

Another way to look at this is if there is a sacrificial feast, then we can be sure “atonement” is not taking place with those sacrifices. Whenever “atonement” is happening for someone, they are not feasting on the atoning sacrifice. Insofar as nobody is permitted to eat from an atoning sacrifice that is offered for them (priest or lay), it is not feasting but rather a sort of *fasting*—in the sense of not consuming the sacrifice—that is connected with atoning sacrifices. This fasting aspect of not being allowed to partake from atoning sacrifices that purge one’s own sins from the sanctuary is taken to its logical conclusion on the Day of Atonement in which fasting from all meals throughout the day is required (16:29, 31; 23:32; Num 29:7; cf. Isa 58:3).⁹ Since it is a day dedicated to *atonement* writ large, then it makes perfect sense that it would be a day dedicated to *fasting*. Fasting and atonement were so closely tethered together that the Day of Atonement became known simply as “the Fast” (e.g., Acts 27:9; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.240). Conversely, joyous *feasting*—the opposite of fasting—is connected with the non-atonement well-being sacrifices (Num 10:10). As we will see, these sacrificial feasts usually celebrate and commemorate a past act of divine deliverance. They are joyous feasts that have nothing to do with atonement.

THE PURPOSE FOR THE REGULAR BURNT OFFERINGS

This almost brings us to the purpose and occasions of the non-atonement well-being offerings, but before getting into that we need to understand the function of the regular prescribed daily burnt offerings, the *tāmīd* (Exod 29:38–46; Num 28:1–8), because these illumine the logic behind the well-being offerings.

A burnt offering is one where the entire animal—except for its hide, which goes to the officiating priest (Lev 1:6 with 7:8)—is burned up on the altar in the courtyard of the dwelling place (1:1–17). The required *tāmīd* in particular is in the non-atonement category.¹⁰ This is because (a) atonement (*kipper*) is never mentioned in relation to these, nor the other regularly prescribed burnt offerings that seem to be based on the *tāmīd* for each week (on the Sabbath), each new moon (month), and during the annual convocations (Num 28–29; cf. Lev 12:8, 12–18, 36–37).¹¹ (b) When atonement (*kipper*) is

9. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1054–58, 1065–67.

10. Similarly, Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice*, 137.

11. Atonement (*kipper*) is mentioned with respect to a burnt offering only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:24) and for the *voluntary* sacrifice from an *individual* Israelite (Lev 1:2–4). But this latter is case is peculiar for the very reason that burnt offerings in

mentioned in the catalogue of sacrifices for these festivals, it is always only linked with the specific purgation offerings (*hattā’t*, Num 28:22, 30; 29:5, 11). And (c), the only purpose that is mentioned repeatedly for all of these regular required burnt offerings is to provide “a pleasing aroma” to God (Exod 29:41; Num 28:2, 6, 8, 13, 24, 27; 29:2, 6, 8, 13, 36; Lev 23:13, 18).¹²

This last point clues us into the function of these regularly prescribed burnt offerings. Jonathan Klawans shows how the pervasive misunderstanding that all sacrifices have an atoning function have prevented some from realizing the distinctive purpose of the regular burnt offerings.¹³ As we will discuss, atonement deals with the pollution certain sins create on the sanctuary as well as the impurity certain forms of ritual impurity produce on the sanctuary, but these burnt offerings evidently have another function having nothing to do with atonement, as the above observations showcase. As Klawans puts it: “It is not that the daily sacrifice [the *tāmīd*—and I would add those other regular burnt offerings like it] undoes the damage done by grave transgression. Quite the contrary: grave transgression undoes what the daily sacrifice produces,” namely, that the *tāmīd* “attracts . . . the divine presence.”¹⁴ Given the tight correspondence between the twice-daily burnt offerings (the *tāmīd*) and the other regular prescribed burnt offerings noted above, I agree with Baruch Levine that “[t]he essential role of the ‘*ôlāh* [burnt offering] seems to have been that of *attraction*.”¹⁵

This is corroborated by one of the first laws given after ten commandments about building altars. There are only two types of sacrifices mentioned here—the burnt offering and the well-being offering—and only one purpose given: “I will come to you and bless you” (Exod 20:24 NRSV).¹⁶ We will discuss the well-being sacrifice in the next section, but it is unambiguous from this that the purpose of these sacrifices is to elicit God’s presence (and thereby God’s blessing)—hence, “attraction” is more than warranted.

This purpose for divine attraction aligns with the Hebrew word for the burnt offering, ‘*ôlā*, which “means ‘that which ascends.’”¹⁷ Thus, the “pleasing aroma” *ascends* to heaven and thereby *attracts*—in a manner of speaking—God to the altar so that he can “meet with the Israelites there” (Exod

general seem to have a non-atonement function (cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 153, 175–77). Basically, although these two particular burnt offerings can have an atoning function, the *tāmīd* burnt offerings are never said to have an atoning function.

12. Similarly, Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice*, 52–53.

13. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice*, 71–72.

14. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice*, 71.

15. Levine, *In the Presence*, 22–26, here 22; his emphasis.

16. My emphasis.

17. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 172; see also 146, 161, 173.

29:42–45, here v. 43).¹⁸ That's it. That's its function. Once the dwelling place is inaugurated (Exod 40:35; Lev 9:22–24; cf. Solomon's temple inauguration in 1 Kgs 8:10–11 and 2 Chr 7:1–2), then the purpose is probably best understood as *continuance* of this divine presence. As Klawans concludes, “The purpose of the daily burnt offering—and perhaps some other sacrifices as well—is to provide regular and constant pleasing odors to the Lord, so that the divine presence will continually remain in the sanctuary.”¹⁹

The stability of God's presence cannot be sustained by regular burnt offerings alone, however. This is why there is a need for the category of atoning sacrifices. This need for a category of sacrifice with the specific function to remove various pollutions from God's dwelling place (so that God is not driven to abandon it) already implies that these regular burnt offerings have no atoning function. Their only function is divine “attraction” so to speak through their “pleasing aroma.” And so, as Klawans summarizes, “transgression undoes what the daily sacrifice produces.”²⁰ The regular burnt offerings are *not* the sacrificial solution to sins, but rather sins pose a *problem* for what the daily burnt offerings accomplish (attracting God's presence) and for which another solution is necessary (hence the atoning category for sacrifices).

But why does burning an animal (or grain) produce a “pleasing aroma” that “attracts” God's presence? This is fairly straightforward once we realize that the ubiquitous rationale for ancient Mesopotamian and Greek sacrifice is that this provided foods for the god(s).²¹ Although the Torah (and the OT as a whole) rejects the notion that God literally “eats” the sacrifices (e.g., Ps 50:12–13),²² nevertheless the ancient notion of sacrifice as “food” is the

18. See also David's burnt offerings on an altar he built on Ornan's threshing floor in 1 Chr 21:26 (cf. 2 Sam 24:24–25) and Elijah's burnt offerings on the altar on Mount Carmel in 1 Kgs 18:38.

19. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice*, 72.

20. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice*, 71.

21. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 17, 21; Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice*, 11–13.

22. The Torah rejects the notion that God literally eats the sacrifices more obliquely. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 21: “A. L. Oppenheim succinctly characterized Mesopotamian religion as ‘the care and feeding of the god.’ We owe Israel's priesthood for eviscerating every trace of this notion from the sacrificial system. Pagans regularly set food and drink on their god's table, but the Priestly legists banned all food rites inside the shrine [i.e., the dwelling place proper: the holy place and most holy place]. All sacrifices were to be offered on the outer altar in the open courtyard . . . , visible to all worshipers and removed from the tent, YHWH's purported domicile. The text specifically prohibited the burnt offering (flesh), the cereal offering (bread), and all libations (drink) on the inner altar (Exod 30:9). Further, the frankincense, a precious spice, offered with the bread of the Presence, is not placed on the bread, as is the case with other cereal offerings (Lev 2:1, 15; 6:8) but is uniquely set apart from it, so that the bread can be eaten in its

