

Tzav - The Zevah Shelamim: Things We Do Ourselves and Things We Delegate to Others
 Rabbi Eliot Malomet March 28, 2026 10 Nisan 5786 Shabbat HaGadol

We can be forgiven for our confusion and sense of alienation regarding sacrifices. Nevertheless, occasionally we can find a detail that invites our attention. Case in point: the *zevah shelamim*. Translated variously as: *peace-offering*, or *sacrifice-of-well-being*, or *sacred-gift-of-greeting*, it is the sacrifice that a person brings to God as an expression of *joy and gratitude* for any good things that befall us: deliverance from captivity, recovery from illness, an important milestone, or the birth of a new grandchild, etc. One could ask (with *mah-nishtanah* cantillation):

How is this sacrifice different from all other sacrifices?

Olah.	Burnt offering.	Completely burned on the altar.
Minhah.	Grain offering.	Portions burned, portions consumed only by priests.
Hatat.	Sin offering.	Portions burned, portions consumed only by priests.
Asham.	Guilt offering.	Portions burned, portions consumed only by priests.
Zevah shelamim.	Peace offering.	Portions burned, portions consumed by the priests and also by the person bringing it.

Thus, the *zevah shelamim* has a unique characteristic: *the person who brings it is permitted to eat it together with other non-kohanim*. It has less sanctity than the "weightier" sacrifices, the *olah, minhah, hatat and asham*, and belongs to the category of sacrifices that the mishna calls, *kodashim kalim* - the "lighter" sacrifices. It is the kind of offering that anchors a feast. **Example:** The *Korban Pesach* (the Passover sacrifice described in Exodus 12) was a type of *zevah shelamim* because it was to have been *prepared and eaten* by ordinary Israelite families on the eve of the Exodus. The Torah adds one more detail to *zevah shelamim* sacrifice (Lev. 7:29-30):

...המקריב את זבחה שלמיו לה' נביא את קרבנו לה' מזבח שלמיו. ידיו תביאנה את אשיו ה'...

...He who brings near his sacrifice-of-shalom for God is to bring his near-offering himself to God, from his sacrifice-of-shalom; his [own] hands are to bring the fire-offerings for God.

Meaning, if you bring this type of sacrifice **you don't get the kohanim do them on your behalf**. **You** are the one who presents it directly, **together** with the kohanim. Baruch Levine (JPS Torah Commentary, Leviticus) writes:

...the donor of the shelamim sacrifice must actually participate in the presentation of the offering [himself]. In contrast to the "most sacred offerings" [like the olah, the minha, the hatat or the asham] discussed in 6:1-7:10, at which only priests officiated, the presentation of the shelamim sacrifices was to involve ordinary Israelites as well. (p. 46)

¹ The Levy's Rye Bread campaign was created in 1961 and was a feature ad in NY and elsewhere throughout the 70's. Ranked 58th in the *Advertising Age* "Top 100 Advertising Campaigns" of the 20th century, it was created by Judy

Now that little detail is interesting. All other sacrifices are handled by the kohanim. **But the zevah shelamim is handled by the ordinary Israelite donor.** Because it has a lesser status of sanctity, the severe restrictions as to who

You don't have to be Jewish



to love Levy's
real Jewish Rye

could handle it do not apply. To paraphrase the Levy's Rye Bread ad campaign:¹ **You don't have to be a kohen to present a zevah shelamim. Or to put it another way: to express joy and gratitude you don't need anybody else but yourself.** In the sacrificial system, the really holy stuff like burnt, gift, sin and guilt offerings, require a kohen. You bring your sacrifice to them and **they become your agents.** They take it from there.

But for a *zevah shelamim*, **you are intimately involved in the handling of the sacrifice**, to the point that, you, the donor, hold onto it right up to when it is placed on the altar, as the kohen supports you with his hands under yours. For the high sanctity, high "voltage" sacrifices, the kohanim, the "professionals," need to be involved because so much is at stake. The wellbeing of the entire community depends on the proper disposition of your guilt and your atonement. But for joy and gratitude, you don't need that level of "professionalism" and sanctity. You get to act as your own agent. **No one else can express your thanks for you as well as you can. Therefore, you must do it yourself.**

¶ **Do-it-yourself vs. delegation-to-others (shlichut) in Judaism.** Do-it-yourself mitzvot such as *tallit, tefillin, lulav*, or personal prayer are performed by the individual to fulfill the individual's own responsibility. But some mitzvot can be fulfilled by delegating someone else (a *shaliach*) to do them on our behalf. Examples: **Circumcision.** Very few of us know how to do this. Therefore, we delegate the mitzvah to a mohel. Typically, the mohel will turn to the parent (at the crucial point in the ceremony) and say: **Do you authorize me to be the mohel for your son, or do you want to perform the mitzvah yourself?** To which the often-terrified parent says: **I hereby appoint you to be my shaliach in the mitzvah of circumcising my son. Divorce and Marriage.**

When a marriage dissolves, the Torah mandates the husband to present a Get, the document declaring the dissolution of the marriage, to the wife. But very often, the transmission of the Get cannot take place in person. In these cases, the husband dispatches a *shaliach*, or a series of *shlichim*, to deliver the Get to the wife in the presence of witnesses. In talmudic and medieval times, a man could

Protas (1922-2014) and resulted in a huge increase in sales of Levy's bread. As many people will remember, it consisted of a whole series of posters and inspires knock-off copycatting to this day.

