

Tzav Leviticus 6:7-8 צו

Context: While the instructions for sacrifices in Leviticus/Vayikra are directed toward the people, the instructions in Tzav are intended for the priests (Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *TAWC*, 593). This study sheet will specifically explore the meal offering or *mincha* offering, which was first introduced in chapter 2. The word *mincha* means gifts and shows that an offering can be thought of as a gift to God (*TAWC*, 574). Since this Torah portion adds instructions for the priest's role in offering sacrifices, Tzav not only repeats some of the same details about the *mincha* offering from Chapter 2, but adds additional details about how it shall be baked and who may eat of it.

וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הַמִּנְחָה הַקֹּרֵב אֹתָהּ בְּנֵי־אֶהֱרֹן לְפָנָי
 יְהוָה אֶל־פְּנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וְהָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ בְקִמְצוֹ מִסֵּלֶת
 הַמִּנְחָה וּמִשְׁמֶנֶהּ וְאֵת כָּל־הַלֶּבֶנָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּנְחָה
 וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יַיִם נִיחֹם אֲזַכְּרֶתָהּ לַיהוָה:

And this is the instruction of the meal offering. The sons of Aaron offer it before God at the face of the altar.
 A small portion of the fine flour from the meal offering and the oil shall be taken from it and all of the incenses that are on the meal offering shall be turned into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odor of the portion of the meal offering which is burned for Adonai.

meal offering. Hebrew *minchah*, which means “gift.” “Meal” refers to a type of grain. For the poor, offering up an animal sacrifice could be very costly. To allow all Israelites access to God through the sacrificial system, the priestly legislator created alternative sacrifice for the poor: the cereal offering. Support for this position is the attested practice in the nearby Mesopotamian cult,

which explicitly labels cereal as the offering of the poor...The most likely definition for the cereal offering is “a present made to secure or retain good will.” The emphasis, then, is clearly conciliatory. The cereal offering in scripture is of two types. First, it is an accompaniment to animal sacrifices, the required auxiliary of the burnt offering and the well-being offering...The cereal offering could also be offered by itself, in which case, according to the priestly rules, it would be accompanied by oil and, if uncooked, by frankincense. If it was cooked, the requirement of frankincense was waived as a special concession to the poor, for whom even a few grains of this precious spice would have strained their means. (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Continental Commentary*, 25-26)

instruction. Heb. *torah*, which more widely means an “instruction” or “teaching.” Rendered as “Torah” (capitalized), this term comes to represent the entire first five books of the Bible. This is the first time that the term is employed in Leviticus. (*TAWC*, 595)

shall be turned into smoke. The formula, repeated eleven times warns that this is no casual remark. Milgrom notes that in Hebrew the verb ‘to turn into smoke’ is not the same as the verb ‘to burn,’ used for non-sacrificial incineration: it means turning something into something else, smoke...In Leviticus the ‘offering is not destroyed but transformed into smoke, sublimated, etherealised.’ If the verb in this much-repeated sentences means turning everything into smoke, Milgrom is saying that the act of sacrifice is less a killing than a transformation from one kind of existence to another. (Mary Douglas, *Leviticus As Literature*, 68-69)

Questions for Discussion

1. Just looking at the text, how do you think the priestly authors may have envisioned sacrifices such as this one connecting them to God? How, if all, does the Douglas commentary affect your answer?
2. After reading the Milgrom commentary on meal offering, do you feel Leviticus adequately accounts for the poor? Can you draw any parallels to the meal offering as a means to include people of all social economic groups in contemporary Jewish practice?