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The Animalistic Gullet and the Godlike Soul: Reframing Sacrifice in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah

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Abstract: *This article proposes an analysis of two homiletic units in the Palestinian Midrash Leviticus Rabbah, which revolve around biblical chapters pertaining to sacrifices. A theme that pervades these units is that of eating as an animalistic activity that often entails moral depravity. In contrast, the act of sacrificing is constructed in these units as one in which one is willing to give up one's own nourishment, and in a sense one's own "soul," in order to offer it to God. Many of the motifs used to vilify eating in the Midrash can be traced in moralistic Greek, Roman, and early Christian diatribes preaching for moderation in eating or for asceticism; the homilists in Leviticus Rabbah, however, utilize these popular motifs in order to present sacrifice as the spiritual contrary of eating, and thus to give the obsolete practice of sacrifice cultural cachet and compelling meanings.*

The gradual decline and ultimate demise of sacrificial rituals in ancient Mediterranean religions is undoubtedly a critical and defining feature of the period often referred to as late antiquity (150–750 CE).[1] The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, the absence of prescribed sacrificial practices in early Christian teachings (which ultimately evolved into an utter rejection of sacrifice),[2] and finally the rapid marginalization of traditional Roman sacrificial cults following the Christianization of the Roman Empire,[3] all played a role in turning what used to be a pivot of piety in antiquity into a thing of the past. Thus, in late antiquity, new and ostensibly nonsacrificial forms of worship and religious devotion were constantly being conceived and

I am grateful to Ellen Muehlberger, Yair Lipshitz, Tim DeBold, and the anonymous reader for their thoughtful comments and insights, which have greatly improved this article.

1. Here I am following a very broad definition of the span of this period, which was proposed by Peter Brown in his influential *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971). For a survey of the history of the term "late antiquity" and the unique characteristics of this period, see Philip Rousseau's introduction in *Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), xviii–xxii.

2. Daniel C. Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. On the decline of animal sacrifices in the Roman Empire in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, see Scott Bradbury, "Julian's Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice," *Phoenix* 49, no. 4 (1995): 331–56; Michelle R. Salzman, "The End of Public Sacrifice: Changing Definitions of Sacrifice in Post-Constantinian Rome and Italy," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167–86.

propagated.[4] Nevertheless, while sacrificial practices as such became more and more scarce, sacrificial rhetoric and imagery did not disappear, but rather became powerful tools for shaping and conveying new and sometimes radical religious ideas and ideals, revealing the enduring eminence of sacrifice as a critical structuring principle in both Jewish and Christian thought.[5] As Guy Stroumsa cogently put it, both Judaism and Christianity were formed throughout late antiquity as sacrificial religions without sacrifice.[6]

Scholars who have explored the rabbinic responses to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, and thereby to the elimination of Jewish sacrificial rituals, have shown how the rabbis presented the various religious practices that they championed—most notably prayer and Torah study, but also charity and certain forms of asceticism—as apt substitutes for sacrificial offerings.[7] Indeed, many rabbinic sources postulated that one who engages in one of these practices is considered as though he or she had offered an animal on the altar. The governing paradigm in studies of responses to the destruction is that the rabbis rhetorically used the inherited, scripturally based prestige of sacrificial offerings in order to elevate their own notions of piety and devotion, and in order to introduce new modes of religious engagement as equal, if not superior, to traditional forms of worship. While this direction of appropriation—namely, rabbinic modes of religious practice "borrowing" their esteem from sacrifices—is certainly dominant in rabbinic texts, in this article I wish to show that a reverse appropriation, in which sacrifices are valorized through reference to ideals more contemporaneous with the rabbis, is also at work in rabbinic literature.

Focusing on two consecutive textual units in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah, a Palestinian collection of homiletic materials on the book of Leviticus, which is commonly dated to the fifth or sixth century CE,[8] this article will argue that the

4. Guy Stroumsa, *The End of the Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

5. Stroumsa, *End of the Sacrifice*, 56–83; Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 7.

6. Stroumsa, *End of Sacrifice*, 78.

7. For a general overview of Jewish responses to the destruction of the temple, see Robert Goldenberg, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple: Its Meaning and Its Consequences," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume Four, The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191–205. For several notable works presenting rabbinic "substitutes" for the temple cult after the destruction, see Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, "Sage and Temple in Rabbinic Thought after the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 28, no. 4 (1997): 437–64; Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 123–35; Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198–211; most recently, see Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 37–53.

8. On this midrash, its time, and its place, see Hanokh Albeck, "Midrash Vayikra Rabbah," in *The Louis Ginsberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1946), Hebrew Section, 25–43; Mordecai Margaliot, *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah*, vol. 5 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993); H.L Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Marcus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: T & T Clark, 1991), 288–91.

rabbis were interested not only in solidifying their own ideals through comparison to sacrifice, but also in reinforcing the idea of sacrifice itself as a central scriptural theme, by associating it with ideals that both they and their Greco-Roman and Christian contemporaries held high. More specifically, the creators of Leviticus Rabbah equate the offering of animal or grain sacrifices with voluntary relinquishment of food, while at the same time vilifying the consumption of food as entailing treachery, theft, and animal-like behavior. This insistent vilification of food and eating strongly resonates with the imagery and rhetoric used in diatribes against gluttony and in praise of moderation or asceticism in the rabbis' surrounding culture.

Thus, the rabbis in the midrash construct the act of sacrifice as diametrically opposed to the act of eating, and purposefully denigrate the latter in order to elevate the former. They establish this opposition mainly through a continuous word play between two meanings of the Hebrew word *nefesh,* which recurs in these midrashic units, a word that can mean either "gullet" or "soul." The *nefesh*-gullet that consumes food is disparaged as animalistic in nature, whereas the *nefesh*-soul that offers sacrifices while giving up its own food is praised as godlike. Hence, the act of sacrificing is constructed as a form of transformation of a person from an animalistic gullet to a godlike soul. In this presentation of sacrifice as a contrast to eating, the rabbis employ a culturally established negative attitude towards gluttony in order to valorize the increasingly obsolete notion of sacrifice, and to inject it with new and relevant meanings.

Midrash Leviticus Rabbah has long been noted for its unique way of addressing the highly technical—and at times tedious—topics in the biblical book of Leviticus. Attempting to create colorful and compelling orations[9] on a book that consists almost exclusively of detailed sacrificial and ritual manuals, the creators of this midrash chose to approach the biblical text not through the established rabbinic method of verse-by-verse exegesis, but rather through an identification of key words or themes that they used as springboards for the development of much broader topics.[10] Thus, for instance, instead of expounding on the

9. A common view among scholars was that the homilies contained in the midrash originally emerged in the setting of the synagogue, and were used during public sermons adjacent to the weekly Torah reading. This theory was first proposed by Leopold Zunz, *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1832), and was enthusiastically endorsed by Joseph Heinemann in his *Derashot be-ẓibbur bi-tkufat ha-talmud* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970). This hypothesis has been widely challenged in more recent scholarship, most prominently by Richard Sarason, "Toward a New Agendum for the Study of Midrashic Literature," in *Studies in Aggadah, Targum, and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann*, ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski and Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), 55–73; Sarason, "The Petiḥot in Leviticus Rabba: Oral Homilies or Redactional Constructions?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 557–65. For a helpful survey of the state of the debate on this question see Burton Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 10–11.

10. On the unique midrashic technique of Leviticus Rabbah see Jacob Neusner, *The Integrity of Leviticus Rabbah: The Problem of the Autonomy of a Rabbinic Document* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Visotzky, *Golden Bells*; more recently, see Tamar Jacobowitz, *Leviticus Rabbah and the Spiritualization of the Laws of Impurity* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

rules pertaining to the impurity of the parturient woman, the midrash presents a collection of traditions on the miraculous aspects of pregnancy and childbirth and God's involvement in the processes of conception and gestation,[11] and instead of scrutinizing the ritual kindling of the Tabernacle's lamp, the midrash develops the theme of light and its divine significance.[12] Through such homiletic choices, the creators of the midrash effectively generated what David Stern called a "spiritualized understanding" of the biblical book.[13] The urge for such "spiritualization" of the Levitical materials derived not only from their somewhat dry and taxing character, but also, and perhaps especially, from the fact that the most prominent theme of the book of Leviticus—namely, the sanctuary and its rituals—was practically obsolete, as noted above, in the world of Palestinian Jews in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Nevertheless, the fact that the book of Leviticus was part of the regular cycle of Torah readings in synagogues, and more broadly the fact that sacrificial imagery and vocabulary had such a prominent role in biblical and postbiblical religious language, compelled the later rabbis to find meaningful ways to engage with the theme of ritual sacrifice and sanctuary worship. In exploring the reframing of sacrifices in two *parashot* (portions, corresponding with the weekly portions of Torah reading)[14] of Leviticus Rabbah, I hope to make a contribution to the study of this unique midrash by analyzing and demonstrating some of the complex and rich ways in which its creators reinterpret biblical ideas and institutions to make them resonate with their own cultural world.