controlling metaphor in the Torah (Lev 3:11, 16; 21:6, 8, 17, 21–22; 22:25; Num 28:2, 24).²³ Many of these are in close proximity to the idea that these sacrifices produce a “pleasing aroma” for God (e.g., Lev 3:16; Num 28:2, 24). (Put baldly, the idea is that God senses the pleasing smell of the BBQ cookout and, like those classic cartoon portrayals, follows the smoke/scent to its source.)

In fact, the term often translated as “offering by fire” (e.g., NASB, NRSV), *'iššeh*, for the (non-atoning version of) burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the well-being offerings is best translated as “food gift.” The word *'iššeh* more than likely does not derive from the word for “fire” (*'ēš*) “but from a root meaning ‘gift’”²⁴ from Ugaritic or Arabic.²⁵ It is also connected with the priestly food portions allotted to them for their service (Deut 18:1). Further, “fire offering” is inadequate since the term *'iššeh* is not used for other sacrifices that are burned on the altar (e.g., purgation and reparation offerings) and some offerings that are *not* burned are nevertheless designated as *'iššeh* (e.g., the wine drink-offering, Num 15:10; the priest's portion from the well-being offering, Lev 7:30, 35–36; and the bread of the Presence, 24:7, 9).²⁶ The term *'iššeh* (3:3, 9, 14; 7:30) is probably an abbreviation of “food gift” (*lehem 'iššeh*) (3:11, 16);²⁷ and it is also connected to being a “pleasing aroma” (e.g., Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5, 16; 23:13, 18; Num 15:3, 7, 10, 13, 14; 28:2, 24). All of this strengthens the idea that “food” is the foundational underlying rationale of Levitical sacrifice.

At its most basic level, then, Israelite sacrifice is about preparing sacred “food” for God to consume (metaphorically) and sometimes for worshipers—priests and lay—to consume (literally) with God. The burnt offerings are solely for God to consume, but the well-being sacrifices (discussed in the next section) are consumed by God, the officiating priest, and the offerer. Risking oversimplification, the dwelling place is a divine residence outfitted with a sacred kitchen and dining space as well as a takeout restaurant (for

entirety by the priests (Lev 24:9), while the frankincense alone is burned on the inner altar (Exod 30:7–8). Thus all food gifts brought as sacrifices are conspicuously removed from the tent, YHWH's purported domicile, thereby erasing any suspicion that Israel's God consumed the sacrifices (see Psalm 50).”

23. Note also how the outer altar (rather than the literal table *inside* the holy place upon which the bread of the Presence is placed) is called God's “table” in Ezek 41:22; 44:16; Mal 1:7, 12. The “food” metaphor remains the underlying logic of sacrifice even in the postexilic period.

24. Schwartz, “Leviticus,” 197.

25. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 162.

26. Observations from Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 161.

27. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 162.

laity). Sometimes God is the only one being served a meal (burnt offerings) and sometimes lay Israelites, priests, and God are all dining together (well-being offerings).

As we will soon see, and worth noting briefly in this context, the notion of im/purity comes in as a criterion for who is fit to enter/access the holy restaurant and dine with God. And atonement comes in when this sacred kitchen and restaurant gets contaminated and needs to be purged/disinfected. Crucially, the concept of "food" nearly disappears with the atoning sacrifices. The word *'iššeh* "is not used for the purification and reparation offerings, [since these] are not gifts but rituals of expiation."²⁸ Or, as Milgrom explains, "[an atoning] sacrifice that purges the sanctuary of the pollution caused by the accumulation of sin . . . can hardly be called a gift. Conversely, because the burnt offering functions primarily as a gift . . . , there is no better designation for it than *'iššeh*."²⁹

This further supports the above criterion for distinguishing between atoning and non-atoning sacrifices: what is eaten by the laity cannot be an atoning sacrifice. Hence the notion of "food" is dropped when discussing the atoning sacrifices in Leviticus. Only when a sacrifice does not have an atoning function is it labeled a "food gift" (*[lehem] 'iššeh*).

