

Leviticus 1:1-4

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֶרְבַּן לַיהוָה מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה מִן־הַבְּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת־קֶרְבַּנְכֶם: אִם־עֹלָה קֶרְבַּנוּ מִן־הַבְּקָר זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיבוּ אֶל־פֶּתַח אֵהָל מוֹעֵד יִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לְרֹצְנוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: וְסָמַר יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הָעֹלָה וְנִרְצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו:

Adonai called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them: If one from among you presents an offering to Adonai from the beasts, from the cattle, or from the flock, you shall offer your offering. If his burnt offering is from the cattle, they shall offer an unblemished male; at the opening of the Tent of Meeting he shall offer it, to satisfy the will of Adonai. He shall place his hand on the head of the burnt offering, so it shall be acceptable as pardon in his behalf.

Leviticus 5:1-6

וְנִפְשׁ כִּי־תִחַטָּא וְשָׁמְעָה קוֹל אֱלֹהִים וְהוּא עֵד אֹךְ רָאָה אֹךְ יָדַע אִם־לֹא יִגִּיד וְנִשְׁאָ עוֹנוֹ: אֹךְ נִפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּגְעַל בְּכָל־דָּבָר טָמֵא אֹךְ בְּנִבְלַת חַיָּה טָמְאָה אֹךְ בְּנִבְלַת בְּהֵמָה טָמְאָה אֹךְ בְּנִבְלַת שָׂרָץ טָמֵא וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא טָמֵא וְאִשָּׁם: אֹךְ כִּי יִגַּע בְּטַמְאָת אָדָם לְכָל טַמְאָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִטְמָא בָּהּ וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא יָדַע וְאִשָּׁם: אֹךְ נִפְשׁ כִּי תִשְׁבַּע לְבָטָא בְּשִׁפְתָיִם לְהַרְעֵ | אֹךְ לְהִיטִיב לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִבְטָא הָאָדָם בְּשִׁבְעָה וְנִעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא יָדַע וְאִשָּׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה: וְהָיָה כִּי־יִאָשֵׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה וְהִתְנַדָּה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלָיָהּ: וְהִבִּיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא נִקְבָּה מִן־הַצֹּאן כִּשְׂבָה אֹךְ־שְׁעִירֵת עֲזִים לְחַטָּאת וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הִכְהֵן מִחַטָּאתוֹ:

If a person incurs guilt—When he has heard a public oath, and he is a witness or saw or knew of the matter, if he does not tell of it he incurs guilt. Or if a person touches any unclean thing, or the carcass of an unclean being, or the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of an unclean creeping thing, but it was hidden from him and then he realized his guilt; or when he touches human uncleanness--any uncleanness through which he becomes unclean--but it was hidden from him and then he realized his guilt; or when a person utters an oath for good or bad, whatever a man shall utter as an oath, but it was hidden from him and then he realized his guilt in any of these matters--when he realized his guilt in any of these matters, he shall confess his sin; and he shall bring as his penalty for Adonai--for the sin which he has sinned--from among the flocks, a female sheep or goat as a sin offering; and the priest shall pardon him for his sin.

Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno (Italy, active 16c.), commentary on Lev. 1:2

“If one from among you draws close” to God (*NB: “draws close” and “presents an offering” are from the same root, k-r-v*) by means of a confession of his sins and by humbling himself. The concept parallels the verse in Hosea 14:3, “we will pay with bulls after having done so first with our lips.” Psalm 51:19 warns “an offering of sacrificial

meat is only accompanied by a broken spirit.” The psalmist means that God is not interested in the fools who offer sacrificial animals if they have not first humbled themselves. Our sages paraphrase this when pointing out that the Torah does not write here “your entire selves,” but “something emanating from you,” that is by excreting the spiritually unworthy parts of you.

Maimonides (Spain, Israel, and Egypt, active 12c.-early 13c.), Laws of Repentance

For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones; but for transgressions of one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until they have made peace with one another.

Marge Piercy (United States, b. 1936), excerpt from “How divine is forgiving?”

It’s a nice concept  
but what’s under the sculptured draperies?  
We forgive when we don’t really care  
because what was done to us brought unexpected  
harvest, as I always try to explain  
to the peach trees as I prune them hard,  
to the cats when I shove pills against  
the Gothic vaults of their mouths.

We forgive those who betrayed us  
years later because memory has rotted  
through like something left out in the weather  
battered clean then littered dirty  
in the rain, chewed by mice and beetles,  
frozen and baked and stripped by the wind  
till it is unrecognizable, corpse  
or broken machine, something long useless.

...We forgive mostly not from strength  
but through imperfections, for memory  
wears transparent as a glass with the pattern  
washed off, till we stare past what injured us.  
We forgive because we too have done  
the same to others easy as a mudslide;  
or because anger is a fire that must be fed  
and we are too tired to rise and haul a log.