
Vayikra – Vayikra/Leviticus 1:1-5:26

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

2:1-3 When a person presents an offering of meal to the Lord, his offering shall be of choice flour; he shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it and present it to Aaron's sons, the priests. The priest shall scoop out of it a handful of its choice flour and oil, as well as all of its frankincense; and this token portion he shall turn into smoke on the altar, as an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to the Lord. And the remainder of the meal offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the Lord's offerings by fire.

2:13 You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt.

3:16-17 The priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as food, an offering by fire, of pleasing odor. All fat is the Lord's. It is a law for all time throughout the ages, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In Vayikra, God speaks to Moses, laying out the laws of animal sacrifice and meal offerings brought to the Tent of Meeting.

God decrees that a small portion of each offering should be burned; the rest is to be consumed by the priests. He also insists that every meal offering be seasoned with salt, and that neither fat nor blood are permissible for eating.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) God permitted His priests to eat from the sacrifice because they had no other source of income. In what ways do we offer people community food assistance today? What are some of the challenges we face in providing such assistance? What might be some effective ways to address those issues?
- 2) What do we interpret from the divine injunction to include salt in our offerings to God, and to avoid blood and fat at all costs? How does this relate to our work as advocates? What does it tell us about the types of support we are expected to offer needy people and impoverished communities?

Tzav – Vayikra/Leviticus 6:1-8:36

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

7:9-10 Further, any meal offering that is baked in an oven, and any that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. But every other meal offering, with oil mixed in or dry, shall go to the sons of Aaron all alike.

7:15 And the flesh of his thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day that it is offered; none of it shall be set aside until morning.

7:16-17 If, however, the sacrifice he offers is a votive or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten on the morrow. What is then left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be consumed in fire on the third day.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In this parasha, God communicates, through Moses, the rights and duties of Aaron and his sons as priests who will make ritual offerings in the Sanctuary.

Among God's many instructions, He says that an offering belongs either to the priest who offers it or to the whole priestly community, depending upon how the offering is prepared. He also distinguishes between different types of offerings, mandating that some must be consumed entirely on the day of the offering, whereas others may be eaten on the following day, as well. However, by the third day, any leftovers must be burned.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) How do we equitably balance the distribution of limited resources (food, fuels and other raw materials) in a way that prioritizes both individual and communal needs? On a global scale, how do we prioritize when faced with the competing – and equally compelling – claims of so many societies in need?
- 2) Why does God stress the importance of eating the sacrificial meal on the first day or two of the offering itself? What does that imply about the type – and timing – of “offerings” we should be making in support of impoverished people and communities?

Shmini – Vayikra/Leviticus 9:1-11:47

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

10:8 And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.

11:2-3 Speak to the Israelite people thus: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals: any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud – such you may eat.

11:9 These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales – these you may eat.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In Shmini, Aaron and his sons assume their priestly role. God instructs Aaron not to come before Him intoxicated.

Also in this parasha, God reveals the laws of kashrut to Moses and Aaron, detailing which animals on the land, in the air and in the water may and may not be eaten.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) God demands respect from Aaron and his sons when they appear before Him, specifically limiting excessive imbibing of wine. What does this suggest about the ways in which we should – and should not – partake of the earth's bounty? How do we, as proponents of global justice, advocate for appropriate and measured use of natural resources?
- 2) Diet plays a key role in this parasha, and of course in Judaism today. How does restricting what we eat shape the way we approach our environment? How does kashrut influence our commitment to the development of practices and policies that promote sustainability?

Acharei Mot – Vayikra/Leviticus 16:1-18:30

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

17:13-14 And if any Israelite who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of all flesh – its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In this parasha, God commands the Israelites regarding, among other things, the importance of bringing slaughtered animals to the Holy Temple as offerings. He also forbids the consumption of blood, which He views as an offense against life itself.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) What does this emphasis on blood – that which is most internal – tell us about the importance of intention and action over appearances (the “external”)? What does it suggest in terms of our relationship with people around the world, regardless of our external differences?
- 2) We are told to pour the blood of a slaughtered animal on the ground and to cover it with dirt. How is this an exercise in both respect and sustainability? What is the value, both morally and materially, of reinvesting our natural resources?

Kedoshim – Vayikra/Leviticus 19:1-20:27

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

19:9-10 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the strangers: I the Lord am your God.

19:23-25 When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. In the fourth year all its

fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Lord, and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit – that its yield to you may be increased: I the Lord am your God.

The Context – The verses in plain English

Kedosh means holy, and it is appropriate that, in this parasha, God lays out a number of mitzvot (commandments) through which Jews sanctify themselves and emulate divine holiness.

