LEHRHAUS Over Shabbat

Emor

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Amidst the war unfolding in Israel, we have decided to go forward and continue publishing a variety of articles to provide meaningful opportunities for our readership to engage in Torah during these difficult times.

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RETHINKING DISABILITY: LET'S DO BETTER.

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In January 2023, famed YouTuber, Mr. Beast received lots of backlash on a video he made where he "cured" blindness for 1,000 people. While many accused Mr. Beast of performative altruism, I think the mainstream media misunderstood why so many people in the blind community were upset by his performance.

Mr. Beast took what is called the "Medical Approach" to disability. The Medical Approach to disability holds as its fundamental tenet that is better to be abled than non-abled. This turns disability into a purely medical phenomenon. The disability is essentially the same as an illness that must be cured. To Mr. Beast, as a seeing person, it was obvious that being able to see is better than not being able to see. It seems Mr. Beast genuinely wanted to help the blind; his controversy lies in his assumption that it is better to see than to not.

As opposed to the Medical Model of disability, the Social Model of disability holds that disability is purely a societal construct. The best analogy to explain this thought is any magic/ superhero/ alien story out there. One could argue that the non-supernatural beings are disabled in a sense: they are quite literally less able than those that have supernatural abilities. Except, no one would really ever argue that, because the "regular" people function just fine. They live in a world that perfectly caters to them, even if there are those who can do more.

The blind community was upset with Mr. Beast because many members felt that there was nothing inherently wrong with being blind. In fact, many believed there were many beautiful facets

to it, such as community or experiencing the world through our other senses. The only reason why being blind should have any "dis" associated with it is because the world isn't accommodating enough for it. Many blind activists felt that Mr. Beast should have spent his time and money on making the world more accommodating, not the people less blind.

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I imagine that the Social Model of disability sounds pretty revolutionary to some of you, especially if you're an active member of a Jewish community. In truth, our communities take a very similar approach to that of Mr. Beast. I would be remiss to fail to mention that in many ways the Jewish community has come very far in our accommodations and acceptance of disabled people. We have dozens of organizations helping those with cognitive and or physical disabilities; we have schools with great integrated programs; and we have members and organizations fighting to end stigmatization.

However, we fail to address the structural issues that stigmatize and marginalize disabled people to begin with. In other words, we still perpetuate systems that force disabled people to live in a world not built for them. For example, the only reason giving a wheelchair-bound person an *aliyah* is a special occurrence is because it is out of the ordinary of what we expect to happen. It requires so much forethought and logistical planning, it really is a "big deal." But it doesn't have to be. Imagine if our *tefilah* spaces were just wheelchair accessible. Have you ever seen a *bimah* that had a wheelchair ramp? I haven't. Yet, when a disabled person does get an *aliyah*, it is applauded for days because we did such a *hesed*, helping those in need. We never take the time to think *why* that person is "in need." It is as if we view successful accommodation and integration as how much the disabled individual can be "normal," and not how much "normal" can include the disabled individual.

Another area where we unfortunately take a "Mr. Beastian" approach is in our schools. Again, we must mention that our schools have done tremendous work in creating accommodations for our students. We have IEPs, integrated programs, and teachers who go through special training and mentorship on how to best teach to all students (although, we could do some work on how accessible our buildings are to those with physical disabilities). However, our students who don't fit our classical views of disability, that is our mentally ill and neurodivergent students, are often left in the dust. They are labeled as "bad," "poor performers," and "problematic." In reality, those students probably are just not in an environment that supports them. We attempt to try to fit the student around the classroom, not the classroom around the student.

I remember when I was a student with undiagnosed ADHD, despite being bright and studious, I would fall apart when it came to organization and time management. My teachers, with all the best intentions, tried hard to instill discipline and impulse control in me, but were never successful because that model of education was not built for me. I simply could not fit the

mold that was prescribed. For example, as a high schooler, I never possessed the time management and executive functioning necessary to keep up with the multiple hours of homework I was given a night. What teachers would assume should take me twenty minutes, would sometimes take me multiple hours because of my attention deficit. When I would approach my teachers with these difficulties, they often would blame the issues on my lack of discipline or inappropriate priorities, such as the youth movement I was a part of. My teachers were trying to change me, not what was expected of me. The problem was, I could not be changed. My neurochemistry is what it is. As a result, I was left feeling like a failure, and despite being smart, I was a “bad” student. Thank God, I still managed to succeed in school, but many of my peers did not. Thank God, I still managed to succeed in school, but many of my peers did not.

