

Parshat Emor

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Annual (Leviticus 21:1-24:23): Hertz p. 513
Haftarah (Ezekiel 44:15-31): Hertz p. 528

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Torah Portion Summary

God instructs Moshe to teach the priests the laws that apply to their special status. No *kohein* may come into contact with a dead person, the principal source of ritual impurity, other than members of his immediate family – parents, children, siblings and spouse. They were not to shave their heads or make gashes in their skin as expressions of mourning. A *kohein* may not marry a harlot or a divorcee. Additional prohibitions apply to the high priest, who may not come into contact with any dead body, even immediate family, or marry a widow. No *kohein* with a physical defect may offer sacrifices, but he still is permitted to eat the portions of the sacrifices set aside for the priests. A priest who is ritually impure may not eat from these sacrifices. Only priests and members of their households – excluding hired workers and daughters married to husbands who are not priests – may eat the food offerings given to the priests. Animals dedicated as sacrifices may not have any physical defect. An animal and its young may not be slaughtered on the same day.

God instructs Moshe to teach the people about Shabbat and the festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. The priests are to light the lamps in the sanctuary and to prepare twelve loaves of bread to be displayed in the sanctuary each week. A man who was the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father committed blasphemy and was brought to Moshe. God tells Moshe that the blasphemer is to be executed by stoning.

I. It shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe this your Sabbath. (Leviticus 23:32)

1. Now, do we fast on the ninth of the month? Why, we fast on the tenth! But this teaches you that if you eat and drink on the ninth, Scripture considered it as if you fasted on the ninth and the tenth. (Talmud Berachot 8b)
2. It is possible to explain it this way: It is said (Leviticus 16:30): "For on this day expiation shall be made for you to purify you of all your sins." If so, it would be appropriate to receive this day [Yom Kippur] with great rejoicing, with food and drink; but this is impossible for "you shall practice self-denial" is said about the day. Therefore we multiply rejoicing and eating and drinking one day before it. (Itturei Torah--Rabbi Aharon Yaakov Greenberg, 1900-1963, Poland and Israel)
3. The rabbis of the Talmud state that just as it is a religious obligation to fast on Yom Kippur, it is meritorious to eat well on Yom Kippur eve. There is a twofold reason for this declaration. First, eating a good meal on the eve of Yom Kippur helps one endure the rigors of fasting on the day itself. Secondly, since Yom Kippur is a Yom Tov ('festival') and a festive meal is impossible during the fast, it is held on the eve of the day. (Rabbi Louis Jacobs, *The Book of Jewish Practice*, p. 114)
4. "Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy" (Kohelet 9:7). Rabbi Mana of Shaab and Rabbi Joshua of Sirkhin in the name of Rabbi Levi interpreted this verse as referring to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.... On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the eminent men of the generation fast, and the Holy One remits a third of their sins... On the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur individuals fast and the Holy One remits another third of their sins. Thus, by the time the men, women, and children fast the Holy One forgives them all their sins and says, "What has gone has gone; from now onwards will be the reckoning." A *bat kol* [heavenly voice] goes forth and says to them, "Go, eat your bread in gladness, your prayer had been heard." (Kohelet Rabbah 9:7(1))

- Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There never were greater days of joy in Israel than the fifteenth of Av and the Day of Atonement. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem used to walk out in white garments, which they borrowed in order not to put to shame anyone who owned none. The daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. What did they chant? "Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself. Do not set your eyes on beauty, but set your eyes on good family. 'Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised'" (Proverb 31:30). (Talmud Ta'anit 26b)

Sparks for Discussion

Our commentators highlight the festive aspect of Yom Kippur. Why? Do you think this is how people today think about Yom Kippur? What emotions do you associate with Yom Kippur? How do you account for the difference between ancient and modern understandings of Yom Kippur?

II. If anyone maims his fellow, as he has done so it shall be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him. One who kills a beast shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. You shall have one standard for stranger and citizen alike: for I the Lord am your God. (Leviticus 24:19-24)

- Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai stated: "Eye for eye" – money. You say money, but perhaps it means literally an eye? In that case if a blind man blinded another, a cripple maimed another, how would I be able to give an eye for an eye literally? Yet the Torah states: "You shall have one standard" – a law that is equitable for all of you.... It was taught in the school of Chizkiah: "Eye for eye, life for life" and not a life and an eye for an eye; for should you imagine it is literally meant, it would sometimes happen that an eye and a life would be taken for an eye, for in the process of blinding him he might die. (Talmud Bava Kamma 84a)
- "An eye for an eye" This would have been the fitting (punishment) according to the strict law of measure for measure, but we have a tradition that he should pay money, because our conjecture may be at fault, and we may unwisely exceed the exact measure (in punishing) the guilty one. (Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforso, 1475-1550, Italy)
- "The injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him." This verse cannot be applied in any other way than the way our sages have seen fit to understand it. The thrust of the verse is to indemnify the injured party in a manner commensurate to the injury he has sustained, not by depriving [the one who caused the injury] of a limb of his own. It would be physically impossible to cause a person an exact duplicate of the injury he himself has suffered. If he were to cause either a lesser or a greater injury than the one he had sustained, he would be in violation of what the Torah wrote as he would not have complied with the Torah's demand "the injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him." In the case of monetary compensation, experts can evaluate the precise amount of the value of the loss sustained. (Rabbeinu Chananel ben Hushiel, 990-1053, Tunisia)
- One who injures his fellow is liable for five things: for damage [the value of the injury itself], for pain, for healing, for loss of time [from work], and for embarrassment. (Mishna Bava Kamma 8:1)

Sparks for Discussion

What is your initial reaction to the words "an eye for an eye"? In the Talmud, the rabbis derive a number of proofs (examples in Source A) that this phrase must mean and cannot mean anything else but monetary compensation. The Mishnah (Source D) teaches the actual halachah to be applied in the case of injury. What do you think the Torah meant to accomplish by commanding "an eye for an eye"? Why does this passage conclude with "You shall have one standard"?