְצַת מֹרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלֶיךָ: ³וַיִּשָׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר...

1 Samuel 1:10–11

¹⁰And she [Hannah] was bitter and prayed to God and cried and wept. ¹¹And she vowed a vow, saying: “God of hosts, if you surely see the suffering of your maidservant and you have remembered me and shall not forget your maidservant, and so give to your maidservant the seed of a child, then I will give him to God all the days of his life and no razor will come upon his head.”

שמואל א א:י-יא

¹⁰וְהָיָא מָרַת נַפְשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל־הָ' וּבָכָה תְּבֻכָה: ¹¹וַתִּדְרֹג נְדָר וַתֹּאמֶר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱסֹרָא תִרְאֶה תִרְאֶה בְּעֵינַי אֲמַתְךָ וּזְכַרְתָּנִי וְלֹא־תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־אֲמַתְךָ וְנָתַתָּה לְאֲמַתְךָ זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים וְנָתַתִּיו לָהּ פְּלִימֵי חַיִּיו וּמוֹרָה לֹא־יֵעָלֶה עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ:

Points to consider

What are the differences between Abraham's intention and Hannah's? Which do you think is more virtuous?

In what ways might we offer our children to God today?

WORDS OF PRAYER

Psalms 51:17–21

¹⁷My Lord, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise. ¹⁸For You do not want me to bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings; ¹⁹True sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God, You shall not despise a broken and crushed heart. ²⁰May it be Your will to make Zion prosper; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. ²¹Then You will want sacrifices offered in justice, burnt and whole offerings; then bulls shall be offered on Your altar.

Translation based on JPS, 1999.

תהילים נא:יז-כא

¹⁷אֲדֹנָי שְׁפֹתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ: ¹⁸כִּי לֹא־תַחֲפֹץ זָבַח וְאֶתְנָה עֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה: ¹⁹זָבַחַי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נְשֻׁבָרָה לִב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה: ²⁰הִיטִיבָה בְּרִצּוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם: ²¹אֲזַ תַּחֲפֹץ זָבַח־צֶדֶק עֹלָה וְכָלִיל אֲזַ יַעֲלוּ עַל־מִזְבִּיחַ פָּרִים:

Frequently Asked Questions, templeinstitute.org

No, the Temple Institute is not building the Temple offsite. We are building a stone altar offsite so that when the opportunity arrives we can move it to its proper location on the Mount. The Divine service, including the offerings can begin before the building of the Temple itself, once the altar is built and standing in its proper place.

The Temple Institute will wait for as long as it takes. The time for the building of the Temple certainly isn't up to us. [...]

In short, it is not “technical” issues that are holding up the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, as these can be worked out. What is needed is the will of the people of Israel, and the nations, to do what is necessary and build the house of G-d.

Points to consider

Is prayer a suitable replacement for ritual sacrifice? Why or why not?

The psalmist anticipates a return to Temple sacrifice, perhaps in the messianic age. Do you find this idea appealing?

OFFERINGS OF JOY

Mishnah Bikkurim 3:2-4

How would they bring up the first fruits? All the towns of a region would go into the regional capital and sleep in the squares... One was appointed to wake them, saying: "Arise! Let us go up to Zion, to the house of the Lord our God!"

Those who were close would bring dates and grapes and those who were far would bring dried figs and raisins. A bull would walk before them and its horns would be plated with gold and it would have an olive wreath around its head. The flute would play before them until they got close to Jerusalem... And all the artisans of Jerusalem would stand before them and greet them: "Our brothers from such-and-such a place, come in peace!"

...When they reached the Temple courtyard the Levites would speak in song: "I will extol You, God, because You have raised me up and not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me" (Psalms 30:2).

משנה ביקורים ג:ב-ד

כיצד מעלין את הבכורים? כל העירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד, ולגין ברחובה של עיר... ולמשכים היה הממנה אומר, "קומו ונעלה ציון אל (בית) ה' אלהינו":

הקרובים מביאים התאנים והענבים, והרחוקים מביאים גרוגרות וצמוקים. והשור הולך לפניהם, וקרניו מצפות זהב, ועטרה של זית בראשו. החליל מכה לפניהם, עד שמגיעים קרוב לירושלים... וכל בעלי אמניות שירושלים עומדים לפניהם ושואלין בשלומם, "אחינו אנשי המקום פלוני, באתם לשלום":

... (הגיע לעזרה) ודברו הלויים בשיר, "ארוממך ה' כי דליתני ולא שמחת איבי לי" (תהלים ל:ב):

Points to consider

Why is it important that we make offerings joyfully? Is the verse that the priests sing appropriate?

In today's world, where most of us are not farmers, what do we have to offer to God, to our community, and to one another?

Jonathan Sacks, Understanding Sacrifice

What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism and why does it remain important, at least as an idea, even today? The simplest answer – though it does not explain the details of the different kinds of offering – is this: *We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for.* That is why, when they were a nation of farmers and shepherds, the Israelites demonstrated their love of God by bringing Him a symbolic gift of their flocks and herds, their grain and fruit; that is, their livelihood. To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give. Sacrifice is the choreography of love.

rabbisacks.org/understanding-sacrifice-tzav-5776

Closing reflection

Mari son of Rabbi Huna said: אָמַר מָרִי בֶר רַב הוּנָא:
When saying goodbye to a friend, a לא יפטר אדם
person should always be מחברו אלא
in the middle of studying מתוך דבר הלכה,
some aspect of Torah with them. שמתוך
In that way their friend כף זכרו.
will remember them for it.

Talmud, Eruvin 64a

Limmud is an international community of Jewish learning founded in the UK in 1980.

Almost every week, there will be a Limmud activity or event somewhere in the world. These are organised by independent grassroots groups following shared values which include choice, diversity and volunteerism. Groups, volunteers, participants, presenters and supporters connect through the Limmud experience and by collaborations such as this Tikkun Leyl Shavuot project.

This material was collected and edited by Robin Cooke (aka Mikhael Reuven), with support from Jeremy Tabick and Robin Moss. Designed by Uri Berkowitz.

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Limmud promises that wherever you find yourself, Limmud can take you one step further on your Jewish journey.

Find out for yourself and get involved at limmud.org or limmudinternational.org

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