

Leviticus 24, which immediately follows the description of the holiday calendar in chapter 23, is divisible into three parts: in verses 1-9, God tells Moses to command the Israelite to prepare olive oil for the tabernacle lamps that must be kept burning; Aaron is responsible for maintaining the flame. In verses 5-9 the Israelites are assigned to prepare the “Bread of (the) Presence” (הַפָּנִים [ה] לחם/lehem ha-panim) mentioned in Exodus 25:30, 35:13, and 39:36, here termed “loaves” [חלות/hallot]), together with incense for the tabernacle table, to be replaced every Shabbat. The priests may eat the bread that has been replaced as their sacred portion. Then legislation is interrupted by a brief narrative, one of only two narratives in Leviticus:¹

<p>Milgrom:² ¹⁰There came out among the Israelites a man whose mother was Israelite and whose father was Egyptian. And a fight broke out in the camp between the son of an Israelite woman and a certain Israelite.</p> <p>¹¹The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name, <u>cursing it</u>, and he was brought to Moses-</p>	<p>Brichto:³ ¹⁰Now a certain man, son of an Israelite mother and of an Egyptian father, went out among the Israelites; and a struggle ensued in the camp between the half-Israelite and a full-Israelite.</p> <p>¹¹And the half-Israelite, specifying/enunciating the Name,⁴ <u>hurled abuse</u>,⁵ so they brought him to Moses-</p>	<p>(י) וַיֵּצֵא בֶן אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית וְהוּא בֶן אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנְצְוּ בַּמַּחְנֶה בֶן הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית וְאִישׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי:</p> <p>(יא) וַיִּקְבַּב בֶּן הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת הַשֵּׁם וַיִּקְלַל וַיְבִיאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל מֹשֶׁה</p>
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¹ The other is the story of the demise of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Abihu, in Leviticus 10.

² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, p. 2081.

³ Adapted from Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 143-150.

⁴ Viz., the Ineffable Divine Name YHWH, which is an hypostasis of the deity. “Hypostasis” is a term used in philosophy and theology to denote the essential part of a thing as distinguished from its attributes. The principal biblical hypostases are Name (שם/shem) and Face (פנים/panim).

⁵ Does קלל/qll denote imprecation or derision? Is the object of the half-Israelite’s curse/vilification God or the full-Israelite combatant?



<p>now his mother's name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan-</p> <p>¹²and he was put in custody, (until) the decision of YHWH should be made clear to them.</p> <p>¹³And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying:</p> <p>¹⁴Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and have all who were within hearing lean their hands on his head; then have the whole community stone him.</p> <p>¹⁵And to the Israelites speak thus: Anyone who curses his God shall bear his punishment;</p> <p>¹⁶but if he (also) pronounces the name of YHWH he must be put to death. The whole community shall stone him; alien as well as citizen, if he has (thus) pronounced the Name, he must be put to death....</p>	<p>his mother's name was Shelomith daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.</p> <p>¹²They placed him under guard, waiting upon a decree of YHWH's.</p> <p>¹³And YHWH spoke to Moses:</p> <p>¹⁴Bring the derider outside the camp, let all who heard him lay their hands upon his head, then let the entire congregation stone him.</p> <p>¹⁵And to the Israelites you are to declare as follows: Anyone who commits an act contemptuous of his God shall bear his punishment.</p> <p>¹⁶But he who enunciates the name YHWH shall be put to death—all the congregation shall stone him—be he alien or native, for enunciating the Name, he shall die....</p>	<p>וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ שְׁלֹמִית בַּת דִּבְרִי לְמַטֵּה דָן:</p> <p>(יב) וַיִּנְיָחֻהוּ בְּמִשְׁמַר לְפָרֵשׁ לַיהוָה עַל פִּי ה':</p> <p>(יג) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:</p> <p>(יד) הוֹצֵא אֶת הַמְקַלֵּל אֶל מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְסָמְכוּ כָּל הַשְּׂמָעִים אֶת יָדֵיהֶם עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וְרָגְמוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל הָעֵדָה:</p> <p>(טו) וְאֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי יִקְלַל אֱלֹהָיו וְנָשָׂא חֲטָאוֹ:</p> <p>(טז) וְנִקְבַּ שֵׁם ה' מוֹת יוֹמַת רָגוּם יִרְגְּמוּ בּוֹ כָּל הָעֵדָה כִּגֵּר כְּאֶזְרַח בְּנִקְבוֹ שֵׁם יוֹמַת:</p> <p>[...]</p>
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<p>²³Moses spoke (thus) to the Israelites. And they took the blasphemer outside the camp and pelted him with stones. The Israelites did as YHWH had commanded Moses.</p>	<p>[Verses 17-22 summarize laws of murder and injury, including talionic retribution, that apply to both alien and native.⁶ Then:]</p> <p>²³So Moses addressed the Israelites, whereupon they brought the derider outside the camp and stoned him [as YHWH had commanded Moses.]</p>	<p>(כג) וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיּוֹצִיאוּ אֶת הַמְּקַלֵּל אֶל מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְגְּמוּ אֹתוֹ אֲבָן וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת מֹשֶׁה:</p>
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➔ How is the narrative related to the preceding laws about the tabernacle lamp and loaves of bread?

Isaac Abarbanel (b. Lisbon, 1407-1508), *Commentary on Leviticus*

<p>In the previous sections, God commanded and admonished about protection of His Glory, so that they do not disparage it. God commanded about this to the Israelites with laws particular to them, and to priests and Levites with laws particular to them. Also, to Israelites, Levites and priests concerning the festivals [ch. 23], the kindling of the lamp, and the arrangement of the Bread of Presence on</p>	<p>בעבור שבפרשיות של מעלה צוה והזהיר יתעלה על שמירת כבודו ושלא יזלזלו בו. וצוה על זה לישראל במצוות מיוחדות להם, ולכהנים במצוות שיתיחדו אליהם. ולישראל וללויים ולכהנים גם כן בשמירת מועדי ה', והדלקת המנורה, ועריכת לחם הפנים על שלחנו, שהיה</p>
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⁶ Milgrom states (p. 2102), “Law is inextricably bound to narrative—that is, the set of circumstances that engender it.” The general laws that emanate from the case of blasphemy “can never be dissociated from the narrative framework in which they are embedded.” That principle applies also to the stipulation regarding “alien and native,” obviously related in Leviticus 24 to the case of the half-Israelite, although the formula turns up often elsewhere.



its table. The purpose of all of this was so that they would protect God's Glory and not profane it. Therefore, scripture provided a practical lesson in law by way of a certain man who abused the Name.⁷ God commanded that he be stoned and reproved the Israelites for not killing him at once.

Concerning him it says, "the son of an Israelite woman went out," meaning that he left protecting the Glory of God and went out to profane the Name: he departed from the Israelite collective and its admonitions.... And why was this section attached to the preceding ones (viz., about the oil and bread)? Our sages said (*Leviticus Rabba* 32:3) that he took issue with the preceding section. They meant, he mocked the Bread of Presence because the priests would eat it after no less than nine days, unlike the Egyptians, who would eat only warm unleavened cakes every day.⁸ That explains the connection.

התכלית בכל זה שישמרו כבודו ולא יחללוהו. לכן הביא הכתוב הלכה למעשה, ממה שקרה לאיש אחד שקלל את שמו יתעלה, וצוה ה' לרגום אותו באבנים, ומה שהוכיח לבני ישראל על אשר לא המיתו אותו פתאום.

ועליו אמר: ויצא בן אשה ישראלית. רוצה לומר, שיצא משמירת כבוד השם ויצא לחלל שמו, ויצא מכלל ישראל ואזהרותיהם.... ולמה נסמכה הפרשה הזאת אל הפרשיות של מעלה. וחכמינו זכרונם לברכה אמרו, שיצא מפרשה של מעלה. רצו, שלעג על לחם הפנים הנזכר בפרשה של מעלה, לפי שהיו אוכלים אותו הכהנים מתשעה ימים, ולא היה בן דרך המצריים רק לאכול עגות מצות חמות בכל יום. וזה היה טעם הסמיכות:

The continuation of *Leviticus Rabba* 32:3, cited by Rashi and many other commentators, provides another explanation of the half-Israelite's "going out":

⁷ The lamp and bread in the Tabernacle are holy symbols of divine Presence, standing for divine illumination and sustenance, respectively. The roots קלל/*qll* and כבד/*kbd* are antonyms, with base meanings "to be light" and "to be heavy," respectively.

