

"Murder" has traditionally rendered the Hebrew razah here; for, though the verb covers non-culpable homicide as well (Num. 35:11, 27, 30; Deut. 4:42), to construe it as an absolute ban on killing would bring this 'word' into conflict with the death penalty prescribed by the law for many offenses. The injunction affirms the sanctity of human life."

(a) What the Commandment does not forbid

[1] The killing of animals

Genesis 9:3 -- Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things."

Exodus 12:5-6 -- "Your lamb (for the Passover) shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats; and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening."

Acts 10:9-13 -- "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat."

[2] Unpremeditated killing

Numbers 35:15, 20-25 -- "These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither. . . But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die; or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him. But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him anything without laying of wait, or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments: and the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil."

Deuteronomy 19:4-6 -- "And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past; as when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall