

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Terumah**  
**February 13, 2016**

**פרשת תרומה**  
**ד' באדר א' תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 25: 1-27:19

In this *parasha*, Hashem instructs Moshe to collect gifts from Bnei Yisrael in order to build a *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) so that Hashem can dwell among the people; Hashem describes to Moshe the vessels and structures that comprise the *Mishkan*.

The words we use to describe something make a difference. People will respond differently to being described as “stingy,” “frugal,” or “careful with money,” although these terms all have essentially shared meanings.

The Torah is very careful about its choice of words and how it names things. This week, for example, we read about the מזבח – *mizbe'ach* – the altar. Five different primary types of offerings were brought on the *mizbe'ach*; only one of them is linguistically related to the word *mizb'each* itself, and this must be significant in some way.

The primary types of offerings are:

The עולה – *olah* – Burnt Offering. This was the oldest and most common sacrifice, representing submission to God's will. *Olah* literally means “going up” as the smoke and therefore the essence of the offering rose from earth to the Throne of God. The *olah* was completely burned on the altar; no part of it was eaten by anyone since it represented complete submission to God, so the entire sacrifice was dedicated to God. An *olah* offering could be personal or communal and could be

chosen from a number of animals, depending on the means of the person offering the sacrifice. It was offered daily in the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple) and multiple times on Shabbat and *Chagim* (Jewish Holidays).

The חטאת – *Chatat* – Sin Offering. This was offered to atone for and purge a חַטָּאת – *chayt* – sin. It was an expression of sorrow and a desire to reconcile with God. It could be offered only for unintentional sins committed through carelessness, rather than for intentional sins. The size of the offering varied according to the nature of the sin and the financial means of the sinner. Some of these offerings were individual and some were communal, an expression of the interdependence of the community and the fact that we are all responsible in a way for each other's sins. For the most part, the *chatat* was eaten by the *kohen* (priests who worked in the *Beit HaMikdash*).

The אשם – *Asham* – Guilt Offering. This was offered to atone for sins people were not sure they had committed and/or a sin they might have committed. It was also offered to atone for a breach of trust. When such an occurrence happened, the person would bring an *asham* rather than a *chatat* because bringing a *chatat* was tantamount to an admission of sin, rather than a suspicion of sin. If a person found out subsequently that he or she had indeed committed the said sin, at that time he or she would bring a *chatat*. The *asham* was eaten by the *kohen*.

The זבח שלמים – *Zevach Shelamim* – Peace Offering. This was offered to express thanks or gratitude to God. A representative portion of the offering was burned on the altar, a portion was given to the *kohen*, and the rest was eaten by the family; thus, everyone received a part of this offering. This category included thanksgiving offerings, free-will offerings, and fulfillment of vow offerings. This sacrifice had nothing to do with sin, and, in fact, the Talmud in Tractate *Arachin* states that when the Third *Beit HaMikdash* is built, this will be the only class of offering brought to the Temple.

The מנחה – *Minchah* – Food and Drink Offerings. A meal offering [one made of some sort of flour] represented the dedication of the fruits of human work to God, as the substance of the offering was not a natural product, but something created from the earth through human labor. A small piece of the offering was burned in the fire of the altar and the rest was eaten by the *kohen*.

The נסך – *Nesech* – Pour Offering. This offering consisted of undiluted wine poured onto the altar, or, on the first day of *Chol HaMoed* (the Intermediate Days) of *Sukkot*, water brought up from *Mai Breichat HaShiloach*, a specific place in Yerushalayim.

There were various additional offerings given throughout the year such as *bikkurim*, the first fruits, and *challah*, a portion of baked goods given to the *kohen*. The categories described above represent the major sacrifices offered upon the altar, the *mizb'each*.

Note that only one kind of offering, זבח שלמים – *zevach shelamim*, shares a root word with מזבח – *mizb'each*, the Hebrew word for altar. This was the single animal sacrifice unrelated to sin or atoning for sin and the only animal sacrifice offered on the altar which will continue during the Third *Beit HaMikdash*. We can draw many moral lessons from this: that in the future, we will have no sin for which to atone; that the only sacrifice we will want to offer is the “Peace Offering” for thanksgiving; and that the fundamental idea of offerings is not to atone, but to thank God for the many blessings in our lives. The word *mizbe'ach* reflects the optimistic attitude surrounding much of our cultic law.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What do you think about animal sacrifices? What do you make of the fact that they were ubiquitous in the Temple periods?
- What other messages can we glean from the idea that *mizbe'ach* shares a root word with only the *zevach shelamim*?
- Were you to give an offering of thanksgiving today, what would it be for?