I feel the need to mention that the issue of accommodations and accessibility in the classroom is not and cannot be the responsibility of solely the teachers. Teachers are bound by the requirements of the administrators, who are bound by the requirements of the accrediting bodies. And, that doesn’t even begin to address the issues of lack of proper training for teachers on how to educate certain types of students, nor the lack of financial compensation teachers receive for their off-the-clock work. To change our educational models, we must address the issue on multiple levels, through multiple educational bodies and agents; nevertheless, we must change our educational models.

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I am writing this piece on February 16th, 2024, when my students found out last night if they got into a Jewish high school. I think about my students that inevitably got waitlisted or rejected from schools because of whatever mental illness and or cognitive/learning disabilities that have gone under the radar, making them appear to be “poor students.” The pain I feel knowing that there are children who are systemically being locked out of Jewish education is indescribable. I often think about what those children’s lives would look like if school was actually a place for them and didn’t just reluctantly manage them.

How beautiful would our schools be if we adopted the Social Model of disability? Could you imagine what it would look like if all students could just succeed? How our disabled students would feel knowing that they have strengths and challenges just like every other student? How beautiful it would be for every student to know there was a place for them?

Just imagine.

I dream of a day where every student in our schools is accepted as they are for who they are. Our neurodivergent and mentally ill students would never have to feel like they are failures because they can’t keep up with an impossible workload. Our students who require mobility accessibility would never have to jump through metaphorical hoops to move around the building.

As an educator, I know that when we make our classrooms accessible, it helps all students. If our schools were truly accommodating, not only would we be giving support to those who are most in need, but all of the students would also turn into active community members who are knowledgeable in and feel accepted by their faith and heritage.

So, this is my call to action for our heads of school, school boards, principals, and educators: it's time for us to do better. It's time for us to build communities and schools where everyone has a place. Because the problem is not disability, the problem is the world that excludes it.

The Non-Blaspheming "Blasphemer" and the Broader Ethic of the Episode

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I.

It is fair to say that *Sefer Vayikra* is not known for its narratives. It is devoted, for the most part, to the dry detailing of specific laws governing the conduct of priests and the sacrificial service—hence *Hazal's* term for it, *Torat Kohanim,* "the Law of Priests" (*Megillah* 31b), preserved by the Latin (and thus English) name Leviticus.

Not only does this render any narrative found within *Sefer Vayikra* noteworthy in its own right, but it makes all the more astonishing the existence within *Sefer Vayikra* of a narrative that, ostensibly, exists to teach a matter of law: the story of the *mekallel*—typically translated as "the blasphemer"—that occurs at the end of *Parashat Emor* (Lev. 24:10–23).

And to make matters even more striking, this narrative does not simply teach us about *a* prohibition (blasphemy) but rather a *particularly significant* prohibition, given its inclusion in the seven Noahide commandments, the laws Judaism believes to be binding not just on its adherents but on all human beings (*Sanhedrin* 56a).

But this, still, is not the most perplexing part of the narrative's inclusion in *Sefer Vayikra* because the story concludes with the Torah explicitly stating the prohibition:

> And to the Israelite people speak thus: Anyone who blasphemes his God shall bear his guilt; and one who also pronounces the Name of the Lord shall be put to death. The community leadership shall stone that person; stranger or citizen—having thus pronounced the Name—shall be put to death. (Lev. 24:15–16)

These verses render the previous five—which the Torah devotes to a narrative in which a Jew blasphemes and God thus decrees it prohibited—redundant. The black-letter prohibition of these verses should suffice as is.

This strange stylistic choice—while not unique to the story of the blasphemer—is unusual, nonetheless.[1] To use a rather glib example, the Torah's prohibition of murder does not follow from an episode in which someone commits murder. Indeed, while it is obvious from the story of Cain and Abel that God disapproves of murder (Gen. 4:8–15), it takes many chapters and verses before the first inkling of any absolute prohibition is stated by God, at the conclusion of the Noah story (Gen. 9:6). It is thus curious that the prohibition of blasphemy requires a narrative preface.

Not only are these five verses of narrative seemingly redundant, but reading them even complicates and confuses our understanding of the prohibition—distracting us with a convoluted story about how God came to decree the prohibition.

