

Introduction to Tractate Hagigah

At the pilgrim festivals, Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles, Israelites are called to Jerusalem to be seen by, and to rejoice before, the Lord. Now the engagement entails not repentance and atonement, but celebration, and the act of rejoicing encompasses the eating of meat. The three requirements—appearing before God, keeping a feast to the Lord, and rejoicing—are made explicit in Scripture in Exo. 23:17, Deu. 16:15, and Deu. 16:14, respec

- I. The appearance-offering, festal-offering, and peace-offering of rejoicing
 - A. Liability, cost
 - B. The festal offering and the Sabbath
- II. The rules of cultic uncleanness as they affect ordinary folk and “Holy Things”
 - A. Gradations of strictness of rules of uncleanness
 - B. Holy things and the festival

The law of Scripture takes up the pilgrims’ complementary obligations of sacrifice and cultic purity. The Israelite is to be seen in the Temple court on the feast with an obligatory whole-offering (birds or cattle): “None shall appear before me empty” (Exo. 23:15). Keeping the feast furthermore means presenting a peace-offering when one makes his appearance on the first festival day of the feast. The duty of rejoicing involves a peace-offering in addition to the festal peace-offering: “the peace-offering of rejoicing in the feast,” in accordance with Deu. 27:7: “And you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God.”

The law of tractate *Hagigah* accordingly deals with two closely related topics on the single theme of the occasions on which common folk come to the Temple, that is, the pilgrim festivals. This law is devoted first to the festival-offerings, and second, to the conditions of cultic cleanness that pertain to and govern the right to consume part of the meat of those offerings. Three pilgrim festivals draw not only priests and Levites, but also the ordinary people, to the Temple. The pilgrims’ three offerings called for by the pilgrimage are:

- (1) an appearance-offering or burnt-offering, which yields no food either for the sacrificer (the one setting aside the sacrifice) or for the sacrificer (the one physically sacrificing the sacrifice);
- (2) the festal-offering (*Hagigah*), which falls under the rules of peace-offerings and yields meat for the sacrificer; and
- (3) the peace-offerings of rejoicing, subject to the same law as the festal-offering. Since the ordinary folk are going to eat sacrificial meat, they have to make themselves ready to consume food possessing the status of “Holy Things.” The law then encompasses not only the pertinent offerings but the rules of cleanness that govern on the occasion of the festivals.

The attitude of the pilgrim governs in the rite of purification. The effect of his act of purification through immersion is dictated by the attitude with which he immerses himself. If one was unclean and immersed oneself with the intention of becoming clean, that serves.

One who immerses in order to rise up from uncleanness to cleanness, lo, this person is clean for all purposes. One who immerses—if he had the intention of becoming clean, he becomes clean. And if not, he remains unclean. As it states in *Hagigah* (as taken from the Mishnah):

[If] he immersed for eating food in the status of Holy Things and is thereby confirmed as suitable for eating food in the status of Holy Things, he is prohibited from engaging in the preparation of purification water. [If, however], one immersed for the matter requiring the more stringent rule, he is permitted to engage in the matter requiring the less stringent rule. [If] he immersed but was not confirmed, it is as though he did not immerse.

Mishnah Tractate *Hagigah* 2:6D–F