⁸ The midrash does not mention Egyptians. Rather, it is the way of the "king" to have "warm" (=fresh) bread every day rather than bread that has gone stale after more than a week on the table.



<p>Rabbi Ḥiyya taught, he <u>came out</u> [bearing a grudge] related to family affiliation. He had gone to pitch his tent in the camp of the tribe of Dan. They said to him, “By what right do you pitch your tent in Dan?” He told them, “I am from one of the daughters of the tribe of Dan.” They said to him: “It is written ‘each with his standard, under the banners of their <i>father’s</i> house’ (Numbers 2:2)—<i>not</i> their mother’s!” He entered Moses’ judicial court and <u>came out</u> in the wrong. Then he stood up and blasphemed.</p>	<p>תני ר' חייא מפרשת יוחסין יצא שבא ליטע אהליו במחנה דן אמרו לו מה לך ליטע אהלך במחנה דן אמר להם מבנות דן אני אמרו לו כתיב איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם ולא לבית אמותם נכנס לבית דינו של משה ויצא מחוייב עמד וגדף:</p>
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→ Who was the half-Israelite man?

Leviticus Rabba 32:4

<p>Our Rabbis and R. Levi differ on the interpretation. Our Rabbis say, although there were no bastards among them at that time, <i>he</i> was a bastard. R. Levi says he clearly was a bastard. How so? The taskmasters were Egyptians, and the officers were Israelites. One taskmaster oversaw ten officers, and one officer oversaw ten men. Thus, a taskmaster had charge of a hundred men.</p> <p>On one occasion a taskmaster paid an early visit to an officer and said to him, “Go and assemble your crew for me.” When he entered, the officer’s</p>	<p>והוא בן איש מצרי רבנן ור' לוי רבנן אמרי אעפ"י שלא היו ממזרין באותה שעה הוא היה ממזר ר' לוי אמר ממזר ברור היה כיצד נוגשין היו מצרים ושוטרים היו ישראל נוגש היה ממונה על י' שוטרים ושוטר היה ממונה על י' בני אדם נמצא נוגש ממונה על ק' בני אדם.</p> <p>חד זמן קדם נוגש גבי שוטר א"ל זיל כנוש לי חבורתך כיון שנכנס שחקה לו אשתו אמר דהדין גברא היא</p>
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wife smiled at him. He thought, “She is mine!” So, he went out and hid behind a ladder. As soon as her husband left, he entered and seduced her. The officer turned around and saw the taskmaster leaving the house. When the taskmaster realized that he had seen him, he went to him and kept beating him all day, saying, “Work hard, work hard!” with the intention of killing him.

Just then the Holy Spirit stirred in Moses, as it says, “he looked this way and that” (Exodus 2:12). What is “this way and that”? That he saw what the taskmaster had done to the officer in the house and in the field. He thought, it’s not enough that he has seduced his wife, but he also seeks to kill him! Immediately, “When he saw that there was no man, [he killed the Egyptian]” (ibid.) R. Judah says, no one stood up zealously on behalf of the Name of the Holy One, so he killed him [himself]. Rabbi Nehemiah says, he saw that there was no one to stand up and invoke the Name over him, so he killed him [himself].... Our Rabbis say, he saw that there was no prospect of anything good emanating from him or from his children, or from his children's children to the end of all generations, so he “killed the Egyptian” at once....

יצא והטמין עצמו לאחורי הסולם כיון שיצא בעלה נכנס וקלקל עמה הפך לאחוריו וחמתיה נפק מן גו ביתא כיון דיידע דחמתיה נפק לגביה והוי מחי ליה כל ההוא יומא וא"ל לעי טבאית לעי טבאית מתכוין בעי למקטלי

באותה שעה הציץ רוח הקדש במשה הה"ד ויפן כה וכה מהו כה וכה אלא ראה מה עשה לו בבית ובשדה אמר לו לא דיו שקלקל עם אשתו אלא שהוא מבקש להרגו מיד וירא כי אין איש ר' יהודה ור' נחמיה ורבנן ר' יהודה אומר ראה שאין מי יעמוד ויקנא לשמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ויהרגהו ר' נחמיה אומר ראה שאין מי יעמוד ויזכיר עליו את השם ויהרגהו ורבנן אמרין ראה שאין תוחלת עתידה לעמוד ממנו ולא מבניו ולא מבני בניו עד סוף כל הדורות מיד ויך את המצרי....