My point in this article is thus to suggest that the purpose behind the Torah's inclusion of this narrative of the blasphemer is not actually about the prohibition of blasphemy. Rather, it is about something far more severe—the *cause* of the first instance of blasphemy—that the Torah wishes to highlight. But it is only through a close reading of the narrative and its surrounding verses that this issue comes to the fore.

II.

Before turning to the narrative, however, a word must be excised from usage. Despite the popularity of doing so, the sin committed cannot be translated as "blasphemy." As is often said, every translation is also an act of interpretation. Translating the sin as "blasphemy" instantly conjures a certain image: what the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines as "insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God," "claiming the attributes of a deity," or "irreverence toward something considered sacred."

As is clear from the story, not a single one of these definitions comes even close to matching the sin violated by the man formerly known as "the blasphemer."

But finding a name with which to refer to the sinner becomes tricky. Because I am also hesitant to refer to him without translation by the sin he committed—as "the *mekallel*." A core part of what I am to argue is that the true force of this episode can only be recognized when the broader situation that drives the sinner to sin is

[1] The most obvious parallel is the story of the wood gatherer at the end of *Parashat Shelah* (Num. 15:32–36), yet there are still key differences that separate these two stories despite their literary similarity. For starters, the prohibitions under discussion, blasphemy and Shabbat, are treated very differently in the Torah as a whole: Shabbat is a core commandment repeatedly emphasized, while blasphemy is only mentioned here. For other reasons to suspect that there is a fundamental difference between the two, see Netziv's *Ha-Emek Davar* to Lev. 24:14, s.v. "ve-samekhu kol ha-shome'im et yedeihem al rosho."

acknowledged.

The only remaining option, it seems, is to use the Torah's other way of referring to him, "the son of a Jewish woman,"[2] but this is a lot for a reader to process (and, quite frankly, a lot to type) every single time the son of the Jewish woman is referenced. Instead, I will refer to the son of the Jewish woman by the (somewhat clunky) name "Ben Shelomit," "the son of Shelomit," given the Torah's identification of his mother as Shelomit bat Dibri (Lev. 24:11).

III.

The narrative itself unfolds over a series of five verses, each verse describing a more perplexing scene than the previous. The opening verse of the narrative (v. 10) introduces us to Ben Shelomit, someone who—the Torah is quick to stress—has only a Jewish mother, and whose father is Egyptian. We are then told that a fight breaks out between Ben Shelomit and another Jew, though no reason is offered by the Torah as to why.

This other Jew is never identified, and the only thing that seems to matter is that he is a Jew—that is, underscoring that he is the son of *both* a Jewish mother and a Jewish father. This sharp contrast is highlighted by the Torah's reference to the Jew as simply "the Jew," while Ben Shelomit is "the son of a Jewish woman." Also noteworthy is that the Torah never tells us who causes the fight. All that matters, it seems, is that there is a fight between Ben Shelomit and the Jew.

Whatever happens during the fight is also unknown, as the next verse (v. 11) skips to the end of the fight, triggered by Ben Shelomit's action: *va-yyikkov et Hashem va-ykallel.* Whatever exactly this means will be discussed below, but the people's reaction to this act results in them bringing Ben Shelomit before Moses.

An important observation must be made here. The Torah's description of the people's *instant* reaction to Ben Shelomit's action means that *there are onlookers to the fight*—a fact explicit in a later verse (v. 14).

The next scene in the story (v. 12) reveals that Moses himself does not know what Ben Shelomit's punishment must be. Ben Shelomit is thus placed in custody until God reveals to Moses the consequences Ben Shelomit must face.

This verse is, perhaps, the strongest indication that the sin committed is not blasphemy as it is typically understood. Because if Ben Shelomit's sin was to curse God or express some general contempt toward Him, the resulting punishment should have been obvious to Moses. After all, the Torah has twice stressed that one who is *mekallel* their parents is put to death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), with the latter formulation of this prohibition spelled out shortly before this episode. Were Ben Shelomit to have simply paralleled this

[2] While the Torah uses the term "Israelite" rather than Jewish—and, indeed, referring to the Israelites as "Jews" is anachronistic—I am nonetheless preferring conventional over precise terminology.

prohibition—that the only difference was that he cursed God rather than his parents—his punishment should not have required divine assistance to determine. If one who curses their parents deserves death, how much more so one who curses God?

Indeed, an interpretive haze suffuses this entire narrative. Ben Shelomit's sin is shocking enough that the people bring him before Moses—yet this sin is so unique, so exceptional, that Moses must wait for God to reveal the punishment. Everything about this story defies a simple reading, a challenge that continues into its final scene.