Finally, this article seeks to bring to the fore the intricate connection between sacrifice and food, a theme that has not yet been investigated in the study of the rabbinic construction of sacrifice, and to offer some directions for thinking about this relationship in the postsacrificial context of late antiquity. To be sure, throughout the ancient world sacrifices were not only media of reciprocal communication with the divine, but also opportunities to feast.[15] To offer a sacrifice was, in the majority of cases, to produce food (whether for oneself, for the priests, or for both),[16] and many of the practices associated with sacrifice were

11. Vayikra Rabbah, *Tazri'a, par. 14*, to Leviticus 12:1 (ed. Margaliot, 2:295–318).

12. Vayikra Rabbah, *'Emor, par. 31*, to Leviticus 24:1–4 (ed. Margaliot, 4:714–33).

13. David Stern, "Vayikra Rabbah and My Life in Midrash," *Prooftexts* 21, no. 1 (2001): 32.

14. The Palestinian custom of weekly Torah readings, which was practiced at the time of the compilation of Leviticus Rabbah, was not based on an annual cycle in which the entire Pentateuch is read though the course of one year. Rather, as Shlomo Naeh showed, the Palestinian cycle was designed to take three and a half years, so that the Torah reading would be completed twice in the course of seven years. See Shlomo Naeh, "Sidre kri'at ha-torah be-'ereẓ yisra'el: 'iyyun meḥudash," *Tarbiz* 67 (1998): 167–87.

15. John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 93–6. See also Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Peter Altmann, *Festive Meals in Ancient Israel: Deuteronomy's Identity Politics in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

16. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Domestication of Sacrifice," reprinted in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 145–59.

notably culinary in essence.[17] The biblical ritual system, which assumes a strong identification of the very act of eating meat with sacrificial practices, is not exceptional in this regard,[18] and echoes of the identification of all meat with sacrifices are discernible in rabbinic literature as well.[19]

In the classical world the two practices of sacrificing and eating were closely intertwined, but how did the connection between eating and sacrificing evolve in late antiquity, when food (and notably meat) was consumed regularly but no sacrificial system existed? In *parashot* 3 and 4 of Leviticus Rabbah we find a particularly interesting way of restructuring the connection between eating and sacrificing in a world without sacrifices, such that these two activities are decisively and blatantly dissociated from one another. The rabbis make clear that sacrificial offerings *could* serve as food; however, their pious offerers have chosen not to use them as nourishment but rather to bring them to God. In other words, the homilists in Leviticus Rabbah use the association of food and sacrifice to create a diametrical opposition between the two, and to offer a model in which the act of sacrifice acquires spiritual significance insofar as it entails giving one's food to God rather than to one's belly. My reading of Leviticus Rabbah, then, seeks to shed light on some alimentary aspects of the notion of sacrifice as it continues to develop in rabbinic culture, and thereby, hopefully, to open a gateway for further consideration of the connections between food and sacrifice in late antique religious cultures.

Leviticus Rabbah 3: The Poor Person's Offering and the Bird's Crop

Leviticus Rabbah is, in its essence, an anthological compilation: each one of its thirty-seven *parashot* (homiletic units that correspond with particular segments of the Torah) consists of a wide variety of self-contained rabbinic traditions. While these various traditions are often creatively and selectively redacted so as to work towards one overarching theme that is prominent in the *parashah* as a whole,[20] for the most part they are not dependent on one another.[21] The specific homiletic

17. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, eds., *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

18. The book of Leviticus prohibits any slaughter of cattle or flock not preceded by ritual sacrifice (Leviticus 17:1–10); see Baruch J. Schwartz, "Profane Slaughter and the Integrity of the Priestly Code," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996): 15–42. In contrast, the book of Deuteronomy permits such nonritual slaughter and the consumption of unconsecrated meat, but makes the point that it is primarily intended for people who cannot make it to the chosen place of worship (Deuteronomy 12:20–29). See Bernard Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23–52.

19. This view is reflected in a rabbinic tradition regarding some of the more extreme reactions to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, which included a refusal to eat meat since sacrifices are no longer offered at the altar; see T. Sotah 15:10–11 and B. Bava Batra 60a; cf. 2 Baruch 10:9–10, B. Pesaḥim 109a.

20. The thematic unity of the *parashot* in Leviticus Rabbah was especially emphasized by Joseph Heinemann, "'Omanut ha-kompoziṣiah be-midrash vayikra rabbah," *Ha-sifrut* 2 (1971): 808–34.

21. David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern (New York: Oxford University Press), 108–40; Visotzky, *Golden Bells*, 10–22.

thread in *parashot* 3 and 4, on which this article will focus, cannot, it should be stressed, be traced in each and every one of the traditions that constitute these *parashot*; rather it functions as a leitmotif within selected traditions and, more broadly, in these *parashot*'s overall structure and logic. I shall thus not present a detailed translation and exposition of the two *parashot* in full, but rather focus only on the ways in which the leitmotif of gullet/soul and food/sacrifice plays out in the midrashic materials.[22]

Each *parashah* in Leviticus Rabbah centers around one biblical verse from the book of Leviticus, which serves as a recurring point of reference throughout the *parashah* as a whole. In *parashah* 3, the core verse is Leviticus 2:1, "When a person [*nefesh*] presents an offering of cereal unto the Lord," whereas in *parashah* 4 the core verse is Leviticus 4:2, "when a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt." For the homilists, the key word in both these verses is *nefesh*, and it is through the dual meaning of this word that they make their main homiletic move. In biblical Hebrew, the word *nefesh* literally means throat or gullet, but since the throat is the place in the body in which life was thought to be located, the word *nefesh* also acquired a metonymic meaning of a living person in general, and by way of extrapolation, of the principle of life itself, commonly identified as the soul.[23] Put differently, in biblical Hebrew the word *nefesh* can be read either physically, as pertaining to a part of body—and one which is closely associated with food and eating—or spiritually, as the entity that bestows the powers of reason and deliberation on the body. In rabbinic literature, the word *nefesh* is used almost exclusively to denote either a living creature or the force of life,[24] but there are nonetheless several indications in rabbinic texts that the rabbis were quite familiar with the corporeal meaning of the word.[25] The

22. All citations and references are according to Mordecai Margaliot's edition. I have also consulted Chaim Milikowsky's online synoptic edition at http://www.biu.ac.il/js/midrash/VR/. All translations are mine.

23. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., vol.1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 711–13; see also Mayer Gruber, "Hebrew 'da'abôn nepes,' 'Dryness of Throat': From Symptom to Literary Convention," *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 3 (1987): 365–69. A similar range of meanings, from the physical throat to a living being or self, can be traced in the Akkadian usages of the word *napishtu*; see *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD) N 296a–303b. See also Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2009), 244–46.

24. On the rabbinic concept of *nefesh* or "soul" see Ephraim E. Urbach, *Ḥazal: 'Emunot ve-de'ot* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1969), 190–226; more recently, see Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Guf ve-nefesh ba-hagut ha-yehudit ha-kedumah* (Ben-Shemen: Modan, 2012), 59–67.

25. It is difficult to find rabbinic usage of the word *nefesh* itself that unequivocally refers to gullet: although there are quite a few places in which this is most plausibly the meaning of the word (as I will suggest in my reading of Leviticus Rabbah below), a metaphorical understanding of "life" or "soul" is usually also plausible (see, for example, Y. Terumot 8:1, 45c, in which disgusting foodstuffs are referred to as things that "make one's *nefesh* recoil."). However, we do find several rabbinic references to the physical throat that use the construction *bet nefesh*. For example, bird carrion is said to convey impurity to the one who eats it when it reaches one's *bet nefesh* (Sifra, *'Aḥarei mot, par.8, per. 11.2*, to Leviticus 17:15). Similarly, the biblical ordinance "And you shall afflict your souls/gullets (*ve-'innitem 'et nafshotekhem*)" is explained in the Sifra as follows: "let this affliction be in

homilists in both *parashot*, as I will suggest, play with the two meanings of *nefesh* to create a contrast between the physical gullet, presented as the location of moral atrocities, and the soul, which is explicitly said to be free of the need to eat.

Let us begin with Leviticus Rabbah 3. As is the custom of this midrash, while the point of departure of the *parashah* is the biblical verse that commences the elaboration of rules pertaining to cereal offerings, the homilists do not actually elaborate on the particularities of the cereal offering, but rather develop a specific theme that arises from the topic of cereal offerings more broadly—in this case, the fact that it is a form of offering usually brought by the poor who cannot afford animal sacrifices. The overarching theme of the *parashah*, which has been noted by scholars for its relatively high level of cohesion,[26] is the value of poor persons' offerings and sacrifices, and the merit of their devotion to God more generally.

The first three units of the *parashah* are of the literary pattern most typical of Palestinian midrash, a pattern commonly known as *petiḥta* (pl. *petiḥtot*), in which the homilist chooses a verse located in a distant part of the Hebrew Bible and artfully develops a connection between the distant verse and the local Torah verse around which the *parashah* revolves.[27] In our case, the local Torah verse, to which the homilists eventually return, is "When a person presents an offering of cereal unto the Lord" (Leviticus 2:1).

