

## Introduction to Tractate Temurah

Israel relates to God at the altar in such a way that God hears and responds to Israel's declaration of intentionality. For example, God hears and responds to a person's intention and desire to sanctify a given animal for a specified sacred purpose. Can Israel then change its mind, using the words of sanctification to revise the classification of an already-classified beast? Is it possible, for example, for Israel, endowed after all with the power to use words to classify beasts for holy purposes, to change its mind, substituting one animal for another, sanctified one? Building upon Scripture, the law of *Temurah* underscores the limitations that God sets upon Israel's command of transformative language. Once the Israelite has made a statement, he cannot nullify it; nor can he change his mind, declaring profane a beast designated as holy and replacing that beast with some other. Scripture is explicit that the beast designated as a substitute becomes holy and the beast that was already consecrated remains holy (Lev. 27:10).

- I. The rules of substitution: who may substitute, and to what end
  - A. Liability to the law of substitution
  - B. Exemptions from the law of substitution
  - C. The individual's offerings are subject to the law of substitution; those of the community are not
- II. The status of the offspring of substitutes
  - A. Diverse sacrifices, their substitutes and offspring
  - B. The supererogatory sin-offering
- III. The language used in effecting an act of substitution
- IV. Formal appendix

The law of the Torah itself contains few complications. If one sanctifies a beast to the Temple, that act of sanctification is indelible. One may not substitute an unconsecrated beast for a consecrated one, e.g., intending to deconsecrate the consecrated beast by the replacement. If one does so, the beast designated as a substitute takes on the status of the consecrated beast and is itself sanctified, while the beast for which the substitute was identified retains its status as holy. Lev. 27: 9–10 states the law in so many words: "If it is an animal such as men offer as an offering to the Lord, all of such that any man gives to the Lord is holy. He shall not substitute anything for it or exchange it, a good for a bad or a bad for a good; and if he makes any exchange of beast for beast, then both it and that for which it is exchanged shall be holy." It follows that acts of sanctification of animals to the Temple take effect at a second remove.

The law of *Temurah* makes the point that the status of sanctification is not only indelible but immutable. Once a beast has been declared holy, within the regulations of sanctification it remains so until properly secularized, and once it has been declared holy in a given status, e.g., Most Holy Things, that status is immutable and cannot be revised to the one of lesser Holy Things. The initial act of dedication endures. The language that effects the act of sanctification produces that change in classification that turns the common into the holy, and once spoken, the words work.

The sages raise the question: What if one proposes to substitute a secular beast for a holy one? Such an exchange not only produces no result as to the status of the already-holy beast, but it also imparts the status of sanctification to the beast declared holy as a substitute. As the Torah insists, the holy one then serves as a governing metaphor: the secular beast becomes like, enters the status of, the already-holy beast. But the already-holy beast does not lose its status of sanctification.