

Num. 15:27

In case it is an individual who has sinned unwittingly, he shall offer a she-goat in its first year as a sin offering. **28** The priest shall make expiation before the Lord on behalf of the person who erred, for he sinned unwittingly, making such expiation for him that he may be forgiven. **29** For the citizen among the Israelites and for the stranger who resides among them—you shall have one ritual for anyone who acts in error.

Num. 15:30

But the person, be he citizen or stranger, who acts **defiantly**^d reviles the Lord; that person shall be cut off from among his people. **31** Because he has spurned the word of the Lord and violated His commandment, that person shall be cut off—he bears his guilt.

^d *Lit. “with upraised hand.”* [פְּיָדָה רְמוּהָ]

Jacob Milgrom, Numbers (JPS Torah Commentary)

acts defiantly Literally, “with upraised hand.” The original setting of this metaphor is seen in the statues of ancient Near Eastern deities who were sculpted with an uplifted or outstretched right hand, bearing a spear, war ax, or lightning bolt. Similarly, the mighty acts of the God of Israel are described as being performed “by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 26:8) or by this very expression, “with an upraised hand” (33:3; Exod. 14:8). The upraised hand is therefore poised to strike; it is a threatening gesture of the Deity against His enemies or of man against God Himself. Thus, this literary image is most apposite for the brazen sinner who commits his acts in open defiance of the Lord (cf. Job 38:15). The essence of this sin is that it is committed flauntingly. [Targ. Onk. and Targ. Neof. aptly render *beresh galei*, “publicly.”] However, sins performed in secret, even deliberately, can be commuted to the status of inadvertencies by means of repentance.

RASHI: Defiantly. Literally, “with a high hand”—deliberately rather than inadvertently.

RASHBAM: But the person, be he citizen or stranger, who acts defiantly reviles the Lord. “Defiantly reviling the Lord” obviously refers to idolatry even according to the straightforward meaning of the text.

MASORAH: Defiantly. The Hebrew expression also occurs only in 33:3 and in Exod. 14:8.

Ex. 14:8

The Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites. As the Israelites were departing defiantly, **9** the Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pihahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

Num. 33:3

They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. It was on the morrow of the passover offering that the Israelites started out defiantly, in plain view of all the Egyptians.

David Frankel, “Mitzvah Piety’ and the Need for Individual Atonement”

thetorah.com/mitzvah-piety-and-the-need-for-individual-atonement/

According to Jacob Milgrom in his JPS commentary on Numbers (ad loc., p. 125), the statement of Numbers 15:30-31, that he who acts בְּיָד רָמָה, “defiantly,” is subject to karet and cannot offer a sacrifice of atonement, refers only to the one who publicly flaunts his defiant behavior... This interpretation is doubtful. First, if בְּיָד רָמָה refers to defiant acts done in public why is this punished by karet alone? Why shouldn't the community punish him? The person who curses the name of God in public, for example, is executed by the community (Lev. 24:10-23). The warning of the karet punishment fits much better for a sin that is hidden from the people. This is why punishment must be meted out by God. Second, the fact that בְּיָד רָמָה is placed in contrast with בשגגה implies that it refers to sins done knowingly and intentionally. This in itself constitutes defiance. If the sacrifice of atonement was indeed available to the person who knowingly sinned but was not seeking to make a public display of his sin why is there no clear statement to this effect? It seems to me that Milgrom found the simple position of the text too severe—it leaves the intentional sinner with no option for remorse and forgiveness—and therefore, sought to present a more palatable understanding of it.

Num. 15:32

Once, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they came upon a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. 33 Those who found him as he was gathering wood brought him before Moses, Aaron, and the whole community. 34 He was placed in custody, for it had not been specified what should be done to him. 35 Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall be put to death: the whole community shall pelt him with stones outside the camp.” 36 So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

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