The first *petiḥta* (3.1) departs from the verse "Better is a handful of gratification than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind" (Ecclesiastes 4:6). This verse is used to invoke the notion that a small quantity of something worthwhile is preferable to a large portion of lesser quality, ultimately leading—after suggesting multiple examples to demonstrate this idea—to the statement "the Holy One blessed be He said: a handful of the poor man's voluntary cereal offering is more desirable to me than two fistfuls of the congregation's fine incense, for the latter is used for atonement and the former is not used for atonement [i.e., has no aspect of sin to it]."[28] The second *petiḥta* (3.2) departs from the verse "You who fear the Lord, praise Him … for He did not scorn nor did He spurn the plea of the poor" (Psalms 22:24–25). Following this verse, the unit makes the point that not only does God not dismiss the prayer of those of a more lowly status, He in fact heeds it first. The verse from Psalms is connected to the verse from Leviticus

the place of your soul/gullet (*be-bet nafshotekhem*), and which [affliction] is that? [Refraining from] eating and drinking" (Sifra, *'Aḥarei mot, par. 5, per. 7.3*, to Leviticus 16:31; See also Y. Yoma, 8:1 [44d]; B. Yoma 74a; B. Nedarim 81b). In a similar vein, in the Palestinian Talmud an adornment that is placed on a woman's neck is referred to as "that which is placed on *bet ha-nefesh*" (Y. Shabbat 6:4 [8b]).

26. Heinemann, "'Omanut ha-kompoziṣiah"; Norman J. Cohen, "Leviticus Rabbah, Parashah 3: An Example of a Classic Rabbinic Homily," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72, no. 1 (1981): 18–31.

27. For a helpful explanation of the genre of *petiḥta*, see Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy," 129–32. Cf. Joseph Heinemann, "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 100–22.

28. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:59). The entire *petiḥta* appears, with slight changes, in Kohelet Rabbah 4.6.

through the statement "in the same way that He did not scorn his [=the poor man's] prayer, so He does not scorn his offering."[29] Finally, the third *petiḥta* (3.3) departs from the verse "Let the wicked give up his ways, the sinful man his plans, let him turn back to the Lord and he will pardon him" (Isaiah 55:7). The verse is used to make the point that a cereal offering is highly effective for pleading forgiveness from God.[30]

Whereas two of the three *petiḥtot*, insofar as they are structured to refer back to Leviticus 2:1, specifically focus on the cereal offering as a characteristic offering of the poor, the remainder of the *parashah* ties together the cereal offering with the offering most commonly identified with the poor—the bird offering[31]—and uses both these offerings concomitantly to convey the message of God's preference for the meager offerings of the poor. The bird offering, however, is addressed in the biblical passage that *precedes* the one that discusses cereal offerings (Leviticus 1:14–17), and thus the homilist must "backtrack" in order to integrate this topic into the discussion. The midrashic unit that provides the transition from cereal offering to bird offering (3.4) focuses on the biblical requirement that before a bird is offered on the altar its crop (i.e., its esophagus or gullet) be removed. This unit is central to the gullet/soul motif in these *parashot*, and thus shall be brought here in full:

> (3.4a) What is written above of the matter [=immediately before the rules pertaining to cereal offerings]?—"He shall remove its crop with its feathers"[32] [Leviticus 1:16]. R. Tanḥum b. Ḥanilai said: that bird flutters and flies all over the world and eats in every direction [=everything], and eats of stolen and robbed items; [therefore] the Holy One, blessed be He, said: since the crop [*zefek*] is filled with stolen and robbed items, let it not draw near the altar. But [in contrast] a domestic animal [*behemah*] is nourished at the manger of its owner and it does not eat in every direction, therefore one sacrifices all of it [=without removing any part], for which it was said [regarding domestic animal sacrifice] "and the priest shall turn the whole [*'et ha-kol*] into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering" [Leviticus 1:9].[33]

The point made here is that God commands to distance the bird's crop from the altar since this part of its body, which is specifically the one into which food enters, can be charged with theft and robbery (presumably, of food belonging to

29. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:61).

30. This unit does not cohere with the overarching theme of the poor person's sacrifice, and was apparently incorporated into this *parashah* because it presents yet another perspective on cereal offerings. See Margaliot's comments, *Vayikra Rabbah*, 1:63.

31. A bird offering is explicitly mentioned as a substitute for animal offerings, available for destitute persons, in Leviticus 5:7–10, 12:8, and 14:21–23. In Leviticus 5:11–13, the cereal offering is mentioned as a substitute for those who cannot even afford a bird offering.

32. "With its feathers" seems to be the more literal translation of the Hebrew *be-noẓatah* (cf. LXX: *sun tois pterois*). In contrast, Onkelos translates "he shall remove the crop with its contents" (*ya'ade yat zafkei be-'okhlei*).

33. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:64).

others). The unit then continues, as we shall immediately see, to establish an analogy between the bird's crop and the human and/or animal *nefesh*, which is likewise charged with theft and robbery. By choosing the word *nefesh* the homilist creates resonance between the bird offering and the core verse of this *parashah* – "if a person offers" (*nefesh ki takriv*), but also invokes the distinct *corporeal* meaning of this word, as he casts the *nefesh* as equivalent to the bird's crop (i.e., as gullet):

> (3.4b) Because this *nefesh* steals and robs, come and see how much pain [it goes through] until it [=what it ate/stole] departs from it: from the mouth to the esophagus, from the esophagus to the stomach, from the stomach to *mesisa*, and from *mesisa* to *bei kasya*, and from *bei kasya* to the *keres*, and from the *keres* to the intestines, and from the intestines to the small intestine, and from the small intestine to the large intestine, and from the large intestine to *sane deyadva/divei* [=lit. "the strainer of effluvia"], and from *sane deyadva/divei* to the rectum, and from the rectum to the outside. Come and see how much pain and how much toil until its food departs from it.[34]

Despite the dense and somewhat obscure anatomical terminology, the message conveyed in this passage is rather simple: the protracted and complex process of digestion, which is presented here as quite excruciating, serves as a form of punishment for the act of stealing and robbing entailed in eating, the location of which is the gullet. It seems that the underlying assumption in this passage is that theft and robbery are an essential characteristic of the *nefesh*, even if those do not actually take place in every act of eating (since obviously the "punitive" process of digestion described here is not unique to the digestion of stolen foods). The theme of eating as theft, as we will see, recurs in *parashah* 4 of Leviticus Rabbah as well, as does the emphasis that the end of the digestion process is the production of excrement.

The list of digestive organs itself is somewhat perplexing, since it is not entirely clear whether it pertains to humans, to animals, or to both. The terms *mesisa* and *bei kasia* can be quite safely understood as the third and second chambers, respectively, in the stomach of ruminants[35] (the omasum and the reticulum).[36] This led scholars to believe that the *keres* referred to here, which literally simply means "belly" and is commonly used both in respect to humans and in respect to animals, is the first chamber of the ruminant's stomach (the rumen).[37]

34. Vayikra Rabbah, Vayikra, par. 3, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:64–65). Cf. Kohelet Rabbah 7.19.

35. See, for example, M. Ḥullin 3.1–2.

36. In Leviticus Rabbah, however, the term *mesisa/meses* is also used in accounts of human anatomy; see Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 4*, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:86); Vayikra Rabbah, *Meẓor'a, par. 18*, to Leviticus 15:2 (ed. Margaliot, 2:392).

37. Yehuda Leib Katzenelson, *Ha-talmud ve-ḥokhmat ha-refu'ah* (Berlin: Hayim, 1928), 186–89; Avraham Steinberg, *Perakim be-patologiah shel ha-talmud ve-nos'ei kelav* (Jerusalem: Schlesinger Institution, 1975); accessed at http://www.medethics.org.il/articles/ASSIA/ASSIA6/R0061226.asp.

It seems hardly likely, however, that the homilist intended to depict the protracted digestive process as pertaining only to animals, since the word *nefesh* is most commonly identified with human beings, and as mentioned above, is often used straightforwardly to denote "person."[38] The most plausible explanation for this ambiguity is that the homilists indeed intended to refer to human beings in this passage, but since the anatomic description that was readily available to them was that of the ruminant's digestive system, they used it without much regard for the divergence of its details from human anatomy.[39] There is also the possibility that this equivocality is intentional, and that it serves the homilists to blur the boundary between humans and animals—first, by creating an analogy between the bird's crop and the human *nefesh*, and then by remaining vague on the distinction between humans and ruminants in what concerns the consumption and digestion of food.

How does this unit, which develops the theme of the *nefesh* (here, in the sense of gullet) as stealing and robbing, tie into the greater theme of the inherent value of the sacrifice of the poor, which we identified in the *parashah* as a whole? On the face of it, it does not. All that this unit does is invoke the biblical reference to the bird offering. However, the following unit (3.5) suggests a much more convenient and smooth transition to the topic of bird offering, while nicely maintaining the cohesiveness of the theme of the poor person's sacrifice, in a way that raises the question of what function, if any, unit 3.4 serves in the *parashah*. Unit 3.5 commences with a comment on the manner in which a bird offering is burnt on the altar, namely, as one piece, without removing its feathers and without being dissected into its constituent parts:

> (3.5a) "The Priest shall tear it open by its wings without severing it, and turn it into smoke on the altar" [Leviticus 1:17]. R. Yoḥanan said: a layperson, if he smells the smell of [=the bird's] wings [being burnt], his soul (*nafsho*) is repelled, and you say that it should be offered on the altar—what for?—So that the altar will be adorned with the sacrifice of the poor.[40]

According to this passage, birds are sacrificed whole on the altar, even though this brings about a particularly foul smell when the feathers are incinerated, so as to make the offering seem more substantial and thus yield more dignity to the poor person's sacrifice. We immediately see that this passage elegantly ties the *parashah*'s theme of the favorability of the poor person's offering to the biblical

38. One could also argue that reading the description of the digestive process as relating to animals is incommensurate with the statement that immediately precedes this passage, which excludes domestic animals as creatures whose consumption of food does not involve theft and robbery. However, it is not uncommon for adjacent midrashic passages to contradict one another without any comment on the incongruity at hand.