Here (v. 14), God reveals to Moses the punishment for Ben Shelomit: execution. Yet here two additional steps are required. First, all those who heard Ben Shelomit utter his sin must lay their hands upon his head. Second, *kol ha-edah,* "the entire community," must take part in his execution.

This first step is remarkable, as it belongs not to the realm of capital punishment but to the sacrificial service. Indeed, its most iconic occurrence is within the laws of Yom Kippur, in which Aaron must lay his hands upon the goat sent to Azazel (Lev. 16:21–22). Within this context, the Torah explicitly identifies the purpose: for Aaron to confess the sins of the Jewish people upon the goat—"thus the goat shall carry all their sins to an inaccessible region."

Seforno thus extrapolates from this situation a broader thesis. A person always lays their hands upon an animal about to be offered in order to achieve atonement (Seforno to Lev. 1:2, s.v. "min ha-behemah"). And Hizkuni takes this idea even further—a person lays their hands upon the animal about to be offered to reinforce the fact that the animal is being slaughtered in place of the person themselves. The animal ultimately dies for the sins of the offerer (Hizkuni to Lev. 1:4, s.v. "alav").

What emerges from this strange step in Ben Shelomit's execution is not only the possibility that the onlookers—simply by being witness to the fight—have committed some sin that requires forgiveness, but that they must recognize that Ben Shelomit's death is in some sense the consequence of their own actions.

These five verses, which appear at first glance to explain why the sin of "blasphemy" is prohibited, raise further questions rather than provide answers: Why must Ben Shelomit's ancestry be highlighted? Why is he in a fight—and who caused it? Why is Moses unaware of what must be done? And why must the crowd share some of the blame?

All of these questions, however, require an answer to the most central issue: What is this sin of Ben Shelomit? Only by uncovering this translation can the other questions be solved and a greater meaning to the entire episode be unearthed.

IV.

All the typical translations of Ben Shelomit's sin, *va-yyikkov et Hashem va-ykallel,* orbit the same

imagery. JPS (1985) states that Ben Shelomit "pronounced the Name in blasphemy," a translation echoed by Artscroll in *The Stone Edition Tanach*, telling us that Ben Shelomit "pronounced the Name and blasphemed." R. Lord Jonathan Sacks opts for a slightly different word choice in the Koren *Hebrew-English Tanakh (Magerman Edition)*, that Ben Shelomit "blasphemed the Name and cursed."

And while all of these translations favor what I believe to be the unhelpful word "blasphemy" to characterize Ben Shelomit's action—they all, crucially, grasp that Ben Shelomit's sin comprises *two* separate yet linked actions: first *va-yyikov et Hashem* and then, only afterward, *va-ykallel.*

Va-yyikov, most literally, shares its root with words that mean "to pierce," or "to bore through." Such words, in and of themselves, are value neutral—it is neither good nor bad to pierce something—it just *is.* If, however, one bores through something they should not, such as the lock on someone else's door, then the act of piercing is transgressive.

Ben Shelomit's first action is to pronounce God's Name. He pierces the heavens, as it were, tearing through the fabric that divides God and people. And though this itself is egregious, Ben Shelomit's sin is not simply this forbidden act of invoking God's Name but includes the second part of his action: *va-ykallel.* He invokes God's Name *as a curse.* Too often, however, we assume that he is cursing God—hence the popularity of the word "blasphemy"—but I would argue otherwise. He is cursing *the Jew* fighting him.

In the course of the fight, Ben Shelomit resorts to desperation. In an attempt to overcome his opponent, he invokes God's Name and calls on Him to strike his enemy. Translating Ben Shelomit's sin this way reveals that Ben Shelomit does not blaspheme God's Name—the way we often understand it—but rather, *va-yyikkov et Hashem,* "he invoked God's Name," *va-ykallel*, "and hexed [his opponent]."

And this interpretation of Ben Shelomit's action is not as jarring as it may first seem. Because there are at least two other occasions in *Tanakh*—one explicit, the other midrashic—in which God (or other deities) are invoked in order to hex an enemy. The first is uttered by Goliath, who is enraged upon seeing that David, of all people, is the Jewish people's champion sent to fight him (I Sam. 17:42–43). Goliath sees David as puny and unworthy and, taking offense at David's presence, deems David to be beneath his stature to battle. Thus, *va-ykallel ha-Pelishti et David be'lohav,* "the Philistine cursed David by his gods"—Goliath calls on his gods to take out David on his behalf.

