

Introduction to Tractate Menahot

The written Torah specifies numerous offerings of grain, wheat, or barley, and these numerous offerings serve diverse occasions. *Menahot* homogenizes these. It affords recognition only to two distinct grain offerings; the offering of the first barley (*'omer*) of the new agricultural season (from the advent of the full moon of the month Nisan through Pentecost) and the two loaves and show-bread placed on the altar at Pentecost. All of the other diverse meal-offerings are encompassed within a common set of rules. These impose modes of differentiation, in the place of Scripture's.

- I. Reprise of the principles of *Zebahim* on improper intention and the invalidation of meal-offerings
 - A. Reprise of *Zebahim*
 - B. Other rules of invalidation of meal-offerings
- II. The proper preparation of meal-offerings
 - A. General rules
 - B. The meal-offering that accompanies the thank-offering
 - C. Sources of flour, oil, and wine used for the meal-offering
 - D. Measuring the materials used for the offering
- III. Special meal-offerings
 - A. The *'omer*
 - B. The two loaves of Pentecost and the show-bread
- IV. Vows in connection with meal-offerings

Menahot specifies five classes of votive cereal offerings:

- (1) a meal offering of fine flour; a meal offering baked in the oven in two forms,
- (2) cakes and
- (3) wafers;
- (4) a meal offering made in a griddle; and
- (5) a meal offering made in a pan.

All are subject to the same governing regulations: a tenth ephah of fine flour and a log of oil. The principal pertinent verses of Scripture are these: Lev. 2: 1–13, 6:14–18, and 7:9–10. Obligatory meal offerings, in addition, include these: the meal offering of a poor sinner by reason of the sins specified (Lev. 5:11–13); the meal offering of jealousy, presented by the woman accused of adultery (Num. 5:15); the meal offering of the anointed priest or the cakes of the high priest presented every day (Lev. 6:13–16); the meal offering brought with drink offerings along with whole offerings of peace-offerings brought by reason of vows or as votive offerings (Num. 15: 2-16), with daily whole offerings and additional offerings (Num. 28: 5), with the whole offering of a bullock (Num. 15:24), with the offerings of a Nazirite (Num. 6:15), with the offerings of the *'omer* (first barley) and with the two loaves of show-bread (Lev. 23:13, 18); with the offerings of the person healed of the skin ailment (Lev 14:10); with the two loaves and the show bread (Lev. 23:15–17, 24:5–9); and so on.

For its part, the law of the Mishnah and the Talmud proceeds from the general to the differentiated. First of all, the law sets forth rules for meal-offerings of all categories and classifications, however prepared and for whatever purpose. Second, it turns to general rules for the presentation of meal-offerings, e.g., the source for the grain, oil, and wine; the character of the measuring cups that are used for them all; and the like. It turns, third, to the special public offerings, the '*omer* and the counterparts for Pentecost. At the end, *Menahot* reviews the language that is used for vows for votive offerings, and how that language is to be interpreted.