39. Indeed, in Kohelet Rabbah 7.19 the same list of organs appears (albeit in a somewhat different order) in a context that unmistakably refers to the human body.

40. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:65–66).

verses dealing with the bird offering, and thus allows bird offerings and cereal offerings to be discussed in tandem in what will follow.

Why, then, was the passage on the stealing and robbing gullet of birds/humans/animals (3.4) included in the *parashah*, if it does not cohere with the greater theme of the *parashah* and if a much more elegant transition to the topic of the bird offering is suggested in 3.5? Here one could argue that unit 3.4 was included simply because it contains a homily on the biblical verses pertaining to the bird offering, and is thus loosely connected to the following unit, which deals with the same cluster of verses.[41] In truth, Leviticus Rabbah has a strong associative component to it, and it is not unusual for it to include midrashic materials that do not serve the larger theme of a specific *parashah*. Nevertheless, the fact that the theme of the robbing and stealing *nefesh* will loom large in the next *parashah* of the midrash, which also pertains to sacrifices, points to the possibility that this unit was incorporated here intentionally, and that it is part of a thought-out homiletic thread that runs across these two *parashot*. Specifically, in terms of its function in Leviticus Rabbah 3, it seems that unit 3.4 puts forth the notion of the animalistic *nefesh* (=the gullet), in order to contrast it with the *nefesh* (=soul) that relinquishes its own food through the act of sacrifice, a notion that the midrash continues to develop in the remaining parts of the *parashah*.

Immediately following the statement on the burning of the bird offering whole so as to dignify the poor person who brought it, unit 3.5 continues to relate three stories of poor persons and their offerings, all of which demonstrate the idea that the meager sacrifice of the poor is most readily accepted by God, even more so than the lavish animal sacrifices of persons of greater means. The three stories can be briefly summarized as follows:

In the first story (3.5b), it is told of King Agrippa who, like King Solomon in his time, wished to offer one thousand burnt offerings on the same day, and asked that no one else be allowed to sacrifice that day. The priest, however, made the call to allow a poor man who brought a pair of doves to make his sacrifice on that day. This takes place after the poor man tells the priest that every day he catches four doves, two of which he uses for his own needs and two of which he sacrifices. When King Agrippa learns of this event, he approves of the priest's decision.

The second story (3.5c) tells of an ox that was being taken to be sacrificed on the altar, and along the way stood and refused to be led further; a poor man then came and handed the ox a bundle of endives. Having eaten the endives, the ox was able to cough out phlegm that was obstructing its throat, and then allowed itself to be led to the altar.[42] The owner of the ox then received a message in a dream that the offering of the poor man (namely, the bundle of endives) was deemed preferable to his own offering (i.e., the ox).

41. Cohen ("Leviticus Rabbah 3," 29) dismissed this entire subunit as an example of "divergencies and superfluities" in the otherwise neatly compiled *parashah*.

42. On the Greco-Roman cultic context of this story, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 159.

Finally, the third story (3.5d) tells of a woman who brought a handful of semolina to the temple, and was scorned by the priest, who complained that there is nothing in this offering—not for him to eat[43] and not even for the token amount that must be burnt on the altar. The priest then receives a message in a dream that he must not scorn this woman, since she should be seen as one who sacrificed her own soul.

All three stories, as is immediately discernible, powerfully make the point that the measly sacrifice of the poor is accepted willingly and favorably by God, more so than the plentiful offerings of the wealthy. This notion in itself is not unique to Leviticus Rabbah, and can be found in various religious contexts. One of the most well-known examples of this theme is the story of the poor widow in Mark 12:41–44 (=Luke 21:1–4), in which Jesus praises a woman who gave only two copper coins to the temple's treasury, saying "this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury… she, out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."[44] It is important to note, however, that in Leviticus Rabbah all three stories emphasize that the merit of the poor person's offering is entailed in the fact that it effectively means *giving up on one's own nourishment*. In the first case (3.5b), the poor man sacrifices two of the doves he hunts daily, though he could have eaten them rather than giving them to the temple. In the second story (3.5c), the bundle of endives that the poor person hands the ox is not meant as an offering at all; it is presumably meant for the man's own sustenance, but the very fact that he relinquishes it in order to facilitate the sacrifice of the ox renders this bundle an offering in and of itself. Finally, in the third story (3.5d) the point is explicitly made that for the poor woman, even a scanty cereal offering is an extremely substantial sacrifice, so much so that she should be considered as if she has sacrificed herself. The exact wording of this story's concluding line is highly instructive for our discussion here: "… It was shown to the priest in the dream: do not scorn her, it is as if she sacrificed her own *nefesh*."[45] The dual meaning of the word *nefesh* as both gullet and soul/person serves here to convey the message that to sacrifice the gullet—that is, to give up on one's own food—is tantamount to sacrificing oneself. The fact that the poor woman's offering, as pitiful as it is, deprives her of food, allows this offering to be seen as an offering of the highest order.

The message that the sacrifice of one's potential food counts as a sacrifice of oneself is bolstered in a comment that immediately follows the last story:

43. In Genizah Fragment New York, JTSA ENA 2699.23–24, and in MS Toronto (Friedberg, Sasson 920), the priest's concern regarding the portion he will get to eat does not appear. This could be a result of scribal error, or of an intentional attempt to minimize the implicit criticism of the priest's behavior.

44. Mark 12:43–44 (NRSV translation).

45. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:67–68). Cf. B. Menaḥot 104b.

> (3.5e) And is this not a case that can be deduced a fortiori? If one who does not offer a *nefesh* [=living being] is referred to by Scripture as *nefesh* [=person, in the verse "when a person presents a (cereal) offering"], one who does bring a *nefesh* [=living being], all the more so is it "as if she sacrificed her own *nefesh*" [=soul/gullet].[46]

Here the homilists tie the notion that the poor person's offering can be seen as self-sacrifice to the verse around which the entire *parashah* revolves: "when a person [*nefesh*] presents an offering." They suggest a reading according to which the offerer is also what is being offered: The *nefesh* (person) essentially sacrifices a *nefesh* (gullet/soul). The homilists then continue to make the point that if the offerer is actually, and not only metaphorically, offering a *nefesh*, that is, a living being such as an animal, his or her offering is seen as even more worthwhile.[47] Indeed, this comment seems to run against everything the *parashah* has been attempting to establish until now, namely, that animal sacrifices are not necessarily superior to the meager offerings of poor persons;[48] but the main message here is that the more substantial the source of nourishment which a person gives up on in order to sacrifice, the more worthwhile and desirable the offering.

Through the multiple meanings of the word *nefesh* the redactors of this *parashah* construct a contrast between the *nefesh* that consumes food, and the *nefesh* that is willing to relinquish food in order to dedicate it to God. What makes the act of sacrifice worthy, in this view, is the willingness to deprive the gullet; in turn, the gullet itself is portrayed highly negatively, as engaging in theft and robbery, and as animalistic in nature. Thus the authors of Leviticus Rabbah 3 achieve two things: first, they *distance and separate* the act of sacrificing from the act of eating (acts which were closely intertwined in the ancient world), and second, they establish *the inferiority of the eater in relation to the sacrificer*.

Interestingly, the midrash establishes the superiority of the sacrificer to the eater not only by contrasting the gullet with the self-sacrificing soul, but also by contrasting the one who brings the offering with the one who ultimately gets to consume it—namely, the priest. Thus we find in the concluding unit of this *parashah*:

46. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:68). This entire passage is missing in MSS London (British Library Add. 27,169) and Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek heb. 117).

47. Margaliot (*Vayikra Rabbah*, 68) and Cohen ("Leviticus Rabbah 3," 27) interpret the phrase "one who does bring a *nefesh*" as pertaining to fast and repentance. However, this reading seems to be a forced attempt to make the passage cohere with the rest of the unit.

48. Such incongruities within a single *parashah* are not uncommon, as shown by Heinemann, "'Omanut ha-kompoziṣiah," 814. Heinemann sees such inherent contradictions as reflecting a "dialectical approach" on the side of the editor. See also Cohen, "Leviticus Rabbah 3."

> (3.6)… Behold one who brought his cereal-offering from Gaul [*Galia*] or from Spain [*'Aspamia*] and from their neighboring [areas], and he saw the priest removing the handful [which is designated to be burnt on the altar] and eating all the rest, and he said: Woe is me, all that pain I have gone through so that that one will eat! And they [=presumably other people at the temple] would appease him and say: if that one, who has only gone through the pain of two footsteps between the hall and the altar was rewarded with eating, you who have gone through all this pain, all the more so [that you will be rewarded].[49]

This unit, which emphasizes the role of the priest as the one who actually gets to consume the offerings, echoes the portrayal of the priest in 3.5d as lamenting the small quantity of the woman's cereal offering, which does not leave much for him to eat. While the midrash never questions the priests' prerogative to consume the offerings—in fact the concluding unit (3.6) later attempts to affirm this very prerogative—it does use the figure of the eager-to-eat priest, who is portrayed as rather crude and selfish,[50] to highlight the notion that the one sacrificing is *not* the one eating. Through this contrast between the sacrificer and the eater, the homilists construct the act of sacrificing and the act of eating as fundamentally opposed, and stress the noble nature of the states of mind and body associated with the former as opposed to the lowly nature of those associated with the latter.