The second occurrence in which someone invokes God's Name to hex another is found in one of *Hazal'*s explanations for how Moses killed the Egyptian who was beating a Jew (Ex. 2:11–12). Though the Torah itself states simply that Moses struck the Egyptian, *va-yyakh et ha-Mitzri, Hazal* suggest that Moses invoked God's Name and called on Him to strike the Egyptian (*Exodus Rabbah* 1: 29).

The meaning of Ben Shelomit's sin, then, is clear. It is not that he blasphemed but that he invoked

God's Name and called on Him to strike his opponent. With this understanding, the story can be reconstructed, and its deeper meaning emerge.

V.

The first scene in the story stresses that Ben Shelomit is the son of only a Jewish mother—his father is Egyptian. This is key, not because the Torah wishes to cast him as someone with suspect lineage, but to highlight that Ben Shelomit is an alien amongst his people. For starters, by being the son of only a Jewish woman, there is a practical ramification: it is unclear to which tribe he belongs. Because tribal identification flows from a person's father, he has no obvious identity.

But more than this, Ben Shelomit is not just the son of a non-Jewish father but the son of an Egyptian, the very people who had enslaved and oppressed the Jewish people! And while the Torah does not say so explicitly, the default understanding—championed by Rashi (Lev. 24:11, s.v. "ve-shem imo Shelomit bat Divri")—is that Shelomit sought out a relationship with Ben Shelomit's Egyptian father. In other words, Ben Shelomit is a symbol of something despicable to the Jewish people: a Jew creating intimacy with the oppressor.

Hazal, ever sensitive to the Torah's choice of words, thus reconstruct the events that led to and caused the fight. Noting that the entire story begins with the word *va-yyetze,* that Ben Shelomit "went out," they suggest that he had just left the *beit din* of Moses (*Sifra, Emor* 14:1). Seeing himself as a member of the tribe of Dan through his mother's ancestry, Ben Shelomit had pitched his tent within its camp. The people of Dan, however, objected that only those with a father from Dan were part of their tribe (*cf.* Num. 2:2)—and Moses found in favor of the tribe's objection.

It is not hard to imagine Ben Shelomit's anger and frustration here, having learned that there is no tribe within which he can dwell. And it is also not hard to imagine that, as he walks through the busy thoroughfare, there are those—perhaps from the tribe of Dan, perhaps from elsewhere—who see an opportunity to goad him. As a symbol of something so detestable to them, there would have been many quick to hurl slurs and insults his way.

Thus a fight breaks out between Ben Shelomit and another Jew. It does not matter who this other Jew is because he is, in many ways, an avatar for many members of the Jewish people. The only thing that matters to the narrative is the identity dynamic: Ben Shelomit is an outcast while the Jew is not. And it is equally plausible for either to start the fight. Ben Shelomit, dejected and outraged, finally snaps and turns on one of the people who insults him. Alternatively, one of the Jewish people takes things a step further than everyone else and physically attacks Ben Shelomit.

What matters next, however, is crucial. Whether Ben Shelomit deserves to emerge victorious or not, things do not go well for him. We can imagine his panicked face as he looks around at the assembled crowd, willing someone—anyone—to

jump in and help. But no one does. Thus, Ben Shelomit resorts to his final gambit. With no human around to help, he decides to trespass upon the divine, invoke God's Name, and call on Him to strike his opponent.

The fight ends. The mob immediately takes Ben Shelomit to Moses. The Torah never tells us whether the crowd is shocked by the fact that Ben Shelomit tried to use God as his personal bodyguard or because Ben Shelomit's attempt succeeded and his opponent lay dead before them all. All that matters is that the consequence for his shocking action must be determined.

And it is here that the reason for Moses's uncertainty becomes clearer. Because, while a transgression has clearly taken place that requires punishment—invoking God's Name—the haze of context modulates any potential consequence. Could Ben Shelomit have been acting in self-defense? Or was it an unnecessarily extreme and impious act of aggression? If God *did* strike the Jew, does that mean that He approved of Ben Shelomit's actions? (Making matters more complicated is the fact that Moses himself may have once used this method to execute another—giving him a conflict of interest, as it were.)

Thus only God can judge Ben Shelomit—and He does so: Ben Shelomit's sin was so egregious that he must be executed.