One such commandment relates to the gathering of crops: Jews are instructed to leave a portion of their land unharvested, so poor and needy people have an opportunity to eat. Another of these mitzvot involves the cultivation of fruit trees – God mandates that Jews wait five years before consuming the produce they yield.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) God's instruction that we leave the corners of our fields for people in need gives them a role in their own self-improvement – rather than simply harvesting everything and then giving a portion to charity, we enable the poor to glean for themselves. Why might this be an important element of any lasting attempt to reduce global poverty? What is the value in empowering people to help themselves?
- 2) Why are we told to wait before enjoying the fruit from trees that we plant? What does this suggest about the importance of making long-term investments in solutions to entrenched social problems? What are some examples of such investments, and what makes them so impactful?

Emor – Vayikra/Leviticus 21:1-24:23

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

22:10-11 No lay person shall eat of the sacred donations. No bound or hired laborer of a priest shall eat of the sacred donations; but a person who is a priest's property by purchase may eat of them; and those that are born into his household may eat of his food.

22:21 And when a man offers, from the herd or the flock, a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord for an explicit vow or as a freewill offering, it must, to be acceptable, be without blemish; there must be no defect in it.

23:10-12 When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest. He shall elevate the sheaf before the Lord for acceptance in your behalf; the priest shall elevate it on the day after the sabbath. On the day that you elevate the sheaf, you shall offer as a burnt offering to the Lord a lamb of the first year without blemish.

The Context – The verses in plain English

The first part of Emor deals with the special laws pertaining to Aaron and his offspring – the Israelites' priests. Among God's many mandates is a specific breakdown of who may – and may not – eat from the ritual offerings brought by the Israelites to the Temple. God also decrees that all animals offered in sacrifice must be blemish-free, and that harvest sacrifices be accompanied by animal offerings.

In Emor, God also enumerates many of the Jewish holidays with which we are so familiar today, including Shabbat, Passover, the Counting of the Omer, Shavuot and Shimini Atzeret.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Why does God draw a distinction between “bound or hired” workers and those who have been purchased? How does recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual relate to the strategies we employ in pursuit of global justice?
- 2) What is the significance of sacrificing only our choicest items? What does this suggest about the importance of sacrifice, not only as a sign of divine respect but also as a means of accomplishing tangible goals?
- 3) Why are we instructed to accompany a grain offering with an animal sacrifice? Why is it important that, in seeking to achieve specific objectives (such as ending hunger and poverty), we invest both our hard labor and also our material wealth?

B'har Sinai – Vayikra/Leviticus 25:1-26:2

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

25:3-4 Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

25:6 But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce – you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

25:11-12 That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

25:20 And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

The Context – The verses in plain English

God lays out for Moses the notion of a sabbatical and a jubilee year. Every seventh (the sabbatical) and fiftieth (the jubilee) year, all work on the land must stop to allow it time to rest and regenerate. During these years, the land is not cultivated, but whatever it produces may be eaten.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) God establishes a code of conduct that promotes environmental consciousness. What are the benefits of such a code? What role do sustainability and conservation play in our efforts to alleviate global poverty?
- 2) God promises to provide sufficient grain during the sixth year of an agricultural cycle so as to compensate for what we will lose in the seventh. In order to sustain ourselves during sabbatical years, we must learn to plan ahead and moderate our consumption. Why is curtailing our use of global resources an important part of fostering growth and prosperity in impoverished communities?

B'chukotai – Vayikra/Leviticus 26:3-27:34

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

26:3-5 If you follow my laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land.

26:18-20 And if, for all that, you do not obey Me, I will go on to discipline you sevenfold for your sins, and I will break your proud glory. I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper, so that your strength shall be spent to no purpose. Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

26:27-29 But if, despite this, you disobey Me and remain hostile to Me, I will act against you in wrathful hostility; I, for My part, will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your cult places and cut down your incense stands, and I will heap your carcasses upon your lifeless fetishes.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In this final parashah of Vayikra, God promises the Israelites wealth and prosperity if they keep His commandments, but threatens them with starvation and worse if they do not.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Why is living morally and ethically (i.e., fulfilling God's mitzvot) inextricably tied to our wellbeing? In what ways does this make us responsible for the welfare of our fellow men, women and children?
- 2) "Eating the flesh of your sons and...your daughters" can be seen as a metaphor for compromising the ability of future generations to thrive. How do our actions today shape our global health tomorrow? What role do advocacy and public policy play in ensuring long-term global prosperity?