Leviticus Rabbah 4: "And the nefesh is not satisfied"

The Levitical verse around which *parashah* 4 of Leviticus Rabbah revolves is Leviticus 4:2, "when a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt," which commences the biblical discussion of the rules pertaining to purification offering (*ḥattat*). The midrashic *parashah* not only refrains from any discussion of the purification offering as such, it barely even engages with more general subjects that could potentially arise from the biblical materials, such as the theme of unintentional sin. Rather, it focuses almost exclusively on the word *nefesh* in and of itself, and assembles various traditions that pertain to the nature, function, and virtue (or lack thereof) of the human *nefesh*.[51] Indeed, the dual meaning of

49. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 3*, to Leviticus 2:1 (ed. Margaliot, 1:68).

50. The theme of the gluttonous priest appears elsewhere in rabbinic literature (most notably, B. Pesaḥim 57a), and the unflattering depiction of the priests here echoes a certain animosity between priests and rabbis, which is discernible in various traditions from and about the Second Temple period. On the competition and enmity between priests and rabbis, see Stuart A. Cohen, *The Three Crowns: Structures of Communal Politics in Early Rabbinic Jewry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 147–78; for a more refined argument, see Martha Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 165–70. However, the motif of the voracious priest is also familiar from Greek and Roman literature; see for example, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, book 8, esp. 8:29.

51. On Leviticus Rabbah 4, see Burton L. Visotzky, "The Priest's Daughter and the Thief in the Orchard: The Soul of Midrash Leviticus Rabbah," in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*, eds. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra Brown, and Graydon Snyder (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 165–71; Stern, "Vayikra Rabbah."

nefesh as both soul and gullet informs much of Leviticus Rabbah 4 and strongly connects it with Leviticus Rabbah 3, in a manner that allows the two *parashot* to function together to promote a particular view of sacrifices.

The first three units in the *parashah* are *petiḥtot*, starting at a distant verse and making their way gradually to the local Torah verse, in this case, "when a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt" (Leviticus 4:2). Notably, two of the three *petiḥtot* work to construct a tension between the two meanings of *nefesh*: between the divine source of justice and morals and the base location of voracious, animal-like eating.

The distant verse in the first *petiḥta* of the three (4.1) is Ecclesiastes 3:16, "At the place of justice there is wickedness." This verse is followed by multiple examples of biblical episodes in which in a place that used to be of justice, iniquities and treacheries took place. The final example of wickedness located in the place of justice is unique: it suggests that both justice and soul (*nefesh*) are located in the same place, and that this place is God's hand. This tradition, attributed to R. Levi, relies on the verses "In His hand is every living soul and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10) and "My hand lays hold on Judgment" (Deuteronomy 32:41). The anonymous homilist then adds that the soul is "located in the place of judgment, but sins." This comment is followed by a tradition attributed to R. Yiẓḥak:

> (4.1) R. Yiẓḥak said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the *nefesh*: I have written in regard to you, "But make sure that you do not partake in the blood, for the blood is the life [*ha-dam hu ha-nefesh*], and you must not consume life with the flesh" [Deuteronomy 12:23], and you go out and sin and steal and rob?[52]—[hence] "When a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt."[53]

The concluding passage of *petiḥta* 4.1 is addressing an apparent conundrum in the biblical verse at hand: how can the *nefesh*, which is presumably of divine origin, "incur guilt" by committing a sin? The midrash deploys this conundrum as an example of a case in which a place of judgment turns into a place of wickedness, pointing to God's disappointment in the soul's choice to stoop to sin. However, the way in which the sinful proclivity of the soul is portrayed in this passage suggests that this sin is closely associated with voracious eating, and that the sinful *nefesh* is, in essence, the gullet. In order to grasp this in full, let us take note of the biblical edict to which R. Yiẓḥak is alluding in its broader context:

52. The words "and steals and robs" (*ve-gozelet ve-ḥomeset*) are missing in the printed edition, and in MSS St. Petersburg (Firkovich I 241), Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale héb. 149), and Oxford (Bodleian Opp. Add. fol. 51). The omission of these words might stem from a misunderstanding of the connection between eating of blood and theft and robbery, which Margaliot (*Vayikra Rabbah*, 80) also found perplexing. In Genizah Fragment Cambridge T-S K27.23, the entire reference to the eating of blood is missing.

53. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 4*, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:80).

> When the Lord enlarges your territory as He has promised you, and you say "I shall eat meat" for your soul/gullet desires [*ki te'ave nafshekha*] to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever your soul/gullet desires [*be-khol 'avat nafsheka*] … But make sure that you do not partake in the blood, for the blood is the life/soul [*ha-dam hu ha-nefesh*], and you must not consume life/soul with the flesh.[54]

R. Yiẓḥak invokes the verse from Deuteronomy in order to emphasize the preferred and elevated nature of the *nefesh* in God's view, which is manifested in the prohibition to consume the blood "for the blood is the *nefesh*."[55] The prohibition at hand is directed towards a practice of eating, and is intended to mitigate the general permission to consume nonsacrificial meat on account of one's craving for it, which is itself described by the idiom "if your *nefesh* desires." The verse thus refers both to the *nefesh* that craves food, which is in effect the gullet, and to the *nefesh* in the sense of life or soul, which is protected by God on account of its preciousness. Much to God's dismay, the *nefesh* ends up "stealing and robbing," thus abandoning its higher calling. As we may recall, the very same conjunction of verbs, "steal" and "rob" (*gzl* and *ḥms*) was used to describe the *nefesh*, in analogy to the bird's crop, in the previous *parashah*. Furthermore, this homily creates a strong association between "stealing and robbing" and uninhibited eating, which includes the consumption of blood. I propose, then, that the oscillation of the *nefesh* between its divine origin and its sinful actions is implicitly mapped out in this passage as an oscillation between soul and gullet. It seems hardly incidental that this oscillation is charted onto a biblical text that discusses the transition from ritual sacrifice to slaughter for self-consumption.

The second *petiḥta* (4.2) pertains strictly to the theme of *nefesh*, as the distant verse with which it commences is "All of man's toil is for the sake of his mouth, yet his *nefesh* is not satisfied" (Ecclesiastes 6:7). While this verse seems to refer to eating and to *nefesh* in the sense of gullet in the most straightforward way, most of the midrashic readings in the *petiḥta* on this verse present highly "spiritual" interpretations, unequivocally taking *nefesh* to refer to the divinely motivated soul, and taking the "toil" mentioned in the verse to refer to good deeds and performance of commandments, which are the means by which one's soul can be satisfied.[56] Among these one particular reading stands out, which is attributed to the anonymous rabbis (*rabbanin*): they present a highly physical reading of the verse, contending that all that one toils to earn in order to eat ends up producing only "foul smell."[57] This seems like a subtle reference to excrement, taking the insatiability of

54. Deuteronomy 12:20, 24.

55. On the biblical notion that "the blood is the life" see William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 12–32.

56. Cf. Kohelet Rabbah 6.6–7.

57. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 4*, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:82). In the printed edition, as well as in MSS St. Petersburg (Firkovich I 241) and Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale héb. 149), the version is "and *not* to foul smell." See Margaliot's comments in *Vayikra Rabbah*, 1:83. In Kohelet Rabbah 6.6–7 the entire reference to "foul smell" is missing.

the *nefesh* to mean that whatever one puts into one's body ends up getting out of one's body. As we have seen, the notion that whatever goes into the mouth (or gullet) ends up being excreted also appears in Leviticus Rabbah 3, in the unit that elaborates on the lengthy process of digestion with which the "stealing and robbing" *nefesh* is penalized. In addition, the very same characterization of the *nefesh* as stealing and robbing recurs again in the end of *petiḥta* 4.2:

> (4.2) R. Yehoshu'a of Sikhnin [said] in the name of R. Levi: the word *nefesh* is written here [=in chapters 4 and 5 of Leviticus, which pertain to sin[58]] six times, in correspondence with the six days of creation. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the *nefesh*: all that I have created in the six days of creation I have created only for you, and you go out and sin and steal and rob?[59]—[hence] "When a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt."[60]

The concluding unit of *petiḥta* 4.2, like the concluding unit of *petiḥta* 4.1 and through the use of almost identical structure and vocabulary, comments on the apparent incongruity between soul and sin – here pointing to the fact that sin and soul appear in conjunction in the Levitical text not once, but six times. The number six invokes the six days of creation, in the course of which God created things that were all ultimately meant for the sustenance and joy of human beings, a notion through which the homilist relates God's disappointment in the human *nefesh*: the *nefesh* is so insatiable, that despite the fact that everything in the world exists to satisfy it, it goes forth and "steals and robs" that which does not belong to it. There is thus a clear opposition between the *nefesh* that is God's most treasured pinnacle of creation, and the insatiable *nefesh* which steals and robs, an opposition that again translates to the opposition between soul and gullet. Going back and forth between the spiritual and physical meanings of *nefesh*, the homilists construct a notion of a person as oscillating between the urge for fulfillment of commandments and the urge to satisfy one's appetite, and closely identify the latter urge with sin, namely, with stealing and robbing.