But the final quirk of the story is revelatory. The onlookers, those who witnessed Ben Shelomit's fight with a Jew, must lay their hands upon him—in recognition of their guilt, as though he is an offering on their behalf. Because the only reason Ben Shelomit resorted to his act was the onlookers' failure to help him or break up the fight. The crowd stood around watching—perhaps simply unwilling to intervene, or perhaps with a more vindictive mentality: enjoying an Egyptian being attacked by a Jew for a change.

Had anyone from the crowd stepped in, Ben Shelomit would never have uttered God's Name and called on Him to strike his opponent. Thus, his sin is—in part—their blame. Ben Shelomit must suffer the ultimate consequence of his actions, but the onlookers must accept their role in his sin. Indeed, the entire people must lay their hands on him and take part in his execution to reinforce their collective responsibility for one another.

VI.

Understood this way, the Torah shares the narrative not because it wishes to relate an episode in which the sin occurs before it explicitly states the prohibition, but because it wanted to highlight a wider issue: the temptation for people to care less about the plight of those on the margins of society—a recurring theme of the Torah as a whole.

In fact, a closer look at the explicit prohibition that flows from the narrative reveals it to be prohibiting two different derivatives of the improper use of a divine Name. The first is a more conventionally understood version of blasphemy, one more closely aligned with the prohibition of

cursing one's parents: "Anyone who blasphemes (*yekallel*) his God shall bear the guilt" (v. 15). Here, the object of the curse seems to be God Himself.

The second, however, prohibits the invoking of God's Name in a manner akin to Ben Shelomit's invocation—even though, when stated simply as a prohibition, the reason why God's Name is invoked is not spelled out: "and one who also pronounces (*ve-nokev,* the same verb as *va-yyikov*) the Name of the Lord shall be put to death" (v. 16).

Putting all of this another way, the verses found here describe two different forms of the prohibition commonly called blasphemy: the conventionally understood blasphemy on the one hand, and the attempt to call on God to perform some sort of divine vigilante justice à la Ben Shelomit, on the other.

This interpretation is further anchored by a literary feature of the verses that conclude *Parashat Emor,* beginning with the prohibition of "blasphemy." The final few verses teach the talion laws: the mirrored punishments a person receives for committing a crime against another (Lev. 24:17–23). But, as Jacob Milgrom notes, verses 13–23 form a large chiasmus—presented below—in which each and every verse (or partial verse) is mirrored by another, reflected around the first half of verse 20.[3]

A—[13] And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

B—[14] Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands upon his head, and let the whole community stone him.

C—[15] And to the Israelite people, speak thus: Anyone who blasphemes (*yekallel*) his God shall bear his guilt;

D—[16] if he also pronounces (*ve-nokev*) the Name of the Lord, he shall be put to death. The whole community shall stone him; stranger or citizen, if he has thus pronounced the Name, he shall be put to death.

E—[17] If anyone kills any human being, he shall be put to death.

F—[18] One who kills a beast shall make restitution for it: life for life.

G—[19] If anyone maims his fellow, as he has done so shall it be done to him:

X—[20] fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

G'—The injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him.

[3] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 295–296.

F'—[21] One who kills a beast shall make restitution for it;

E'—but one who kills a human being shall be put to death.

D'—22 You shall have one standard for stranger and citizen alike: for I the LORD am your God.

C'—23 Moses spoke thus to the Israelites.

B'—And they took the blasphemer outside the camp and pelted him with stones.

A'—The Israelites did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

All of the verses are mirrored—that is, except two. Two verses seemingly unrelated to one another are paired together: the prohibition and consequence of one who invokes God's Name, and "You shall have one standard for the stranger and citizen alike, for I am the Lord your God" (v. 22). And while Milgrom offers his own analysis of the chiasmus, I see it as a clear reinforcement of the story's wider ethic. The need to respect and aid the stranger, the alien, is a corollary to the prohibition of blasphemy—not because the two are always linked but because the very first instance of the sin was a result of the people's failure to care for and protect a stranger, the son of an Egyptian father.

And this, I would suggest, also plays a role in why *kilelat Hashem* is considered among the seven Noahide laws—not because blasphemy itself is so endemic to wider society that it must be stopped but because the invoking of God's Name to strike others—the other form of "blasphemy," the act committed by Ben Shelomit—cuts against the very ethic the Torah envisions for society. One will only call on God to strike others if they feel there is no other human around to help—if they feel that they cannot achieve any justice themselves. Such a society is one that the Torah abhors and must thus be swayed to do otherwise.

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