

# PARSHAS EMOR

*by Gedalia Litke*

The Parsha ends with the episode of the mekalel, the man who cursed HaShem. Rashi says he was a person of tainted lineage who nonetheless sought to receive full citizenship benefits, including rights reserved exclusively for those of more wholesome lineage. The matter was brought to court where the mekalel lost the case. In his rage following the court case he cursed HaShem. After he cursed there was some uncertainty as to how he should be treated, so he was sequestered until the Word of HaShem could be sought. HaShem's response is twofold: (i) the mekalel should be put to death and (ii) cursing HaShem, as well as hitting and damaging another person, are all forbidden acts (of varying degrees of severity), and when damages must be paid by the one who hurt another person the standard is 'eye-for-an-eye'. (24:10-23)

Why do HaShem's instructions concerning the mekalel include the seemingly separate issues of hitting and damages and eye-for-an-eye? Furthermore, Parshas Mishpatim (21:23) already taught us eye-for-an-eye, why is it needed again - if there is some connection between the mekalel and eye-for-an-eye, why wasn't the mekalel episode simply related in Parshas Mishpatim, or, put differently, what is different about the eye-for-an-eye in Emor than in Mishpatim?

The mekalel refused to back down from his approach that there ought to be no difference between a full Jew and someone who is less than a full Jew. He felt that Jews should be able to relate to G-d like any other people and that all people should be equal as G-d's subjects. In fact Jews are bonim laMakom, G-d's children. As children, princes and princesses of the King of Kings, we enjoy a special status and are subject to special scrutiny. The topic of the mekalel belongs in Sefer Vayikro/Parshas Emor because this is where the laws and ideas covering unique status for Kohanim are placed. We also learn from these psukim of Parshas Emor that different punishments apply based on whether the aggressor and/or victim is a Jew or not. Just as within Judaism the Kohanim have special rights and obligations not available to the vast majority of Jews, so too in general Jews have a unique status - a mission as a G-dly people - not available to others.

When one person hits another two elements come into play. One is that the victim suffered and is entitled to damages. This is the element covered in Parshas Mishpatim as part of the overall treatment of civil laws and torts.

The other element of striking a person is similar to the dynamic involved when a soldier is unlawfully killed. In addition to killing a man, the killer has also indicated his lack of respect for the King or country in whose army the soldier was employed. The higher the rank of the soldier, the more

outrageous or rebellious is the crime. Every human is created b'tzelem elokim, in the image of G-d, and so it is inappropriate to strike another human being - above and beyond the Mishpatim reasons - for it is an affront to G-d himself. A Jew is at an elevated level of bonim laMakom; it is in even more inappropriate to strike a Jew (not for the Mishpatim reasons) because in striking a Jew it is as if I have struck a reflection of G-d Himself, so to speak, or that I have struck one of His children. This element belongs in Parshas Emor with the mekalel because the mekalel disputes the special G-dliness of each Jew.

[This is based primarily on a shiur of HoRav Yochanan Zweig, Shlita.]

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