The third *petiḥta* in the *parashah* (4.3) is less relevant for our discussion here, particularly since it does not address the topic of *nefesh* as such but rather presents homilies on the nature and meanings of sins incurred unwittingly. However, the unit that immediately follows (4.4) returns to the general motif of the incongruity between *nefesh* and sin, and again uses the literary pattern that we have seen in *petiḥtot* 4.1 and 4.2:

58. The word *nefesh* actually appears in Leviticus 4–5 eight times (Leviticus 4:2, 4:27, 5:1, 5:2, 5:4, 5:15, 5:17, 5:20). According to Margaliot (*Vayikra Rabbah*, 1:84), verses 5:2 and 5:4 are not meant to be included in the list, since they do not address the issue of sin.

59. The words "and steals and robs" (*ve-gozelet ve-ḥomeset*) are missing in the printed edition, as well as in MSS St. Petersburg (Firkovich I 241), Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale héb. 149), and Oxford (Bodleian Opp. Add. fol. 51).

60. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 4*, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:84).

> (4.4) Ten things minister to the *nefesh*: the esophagus for food, the windpipe for the voice, the liver for anger, the gall for jealousy, the lung for hydration,[61] the *mesisa* to grind, the spleen to laugh, the stomach for sleep, the kidneys advise, the heart fathoms, the tongue concludes, and the *nefesh* is above them all.[62] The Holy One, blessed be He, said to it: I made you above all things and you go out and sin and steal and rob?—[hence] "When a person [*nefesh*] unwittingly incurs guilt."[63]

Within its midrashic context, this anatomical list conveys the message that the entire complex and multifaceted mechanism of the human body, with all its constituent parts, has only one purpose—to serve the *nefesh*. Nevertheless, the homilist complains, the *nefesh* still engages in theft and robbery, not living up to its superior position and divine favorability.

In truth, this passage does not deal with the topic of food at all, except by mentioning some of the functions of digestion in the body. However, the identical literary pattern which recurs in units 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4, and the strong resonance of this pattern with unit 3.4, does allow us to see unit 4.4 as part of a homiletic thread woven across these two *parashot*. This thread contrasts what the *nefesh* could be (godly and leading one towards good deeds and fulfillment of commandments) with what it in fact chooses to be (animalistic and voracious), and maps out this contrast through the two meanings of *nefesh*, soul and gullet respectively, by associating the latter with eating in three out of four passages.

The remaining units of Leviticus Rabbah 4, for the most part, do not tie into this homiletic thread, but rather present various independent traditions that develop the notion of *nefesh* in various directions; in all those units *nefesh* is unequivocally used to refer to soul. Unit 4.5 reflects on the relation between soul and body, debating which one of them has greater responsibility when judged before God; unit 4.6 expounds on the use of the singular form *nefesh* even when referring to the people of Israel as a group; unit 4.7 comments on the five appearances of the invocation "my soul, bless God" in the book of Psalms; and unit 4.8 suggests an elaborate comparison of the soul to God, maintaining that the correspondence between them makes it appropriate for the soul to engage in the praise of God.

It is in this last unit that we find a passing comment that helps illuminate the homiletic thread highlighted above. This unit presents a series of analogies between the soul's function in the body and God's function in the world: the soul fills the body as God fills the world, the soul outlasts the body as God outlasts

61. The manuscripts vary regarding the exact wording here, and some of the versions are clearly errors; however, the root *sh-t-i* (to drink) does appear in all the versions, making it plausible to explain the lung's function in terms of hydration (cf. B. Berakhot 61b: "the lung absorbs all kinds of liquids"). See Fred Rosner *Encyclopedia of Medicine in the Bible and in the Talmud* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), 195.

62. Almost identical lists appear in B. Berakhot 61a–b and in Kohelet Rabbah 7.19 (without mentioning the *nefesh* at the end).

63. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 4*, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:86–87).

the world, the soul sees without being seen as God sees without being seen, etc. Among these analogies, we find the comment that "the soul does not eat in the body and the Holy One, blessed be He, has no eating before Him."[64] According to this comment, one of the distinct manifestations of the soul's godlike nature is the fact that it does not eat. While there is no reason to see intentional correspondence between unit 4.8 and the units that were discussed above, this unit does provide us with an important indication that when the word *nefesh* was taken in the most spiritual direction possible, it entailed the notion of refraining from eating. Eating, then, was for the rabbis a critical component in defining the range of possibilities of the word *nefesh*: from its most animalistic sense, which corresponds with gullet or even a bird's crop, to its most spiritual and godlike sense, to which eating is entirely foreign.

As the midrashic units that were discussed above make clear, the two meanings of *nefesh* are not mutually exclusive: the *nefesh* that robs and steals is not an entirely different entity from the *nefesh* that is God's treasured possession. Rather, a transition between the two is possible, and the *nefesh* can be transformed from godlike to animal-like, if it chooses to take part in sinful activities; presumably, a transition in the other direction is possible as well, if one chooses to engage in good deeds and follow the commandments. The question then arises: if the *nefesh* in its lowly and sinful form is identified with the gullet and associated with the act of eating, and the *nefesh* in its most lofty and divine form is associated with non-eating, what role does food play in the transition between one and the other? Should we take the midrash to be suggesting an ascetic regime of abstinence from food as a path for self-purification, for a transformation from animal to godlike?

In order to consider this question, and ultimately to return to the greater theme of sacrifices and their reframing in Leviticus Rabbah, I turn now to examine Greek, Roman, and early Christian materials that help shed light on some of the attitudes towards food that we have seen in the midrash. Many of the themes we have identified in Leviticus Rabbah seem to be rooted in the rhetoric and imagery of moralistic diatribes against gluttony or in support of asceticism, which were quite prevalent in antiquity and late antiquity. However, I will argue that in Leviticus Rabbah these common themes are not employed only to promote moderation and/or asceticism, but also, and perhaps especially, to reframe the concept of sacrifice.

Homicida gula: Greco-Roman and early Christian diatribes against gluttony

Apprehension regarding food and eating was a deep-rooted part of the intellectual world of Mediterranean antiquity. Philosophers, poets, physicians, and religious preachers were highly concerned with gluttony and unbridled passion for food, which they identified as both morally corrupt and physiologically unhealthy, and dedicated great rhetorical efforts to warn against the medical, ethical, religious, political, and even environmental repercussions of this vice.[65] Several of

64. Vayikra Rabbah, Vayikra, par. 4, to Leviticus 4:2 (ed. Margaliot, 1:97).

the motifs that recur in the *parashot* of Leviticus Rabbah examined above strongly resonate with themes found in such criticisms of gluttony, and reflect a shared cultural universe in which the authors of Leviticus Rabbah partook. To be clear, I am not arguing for a *direct* line of influence between any of the works mentioned below and rabbinic authors. Rather, I am pointing to a pervasive moralistic and religious theme that percolated throughout the world of late antiquity, which the rabbis were likely to absorb,[66] to some extent or another, by being an inseparable part of this world.[67]

The contrast and tension between gullet and soul, which I have traced in Leviticus Rabbah, closely corresponds with the well-established classical notion that eating and preoccupation with food stand in opposition to spiritual advancement, and hinder one's ability to partake in the more divine aspects of life. In the *Timaeus,* Plato makes the point that being obsessed with food means being "devoid of philosophy and culture [*aphilosophon kai amouson*], and disobedient to the most divine part (*tou theiotatoutōn*) we possess."[68] Following the same line of thought, the early Christian Desert Fathers, while advocating not only moderation in the consumption of food but also fierce asceticism, repeatedly identified food as an obstruction to spiritual and intellectual attainment.[69] Thus Evagrius of

65. For surveys of various classical and early Christian diatribes against gluttony, see Veronika E. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting: The Evolution of a Sin* (London: Routledge, 1996); Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24–135.

66. While it is difficult to find elaborate diatribes against gluttony in rabbinic literature, various rabbinic narratives and aphorisms present both overt and implicit condemnations of gluttony as unacceptable social behavior, associated with rudeness, obtrusiveness, and impiety. For various examples, see Ruhama Weiss, *'Okhlim la-da'at: tafkidan ha-tarbuti shel ha-se'udot be-sifrut ḥazal* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uḥad, 2010), 120–47.

67. The scholarly literature that explores rabbinic culture as deeply situated in the Greco-Roman and early Christian world, pioneered by Saul Lieberman's *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: JTS Press, 1962), is copious. For but a few notable examples, see Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998); Peter Schaefer and Catherine Hezser, eds., *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2002); Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz, eds., *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Peeters: Leuven, 2006); Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 C.E.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

68. *Timaeus* 73a, quoted from W. R. M. Lamb's translation, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925). Similarly, Musonius Rufus points that gluttonous people are turned into animals since they lose their rational faculty (fragment 18b), *Musonius Rufus: Lectures and Sayings*, ed. William B. Irvine and trans. Cynthia King (CreateSpace, 2011), 74; see also Anton C. van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962), 96–111.