Furthermore, this means that the atoning function of these other sacrifices gains its larger significance from the more basic "sacred food" rationale of sacrifice. That is, the atoning sacrifices come in to solve the problem of potentially being barred for various reasons (either due to sins contaminating the dwelling place and/or ritual impurities contaminating both the dwelling place and the person) from both providing God his "food"/"pleasing aroma" and having a sacred meal with God.

Keeping with the residence-restaurant image, atonement is what is needed for this holy residence-restaurant to maintain its grade A health score. The place itself (the dwelling place), its butchers, cooks, and servers (the priests), and its customers (the people) all need to be in a state of purity for the sacred meals to happen. Atonement rituals decontaminate the dwelling place and ritual purity regulations ensure that human beings (both priest and lay) are fit to access the sacred space and foods.

We are getting ahead of ourselves, however. In any case, now that we understand how the inauguration of the dwelling place and then all the regular burnt offerings are what "attract" God's presence and how this is

28. Schwartz, "Leviticus," 197. But see Num 15:25, which may be the lone exception (that proves the rule).

29. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 162.

all tethered to the notion of sacred meals, we can discuss the purpose and occasion of both the voluntary and required well-being sacrifices.

THE PURPOSE AND OCCASIONS FOR THE WELL-BEING OFFERINGS

It is now easy to understand the function of the well-being offerings (*šəlāmîm*) since the regular burnt offerings function to "attract" or "invite" God's ongoing presence at the dwelling place. Since God is the only one "consuming" the burnt offerings, it makes sense that there would be a type of offering from which the offerers share in as well. This is what the well-being sacrifices are. As Gary A. Anderson explains:

The role of human consumption constitutes the primary level of meaning for this sacrifice and helps to explain why the *'ôlâ* and the *šəlāmîm* are routinely paired in biblical (and Ugaritic) ritual. The *'ôlâ* was the sacrifice that constituted the basic nourishment for the deity, while the *šəlāmîm* in turn nourished the people.³⁰

Moreover, the function and sequential priority of the burnt offering supports this understanding. From what we can observe from the Hebrew Bible, in practice the well-being sacrifices always come *after* a burnt offering.³¹ As Levine illuminates, "this pattern reveals . . . [the] meaning of the *šəlāmîm*" by how the burnt offering "invited the deity to a common, shared sacrificial meal [which will be the well-being sacrifice] after he had been invoked by means of an *'ôlâh*."³² This brings us back to Exod 20:24 where only these two sacrifices are mentioned and the sole purpose is inviting God's presence to the altar for divine blessing.

Moreover, the term *šəlāmîm* is an umbrella category for three distinct sacrifices (thanksgiving, freewill, vowed offerings, Lev 7:11-21). Before getting to the distinctions, as a main category, the well-being offerings can be either private (for a family or clan unit) or public (communal) (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.224). A public well-being sacrifice marks or commemorates

30. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings," 879.

31. This is the case whether individual worshipers come with both an individual burnt offering and a well-being offering or if they simply bring a well-being sacrifice, since the morning *tāmîd* is always the first sacrifice of any given day. And, at public communal festivals the burnt offerings are always offered first and then the well-being ones come after (see, for example, the two very important public events, the covenant inauguration at Sinai in Exod 24 and the inauguration of the dwelling place in Lev 9). No matter what, a burnt offering *always precedes* any well-being offerings.

32. Levine, *In the Presence*, 26.