Conclusion: the half-Egyptian man in Leviticus 24 was the bastard(?) offspring of an Israelite woman and the Egyptian taskmaster who was killed by Moses. The murder weapon, as it were, was the Ineffable Name.



→ What was the man's personal status?

Ramban (Gerona, 1194-1270), *Commentary on the Torah*

“Son of an Israelite mother, and an Israelite man” teaches that when a non-Jew has sex with an Israelite woman, the offspring is not Israelite, even though the *gemara* rules (*Yevamot* 45b) that when a non-Jew has sex with an Israelite woman, the offspring is *kasher* whether the woman was single or married. They said, however, that the offspring is contaminated and disqualified from priesthood. And moreover, he is not an Israelite with respect to lineage and land inheritance.... When it says in the *Sifra* (14:1) that “among the Israelites” teaches that he converted, it is not that he required conversion.... Rather, they meant to say that he followed the way of his mother and attached himself to Israel.... He did not want to follow his father to be an Egyptian....

וטעם בן הישראלית ואיש הישראלי - להורות כי
 העו"ג הבא על בת ישראל הולד אינו ישראלי ואע"פ
 שפסקנו בגמרא דעו"ג הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר
 בין בפנויה בין באשת איש, הרי אמרו מזהמין את
 הולד שהוא פגום לכהונה, וכל שכן שאינו ישראלי
 בשמו לענין היחס בדגלים ובנחלת הארץ.... ומה
 שאמר בת"כ בתוך בני ישראל, מלמד שנתגייה, אינו
 שיצטרך בגירות.... אבל נתכוונו לומר שהלך אחרי
 אמו ונדבק בישראל.... ולא רצה ללכת אחרי אביו
 להיות מצרי....



→ What about the mother, who, unlike the two anonymous combatants, is named?

Abraham Saba (Castile, 1440-1508), *Tzeror ha-mor*

The sages said (*Leviticus Rabba* 32:5), she was one of a kind and scripture identified her, saying, “the name of his mother was Shelomith bat Dibri of the tribe of Dan,” because already in Egypt, the tribe of Dan had begun to go backwards rather than forward. Thus, it says “they shall march last” (Numbers 2:31), because the idolator goes to the rear and not to the front. Just as in Egypt they began in harlotry, it continued with Samson, who was a Danite, saying to his father, “Get me that one, for she is the one that pleases me” (Judges 14:3) from of old. She *is* idolatry, as it is written, “[they] espoused daughters of alien gods” (Malachi 2:11). Later, the golden calves, one of them placed in Dan (1 Kings 12:29), and the idol of Micah (Judges 18-19). It all derived from Shelomith bat Dibri of the tribe of Dan. You know that the initial error corrupts subsequent acts and cannot be repaired by deliberations, as it says,⁹ “If...this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach” (Genesis 11:6). Therefore, this son was drawn after his Egyptian father.

כבר אמרו, אחת היתה ופרסמה הכתוב, כאומרו ושם אמו שלומית בת דברי למטה דן, כי ממצרים התחיל מטה דן לילך לאחור, ולא לפנים. וכן נאמר בהם לאחרונה יסעו, כי העובד עבודה זרה הולך לאחור ולא לפנים. ולכן כמו שבמצרים התחילו בזנות, נמשך הדבר לשמשון שהיה ממשפחת הדני, לומר לאביו קח לי אותה לאשה כי ישרה היא בעיני, מזמן קדום. והיא היא עבודה זרה, דכתיב ביה ובעל בת אל נכר, אחר כך בעגלי זהב, וישם האחד בדן, וכן פסל מיכה, באופן שכל זה נמשך משלומית בת דברי למטה דן. וכבר ידעת הטעות הנופל בהתחלות, הוא מעוות בעלילות, לא יוכל לתקן במועצות, כאומרו וזה החלם לעשות, ולכן זה הבן הנמשך אחר אביו המצרי:

⁹ Referring to the builders of the Tower of Babel.