69. This theme is highly prominent in the compilation known as *Apophthegmata Patrum* ("The Sayings of the Fathers," henceforth *AP*) which contains traditions and statements of and about the early monastic communities in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine from approximately the fifth century CE. On the history and formation of this compilation see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76–104. On the monastic literature's resonance with and impact on rabbinic literature, see Catherine Hezser, "Apophthegmata Patrum and Apophthegmata of the Rabbis," *La Narrativa Cristiana*

Pontus declared that abstinence from food "cultivates the rational land" and "purifies the intellect,"[70] and Abba Poemen is quoted as saying that one cannot acquire fear of God when one's belly is full.[71] The refinement of the soul, then, is seen as contingent upon the ability to dissociate oneself from the part of the person that constantly craves food,[72] which Plato straightforwardly defines as beastly (*theriōdes*) in nature.[73]

Especially pertinent to Leviticus Rabbah's play on the dual meaning of *nefesh* is the discussion on the liberation of the soul from the body in Plato's *Phaedo*, in which Socrates presents the view that souls that are worthy are entirely released from a bodily existence upon death and are then free to attain their full divine potential. However, the unfortunate souls of those who engaged in gluttony (*gastrimargia*), violence (*hubreis*), and drunkenness (*philoposia*) are doomed to remain trapped within bodies—and moreover, to migrate into the bodies of animals.[74] This passage clearly suggests that the soul oscillates between the beastly and the divine, with the beastly nature closely associated with an insatiable lust for food and drink. A failure of the soul to overcome its beastly propensities fully turns it, quite literally, into an animal. It may be suggested, then, that Leviticus Rabbah's motif of the soul stumbling between its divine origin and its proclivity to devour, rob, and tend to bodily desires is in line with this influential Platonic idea.

There is, however, a notable distance between considering eating and preoccupation with food to be lowly aspects of human living, and identifying them with sin and moral depravity, as the homilists in Leviticus Rabbah do. As we have seen above, *parashot* 3 and 4 in Leviticus Rabbah recurrently refer to the sinfulness of the *nefesh* as "stealing and robbing," and in three out of the four units in which this theme appears, the context suggests a close association between stealing and robbing and voracious eating. Where did this association of eating with theft and robbery come from?

Here too there is interesting correspondence between prevalent motifs in Greek, Roman, and early Christian literature and the themes we identified in Leviticus Rabbah. In various tirades and cautionary diatribes against gluttony we find the notion that when one devours excessive amounts of food, one essentially

Antica (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995), 453–64; Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

70. Evagrius of Pontus, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. David Brakke (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 53.

71. *AP* Poemen 181 (*Patrologia Graeca* 65:365). Cf. B. Berakhot 10b: "Whoever eats and drinks and only then prays, to him refers the verse 'you have cast me behind your back' (2 Kings 14:9)."

72. See, for example, *AP* Silvanus 5 (*Patrologia Graeca* 65:409), in which a truly spiritual man is recognized as one who has no need for food.

73. *Republic* IX 571c. Plato, *Republic,* Books 6–10, trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

74. *Phaedo* 81e. Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

deprives others and robs them of their own portion.[75] Thus, for instance, the Stoic Musonius Rufus maintains that one who is overly eager to consume copious amounts of food is bound to be unjust toward others,[76] and Philo of Alexandria describes the glutton as one who is not hesitant to seize the food of his neighbor in addition to his own.[77] This theme closely resonates with the famous rabbinic depiction of "the rebellious son" mentioned in Deuteronomy 21:18–21 as one who, in his all-consuming lust for food and drink, is likely to end up "going out and robbing human beings."[78] A similar association between eating and stealing can be found in a monastic tradition, in which the desire for food is described as almost inevitably leading to stealing, and one is advised to refrain from both: "do not steal and do not eat" (*mē klepte kai trōge*).[79]

More broadly, Greek, Roman, and Christian writers often portrayed gluttony as a particular manifestation of greed, in such a way that the lust for food and the lust for money were constructed as inextricably linked, and were both associated with willingness to exploit and abuse others.[80] As Emily Gowers showed in detail, the idea that gluttony and covetousness of food leads to moral depravation and entails the brutal exploitation of others is especially prominent in the satires of Juvenal and Petronius,[81] who used vivid descriptions of Roman banquets and feasts to accentuate disapprovingly the differences between the rich and the poor. Gowers emphasizes the role of animalistic imagery in Roman satirical depictions of gluttony, which blurs the distinction between the eater and what is eaten and makes the point that in giving oneself over to the lust for food one, in essence, becomes a beast.[82] This intricate connection between greed and gluttony, between devouring others' property and devouring food, allows us to situate the midrashic homilies that associate eating with "stealing and robbing" in the cultural context in

75. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. Sandnes summarizes this motif as follows: "It is the nature of such persons [=gluttonous] to demand ever more … these demands cannot be satisfied by just methods" (*Belly and Body*, 49). See also Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 55.

76. Fragment 20; see Irvine and King, *Musonius Rufus*, 80.

77. *On Flight and Finding*, 31. Philo, *The Works of Philo*, trans. Charles Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

78. Sifre Devarim, *Re'eh*, *pis. 220*, to Deuteronomy 21:18 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 253); B. Sanhedrin 71a.

79. *AP* Zeno 6 (*Patrologia Graeca* 65:178).

80. This idea appears already in Plato's *Timaeus* 73a. According to Evagrius of Pontus (*De diversis malignis cognitationibus*, 1= *Patrologia Graeca* 79:1200-1201), the demons that incite gluttony are also the ones that incite greed; on gluttony as "the mother of all vices" in the works of Evagrius and his disciples, see Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 131–60. For a similar view on the connection between gluttony and greed, see John Chrysostom, *Epistolam ad Ephesios*, Homily 13.3–4 (*Patrologia* Graeca 62:93-97). Sandnes (*Belly and Body*, 224–47) demonstrates that many early Christian interpreters read Paul's reference to people who "have their belly as a god" (Philippians 3:14) as associating the worship of the belly with the love of money, since gluttony and greed were seen as inextricably linked.

81. Emily Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 188–219.

82. Gowers, *Loaded Table*, 30, 121.

which they were produced, and to see the disdain for eating that they express as part of mindsets shaped in the Mediterranean world of antiquity and late antiquity.

This cultural context might also lend support to the reading of *nefesh* as gullet in the homilies of Leviticus Rabbah. In Greco-Roman culture, the gullet or throat was often seen as the seat of craving for food, as is best demonstrated by the fact that the Latin word for gluttony is simply the word for gullet (*gula*), whereas the common Greek words for gluttony are either *laimargia* ("gullet madness") or *gastrimargia* ("stomach madness"). Indeed, Horace refers to the unceasing quest for food as a behavior that makes one "servile to his gullet" (*servile gulae*).[83] The notion that the gullet is the place in the body in which the lust for food is located,[84] and thus the place that can be charged with the atrocities pertaining to this lust, is also traceable in early Christian literature. Thus, for example, Abba Poemen states that just as David grabbed the lion by the throat to kill it (1 Samuel 17:35), so must we "take ourselves by our gullet [*laryngiou*] and by our belly [*kolias*]" in order to kill the lion that is within us.[85] Most notably, Tertullian, in his *De ieiunio adversus psychicos,* identifies "the murderous gullet" (*homicidam gulam*) as the birthplace of all sin, as this is where the original sin of eating from the forbidden fruit commenced.[86]

As demonstrated above in Abba Poemen's statement, in many of the diatribes against gluttony or in advocacy of asceticism, the gullet and the belly are invoked either interchangeably or in the form of hendiadys to portray the reprehensible obsession with food. For example, in describing the preparations for a particularly lavish feast, Seneca makes the point that the enormous amounts of food prepared were designated "for a single gullet [*unam gulam*], for a single belly [*unus venter*]."[87] Similarly, Augustine reproachfully describes the banquets at the tombs of the dead martyrs with the words "throats and bellies prepare themselves" (*fauces ventresque se parare*).[88] Juvenal, in one of his invectives against the madness of overconsumption in Rome, describes how the gullet is overswelling (*crescente gula*) to allow the belly to contain all the mounds of silver, flocks, and estates that have been invested in the meal.[89] The latter text is particularly resonant with a midrashic tradition that we find in *parashah* 18 of Leviticus Rabbah, an elaborate homily on the concluding chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes, which describes the destruction of the body through old age and death.

83. Satire 2.7, 111. Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, trans. Henry Rushton Fairclaugh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). Equally prominent, however, is the notion that gluttony is tantamount to "serving one's belly" as Sandnes (*Belly and Body*, 35–60, 97–107, 165–80) shows in detail.

84. See, for instance, Musonius Rufus, Fragment 18b (Irvine and King, *Musonius Rufus*, 75).

85. *AP* Poemen 178 (*Patrologia Graeca*, 65:365).

86. Tertullian, *De Ieiunio*, 3.

87. Epistle 95.19. Lucius Annaeius Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistolae Morales*, trans. L.D. Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

88. Epistle 29.8. John E. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: Letters 1-99*, trans. Roland Teske (New York, New City Press, 2001).

89. Satire 11.38–4. *Juvenal and Perseus*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See Gowers, *Loaded Table*, 201.