actually delegate a *shaliach* for the purpose of enacting a betrothal! **Tzedakah.** To this day, when people travel to Israel it is customary to give them *tzedakah* so that they can distribute it to the poor there on our behalf. We designate them as our *shlichei-tzedakah.* **Chametz.** While we are all required to get rid of our chametz prior to Passover, it is often impossible to do so without incurring financial loss. The tradition's workaround for this is the sale of chametz to a non-Jew. While any individual can do this on their own, following a simple set of instructions, the common practice today is to delegate the rabbi of the community as our *shaliach* to sell our chametz with the instrumentality of what is essentially a Power of Attorney (**remember to do this by Wednesday, April 1 at 10:30 a.m.). Kaddish.** A question comes up all the time: Can we hire or delegate someone to say Kaddish on our behalf? In his authoritative and popular *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning,*² the otherwise imperturbable Rabbi Maurice Lamm, z'l, acerbically and caustically denounces of this practice:

No person may be hired to say Kaddish in the place of a living son whether the designated person is very pious or moral or scholarly or a rabbi or a cantor or sexton. The Kaddish is not a magical incantation some exalted abracadabra that opens the gates of Heaven and that needs saying no matter by whom. The son's paying for the Kaddish rather than praying it defeats every conceivable purpose of the sacred prayer. No value can be achieved by transferring this personal religious responsibility to a paid emissary...A bought Kaddish will only reflect adversely on the parent who child has no time or patience for the reverence he should give.

Ouch! But notice: **we can actually draw a do-it-for-yourself arc of continuity from the zevah shelamim to the Kaddish.** *If joy is something that you cannot delegate to a kohen to express on your behalf, then it stands to reason that sorrow, grief, and the transition from bereavement to post-bereavement is also something that cannot be delegated.* If in biblical Israel a *zevah shelamim* channels joy into a shared sacrificial meal, in rabbinic Judaism *Kaddish* channels sorrow into a daily obligation of prayer that lasts for the duration of the mourning period. **The Bottom Line: The deepest yearnings of the spiritual life cannot be delegated to others. We must express them ourselves.** ¶ **The Era of Artificial Intelligence.** It seems obvious that we cannot get AI to pray or perform mitzvot on our behalf. But in the spiritual realm, AI can do many things that are simply unbelievable. Take for example, one

² Since its original publication in 1969, Rabbi Lamm's book has been the go-to guide for the basic practices of Jewish mourning. ***I wrote this book in desperate hope that people would not shrug off Jewish mourning practices.*** At the time it fulfilled the need for a clear, articulate and compassionate description of how a Jew mourns and explained the underlying halakhic and theological principles of Jewish mourning. He revised it in 2000 incorporating changes in medicine, technology, and Jewish life. Close to 30 years after his second edition, dozens of mourning

of the primary domains of Jewish religious and spiritual life: the study and teaching of Torah. With just a simple prompt or question, we can get AI platforms to churn out very compelling Divrei Torah, intricate analyses of talmudic discussions and concise and coherent responsa. It is mind-blowing and terrifying. On the one hand, AI is an extraordinary tool in helping us understand and interpret Torah. But on the other hand, it threatens our integrity and our genuinely human role in the transmission of the tradition. Are we going to rely on AI to transmit our sacred texts and teachings, as opposed to real human teachers? Already we find ourselves wondering whether we are reading AI-generated material or the genuine writing of an real human heart and soul. Are encountering something produced by hours of real struggle and effort or a click that took a millisecond? Is what we are reading real or fake?³ In the age of AI, the teachers of Torah will either be authentic people of learning and wisdom or outright charlatans. ¶

Each of Us Must Tell the Story of the Exodus Ourselves.

We cannot discharge this obligation through the agency of others. The *Sefer Hahinukh*, (a 13th century Spain compendium of mitzvot) articulates this idea beautifully:

מצוה כא: מצות ספור יציאת מצרים: לספר בענין יציאת מצרים בליל ט"ו בניסן, כל אחד כפי צחות לשונו...

Mitzva 21: The commandment to recount the exodus from Egypt: (We are commanded) to recount the exodus from Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan (the first night of Pesach) — each person according to their own linguistic capability...

Like our ancestors who offered the *zevah shelamim* sacrifice, when it comes to recounting the story of the exodus, we need to recount it to the best of our abilities, **each of us in our own way.** Passover emphasizes that we are a storytelling people, constantly discovering and re-discovering who we are in the process. Though we are here in HP in 5786-2026, we have to see ourselves as if we ourselves left Egypt in 2448, 3338 years ago, or thereabouts! By telling the story of our liberation over and over, we are constantly renewing our freedom. **Shabbat Shalom!**

With joy and gratitude, we celebrate the arrival of Yaara Aviv, born to Naama and Jacob Zucker!
מזל טוב! Rabbi Eliot Malomet and Kim Pimley מזל טוב!

On this 29th day of war, we pray that God protect the IDF and US forces in their efforts to defeat a tyrannical regime and create a new future for Israel, the Iranian people, the region and the world. AMEN!

manuals have been added to the Jewish bookshelf, but Rabbi Lamm's is still the one that defined the genre. Soon we will probably need an even newer edition! The quote is on p. 164 of the Revised Edition.

³ Will an AI generated responsum be halakhically binding? We need to update Mordecai Kaplan's definition of Judaism for the AI age: ***Judaism is an evolving human religious civilization created and augmented by real human beings.***