→ What does it mean to נקב/*nqb* the name?¹⁰ (*Tzeror ha-mor*)

<p>When it says, “the son of the Israelite woman נקב the Name,” as the sages said (Sanhedrin 56a), it is like, “And he pierced a hole in its lid (<i>dalto</i>)” (2 Kings 12:10). In this way, he committed heresy, turning the One [אחד=God] into Other [אחר], as it says, “you must not bow to an Other God” (Exodus 34:14). The meaning of “the son of the woman נקב” is that he pierced a hole in the letter <i>dalet</i> of אחד and made it into אחר.</p>	<p>וזהו ויקוב בן האשה הישראלית את השם. כמאמרם ז"ל שהוא כמו ויקוב חור בדלתו, כי זה כפר בעיקר ועשה אחד אחר, כאומרו כי לא תשתחוה לאל אחר, לכן ויקוב חור בדלתו, הוא פירוש ויקוב בן האשה. והוא שנקב חור בדלי"ת של אחד ועשה ממנו אחר.</p>
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→ Why did the half Israelite נקב/*nqb* the Name? (*Tzeror ha-mor*)

<p>Whence did this come to him? They said in “Secrets of Torah” (<i>Zohar</i> 3:106a) that his father was the Egyptian Moses killed in Egypt, as it says, “he killed the Egyptian” (Exodus 2:12) and “Do you mean to kill me [as you killed the Egyptian?]” (2:14), from which we learn that Moses killed him with the Ineffable Name. This matter was kept secret among the Israelites, as it says, “he hid him in the sand” (2:12). You know that it is characteristic of Israelites that if one knows that his fellow killed someone, should they get into an argument he will reveal what he knows and what he doesn’t</p>	<p>ומאין בא לו זה, אמרו בסתרי תורה, כי אביו של זה היה המצרי שהרג משה במצרים, דכתיב ויך את המצרי, ואמרו הלהרגני אתה אומר, מכאן אנו למדים שהרגו בשם המפורש. וזה הדבר היה בסוד בין ישראל, כאומרו ויטמנהו בחול. וכבר ידעת הסגולה שיש בישראל, שאם יודע אחד מחבירו שהרג את הנפש, אם יפול ריב ביניהם יגלה מה</p>
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¹⁰ The base meaning of נקב/*nqb* is “bore, pierce, perforate,” from which “specify, name, distinguish” are derived. The widespread translation “blaspheme” depends on the assumption that נקב is an alternative for נקב/*qbb* (e.g., Numbers 23:8, 11), which does mean “curse, blaspheme, execrate.”



know. When it says here, “they struggled in the camp,” perhaps the [full-Israelite] said to the [half-Israelite], “stop your prattling¹¹ and go after the afflictions and abominations of your Egyptian father, whom Moses killed with the Ineffable Name.” When he heard this, “the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name” that had killed his father. For he said, “how can God have left the place of mercy to requite the sin of my father by killing him,” and then “he pronounced the Name.” Why did he continue to vilify? Perhaps when he knew that Moses was the perpetrator, he vilified Moses too. This is hinted at in his saying the Name [השם/*ha-she-m*] which spells Moses [משה/*Mosheh*] when the letters are reversed.

שידע ומה שלא ידע. וכשאמר בכאן וינצו במחנה, אולי אמר לו כלה מדברותך ולך אצל נגעים וגלולי אביך שהרגו משה בשם המפורש. וכששמע זה, ויקוב בן האשה הישראלית את השם שהרג לאביו. כי אמר איך ה' יצא ממקומו של רחמים לפקוד עון אבי עליו להרגו, ואז ויקוב את השם. ולמה חזר לומר ויקלל. אבל אולי כשידע שמשה הוא העושה וההורג, ויקלל ג"כ למשה. וכל זה רמוז באומרו את השם, בהיפוך אותיות הוא משה.

¹¹ Cf. Eleazar b. Azariah's rebuke of Rabbi Akiba in *Sanhedrin* 67b.