The homilists expound on the obscure verse "the golden bowl crashes and the jar is shattered at the spring" (Ecclesiastes 12:6):

> *And the golden bowl crashes* [*ve-taroẓ gulat ha-zahav*] … R. Ḥiyya b. Neḥemiah said: this is the gullet [*gargeret*], which does away with the gold and makes silver disappear.[90]

It seems that R. Ḥiyya b. Neḥemiah's explanation builds on the similarity between the Hebrew *gulat ha-zahav* and the Latin *gula*, and suggests that the gullet is associated with gold since one uses all of one's possessions in order to please it. The homilists then continue to expound on the following sentence in the verse:

> *And the jar is shattered at the spring*—this is the belly [*keres*]. R. Abba the son of R. Papi and R. Yehoshu'a of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi [said]: Three days after [one's death] the belly shatters and its stench extends to the mouth, and it tells it [the mouth]: there for you is all that you have stolen and robbed [*gazalta ve-ḥamasta*] and placed inside me.[91]

This passage powerfully describes the codependence between the gullet (here described simply as "mouth," *peh*), whose consumption of food is described yet again in terms of theft and robbery, and the belly, which functions as a repository for all those robbed food items. This midrashic unit, then, helps us see the extent to which the characterization of the gullet as stealing and robbing is rooted in Greek and Roman rhetoric and imagery used in criticisms of gluttony and preoccupation with food.

Furthermore, the unit quoted from *parashah* 18 uses another motif that we have seen in our discussion of *parashot* 3 and 4, namely, the motif of the turning of all food into excrement. This idea appeared both in 3.4, in the description of the elaborate path of food from the gullet to the outside, and in 4.2, in the statement that all that food eventually produces is "foul smell."[92] The above homily on Ecclesiastes 12:7 presents a particularly gruesome take on this motif, describing how upon death the path from the mouth to the belly is reversed, as the belly breaks open and all the food it contains, now in the form of excrement, oozes back into the mouth. As with the themes that were discussed above, the theme of the turning of all food into excrement is also notably traceable in Greco-Roman tirades against gluttony.[93]

90. Vayikra Rabbah, *Meẓor'a, par. 18*, to Leviticus 15:2 (ed. Margaliot, 2:397).

91. Vayikra Rabbah, *Meẓor'a, par. 18*, to Leviticus 15:2 (ed. Margaliot, 2:398). Cf. Kohelet Rabbah 12.6. See also, in slightly different versions, Y. Yevamot 16:3, 15c; Y. Mo'ed Katan 3:5, 82b; B. Shabbat 151b.

92. Cf. Mark 7:18 (=Matthew 15:17): "whatever enters the body goes into the stomach and then out of the body."

93. Resonating with the homily in Leviticus Rabbah 3.4 on the pains through which one goes until the digestion process is complete, Seneca (*Moral Epistles* 47.2) mentions that the more one eats, the more protracted and agonizing the process of the disposal of waste. For examples of uses of the motif of excrement in patristic tirades against gluttony, see Tertullian, *De Ieiunio* 6.1; John Chrysostom,

However, while the homilies we have seen in Leviticus Rabbah clearly share themes, motifs, rhetorical structures, and general mindsets with Greek, Roman, and early Christian literature, the question remains: what agenda did these homilies attempt to promote in their midrashic setting? The homilists do not seem to be endorsing an ideal of moderation and temperance, as many of the Greek and Roman diatribes against gluttony do,[94] nor do they explicitly propagate an ascetic regime or at least occasional fasting, as the early Christians texts that use the same motifs do.[95] The latter point is perhaps particularly surprising considering the fact that the practice of fasting and self-denial of food was apparently quite prevalent among Jewish circles in Palestine of the talmudic period.[96] What purpose, then, does the criticism of food and eating serve in *parashot* 3 and 4 of Leviticus Rabbah? What message do the homilists hope to convey by describing the gullet as a sinful part of the body, and by referring to the consequences of eating in such sordid terms? The key to answering these questions, I propose, lies in the midrashic presentation of sacrificing as the diametrical opposite of eating.

Sacrifice as Non-Eating and Eating as Non-Sacrifice

As I suggested above, the homilists construct the act of sacrifice as an act of giving up food—and by extension giving up the gullet (=sacrificing one's *nefesh*)—and contrast this act with voracious eating, which is identified as animalistic. The recurring denigrations of the gullet as robbing and stealing that we find in *parashah* 4, which echo the same theme in *parashah* 3, should be understood as part of a greater rhetorical effort to vilify eating in order to valorize sacrifice. Although the practice of sacrifice is never explicitly mentioned in *parashah* 4, the very fact that this is the topic of the Torah portion around which it revolves makes it implicitly present, and sets the biblical horizon against which the midrashic themes unfold.

The same biblical horizon of sacrifice is also at play in *parashah* 5 of Leviticus Rabbah, which likewise pertains to a Torah portion concerned with sacrifices, but has very little to do with sacrifice as such. In this *parashah* we find a homily on several verses from the book of Amos, describing the overindulgent and ostentatious lifestyle of the wealthy people of Samaria. The homilist expounds on the phrase "you dine on choice lambs and fattened calves" (Amos 6:4), saying: "when one of them would wish to have a lamb from the flock, he would pass

Epistolam I ad Timotheum, Homily 13.3–4 (*Patrologia Graeca* 62:569-570); Chrysostom, *Mattheum*, Homily 70.4 (*Patrologia Graeca* 58:660).

94. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 34–59; Sandnes, *Belly and Body*, 35–160; see also John Coveney, *Food, Morals, and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (London: Routledge, 2000), 30–55; John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 187–210.

95. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 114–90; Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, 79–60.

96. Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121–32.

the entire flock in front of him and choose [a particular] one and slaughter it, and if he would wish to have a calf he would pass the entire herd in front of him, and choose [a particular] one and slaughter it."[97] For an audience versed in the cultic language of Leviticus, this description of the lavish feast, which stands as an emblem of moral depravity, immediately invokes the practice of scrutinizing the animals for sacrifice in order to choose those that are entirely unblemished, as the sacrificial protocol requires. This is yet another example of the way in which the homilists use the parity between sacrificing and eating—in the substances used and in the procedures applied to them—to set the two as two divergent paths in which one can walk: either serving God or serving one's gullet.[98] Above we have seen other examples for the use of this parity, such as the various stories in which poor persons give up their food in order to offer it on the altar, the contrast of the eating priest with the sacrificing layman, and the association of the voracious gullet with the permission to consume nonsacrificial meat.

With this notion that the essence of sacrifice is choosing God (and thereby, the soul) over the gullet, it was only natural to expect the *parashot* in Leviticus Rabbah to contain the theme, which is indeed traceable in both rabbinic and early Christian writings, that fasting is a form of sacrifice, and that the one who abstains from food gives him or herself as an offering to God.[99] It is quite likely that this notion lurks at the background of the homilies we have seen, but it is nonetheless not explicitly related. These homilies cannot be taken simply as a means of advocating asceticism by equating it with sacrifice, *since they are at the same time advocating sacrifice by equating it with asceticism*. That is to say, the authors of the *parashot* both use the imagery of sacrifices to stress the value of self-denial, and deploy the rhetoric of vilification of food to stress the value of sacrifices.

These homilies thus offer a delicate play between themes that are pertinent to the cultural world of the rabbis, and themes that govern the biblical text to which

97. Vayikra Rabbah, *Vayikra, par. 5*, to Leviticus 4:3 (ed. Margaliot, 1:105–106).

98. Of course, some sacrificial practices (most notably the Passover sacrifice) include eating as an inseparable part of the cultic process. Interestingly, however, we can trace a sustained rhetorical effort to distance the Passover sacrifice from gluttonous consumption of food as early as in Philo of Alexandria's comments on Passover, in which he emphasizes that the paschal meal is meant to create reverence and gratitude and not to "gratify the belly" (*On the Special Laws* 2.148), and a very similar effort to distinguish between "pious" consumption of the paschal meat and voracious consumption (*'akhilah gasah*) appears in B. Horayot 10b. In a somewhat different vein, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews utilizes the fact the ordinary temple sacrifices ultimately serve as food for the priests in order to denigrate those sacrifices (Hebrews 9:10), and to contrast them with the self-sacrifice of Christ, "which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat" (Hebrews 13:10). For this author, then, a sacrifice that can be eaten by humans is by definition an inefficacious sacrifice.

99. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 33–69; Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 116–17; Diamond, *Holy Men*, 101–6. The more general notion of suffering as sacrifice already appears in Second Temple literature, as shown by David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

the homilists are committed. The Levitical text presents a world in which sacrifices are an indispensable part; prominent intellectual and religious trends of late antique Palestine construct a world in which food is treated with great suspicion, if not with disdain. The homilists of Leviticus Rabbah do not replace the biblical sacrifice with a discipline of self-mortification, but rather allow the two to work together and to lend meaning to each other. At least in what concerns these *parashot*, then, Leviticus Rabbah should not be seen as subscribing to a supersessionist paradigm, according to which animal and vegetable offerings can be substituted for more "spiritual" forms of sacrifice,[100] but rather as attempting to reframe sacrifices *as such* in light of contemporary moralistic models.

One might wonder why the rabbis found it necessary to advocate sacrifice and to integrate it into the cultural system of values of their audience if sacrifices have not been part of the Jewish landscape for hundreds of years at their time. The answer to this may be that the rabbis could not bear to empty their religious language of meaning. The prospect of seeing the Torah portions concerned with sacrifices as obsolete vestiges of a world that no longer exists (much as they are read today) was not acceptable to the rabbis, and they strove to instill new and relevant meanings into these biblical institutions by enriching them with ideas and concepts from their own contemporary world. Thus, the homiletic method of the creators of Leviticus Rabbah should not be seen as a way of circumventing the biblical book, but rather as a way of bringing it back to life.

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100. On the "supersessionist" model in the explanation of sacrifice and its problems, see Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 3–13, 247–54; Ullucci, *Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice*, 31–64.