

## Introduction to Tractate Tamid

The daily whole offering, *Tamid*, is set forth at Num. 28: 3–4: “This is the offering made by fire that you shall bring to the Lord: male lambs of the first year, unblemished, two each day, for a continual burnt-offering. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer at dusk.” The Mishnah narrates the rite, and the Talmud glosses the Mishnah:

- I. The priests arise in the morning and clear the altar of ashes
  - A. The priests in the morning
  - B. Clearing the altar
- II. Selecting the lamb for the daily burnt-offering
- III. Clearing the ashes from the inner altar
- IV. Slaughtering the lamb
- V. Blessing the congregation, placing the lambs on the altar
  - A. Prayer: a blessing, the Ten Commandments, and a blessing
  - B. Carrying the lambs to the altar
- VI. Clearing the ashes and disposing of them
- VII. Tossing the lambs on the altar

What is at issue in the daily whole-offering? The Tosefta makes explicit what is at stake in the matter:

They exact pledges from Israelites for their *sheqels*, so that the public offerings might be made of their [funds]. This is like a man who got a sore on his foot, and the doctor had to force it and cut off his flesh so as to heal him. Thus did the Holy One, blessed be he, exact a pledge from Israelites for the payment of their *sheqels*, so that the public offerings might be made of their [funds]. For public offerings appease and effect atonement between Israel and their father in heaven. Likewise we find of the heave-offering of *sheqels* which the Israelites paid in the wilderness, as it is said, *And you shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel [and shall appoint it for the service of the tent of meeting; that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for yourselves]* (Exo. 30:16).

Tosefta *Sheqalim* 1:6B–E

So what the daily whole offering purchased by the half-sheqel accomplishes is to form of all Israel a single entity before God: all have sinned, all atone, together. Of this, the law of *Tamid* knows nothing. Here is a case in which free-standing law bears no message beyond its own information, answers no question through the provision of its data. *Tamid* represents a category that does no more than amplify and clarify a topic introduced by Scripture. Scripture has offered a premise of considerable promise: the daily whole offering atones for all Israel. The one noteworthy point—the introduction of canonical prayer into the Temple rite in the fifth section—registers its presence but leads nowhere.