

## Emor

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Shabbat Shalom! This week's portion is Emor. In the parashah, Moses is given a set of rules about how the priests should conduct themselves, what their duties are, what physical defects prevent priests from being able to enter the sanctuary and make sacrifices to G-d, rules defining what animals can be sacrificed, description of holy Jewish holidays, and the rules of equal payback or equitable compensation. This last topic is mainly what I will talk about today.

In the Torah, G-d tells Moses, "If anyone maims his fellow, as he has done so shall it be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him" (Emor, Ch 24: 19-20). This is a famous line from the Torah about the ancient rules of equitable compensation for damages. Taken literally, this line seems to mean if you hurt someone, they're allowed to do the same to you, accident or not.

Our Rabbis say this rule was never carried out literally in the history of the Jewish people. They take it metaphorically, saying if a man pokes out another's eye, he must pay for the damage done and the work time lost. This rule makes sense, but I also think the one who caused the damage should help out the victim out of caring for other human beings, not because he or she has to. Our Rabbis think that this is the form of compensation the Torah commands and not retaliation because there are no rules defining what happens if a blind man pokes out another's eye. This logic helps prove their idea of the rule, but what's odd about this interpretation is right before this happens in the Torah, G-d commands his people to stone a man who cursed his name. This is odd to me because stoning someone to death for cursing is cruel, and how can G-d be nice and mean at two points in the Torah right next to each other? Maybe this is G-d's way of telling his people to be careful with words and not curse or insult others, because he is more lenient with offenders who physically hurt someone and not for the man who cursed. Other monotheistic religions also have their own ways of compensation

Christians follow Jesus' words who just says turn the other cheek when confronted by violence (Matthew 5:38-39). He didn't want his people to seek payback in any form to wrongdoers, because he thought it would lead to even more violence. Mahatma Gandhi and later Martin Luther King Jr. said, "An eye for an eye for an eye for an eye ... ends in making everybody blind." I don't think they agree with what the Rabbis say, and think that people should just leave their issues alone so arguments or fights don't get even worse.

In Islam the Quran strongly discourages, but doesn't forbid you from seeking exact compensation for damages if you're the victim. The Quran says you can have equal payback on a man who hurt you, but suggests that you should just let the offender apologize or accept blood money. Of all the religions, Islam takes the phrase most literally. The Quran also thinks repaying someone for the physical injuries you have done them should be out of a sense of doing a good deed, and while I might not agree with wanting to get exactly even with someone who hurt me, I do agree with this idea.

Which interpretation is correct? It depends. Personally, if a person poked my eye out, I'd rather accept money than take out his eye, like what our Rabbis and The Quran say. To get equal payback might make me feel better but not solve my problems. Taking money or just dismissing the matter is the better solution, depending on the severity of what another has done to you. You shouldn't let another apologize to you for breaking your leg and let it go. But if someone scratches you or give you an injury that doesn't cause you a great deal of suffering, let it go, like Jesus says. So I somewhat agree with each religion. This rule might've seemed minor at first, but reading it more carefully and the other parts of the portion taught a lot of lessons. When hurt by someone, physically or not, not retaliating is the right thing to do. When you're the person who hurt another, helping them out, whether it's getting a band-aid for a cut or giving them money if they can't work for a month, things like this should be done as acts of kindness. And last, words can hurt more than actions because sometimes insults can last forever, while cuts go away and broken bones heal.

Now for my thank yous, I'd first like to thank my dad for helping me with my Tikkun Olam project. For my project, I am collecting used sports equipment to sell to a store that purchases the equipment, and then use the money to buy new basketballs for the boys and girls club in Hartford basketball league, and it was his idea to sell the equipment to buy the basketballs. Next I'd like to thank my mom, Mr. Pinchover, and Cantor Cohn for helping me learn my portions and prayers. I'd also like to thank Ms. Fox and Rabbi Small for helping me write this speech. Last, I'd like to thank my brother and sister for their constant support. Now please turn to page 717 in the big red book.