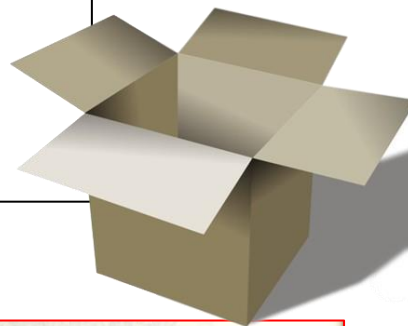


Unpacking the Parasha

Tzav 5784

Rabbi Yisroel Isaacs



Vayikra 7:26

Artscroll/Stone p. 578

רמב"ם RAMBAM

ודע כי הדם היה טמא מאוד בעיני הצאבא (עובדי עבודה זרה) ועם כל זה היו אוכלים אותו, מפני שהיו חושבים שהוא מזון השדים. וכשאכל אותו מי שאכלו כבר השתתף עם השדים ויביאוהו ויודיעוהו העתידות ... ובאה התורה השלמה ליודעיה להסיר אלו החוליים הנאמנים ואסרה אכילת הדם.

The reader should know that even though the idolators considered blood to be highly impure, that did not prevent them from consuming it. They did this because they believed that blood constituted the sustenance of demons, and they hoped that eating blood would grant them the ability that demons hold, to read the future. In response, and in an effort to dispel such delusions and stop such practices, our Torah forbids the consumption of blood.

רמב"ן RAMBAN

המשמע מן הכתוב הזה שיאמר, שיאסור לנו הדם מפני שנתנו לנו להיות על המזבח לכפר על נפשותינו ... וראוי שנפרש בטעם איסורו, כי השם ברא כל הנבראים התחתונים לצורך האדם כי הוא לבדו בהם מכיר את בוראו, ואף על פי כן לא התיר להם באכילה מתחילה רק הצומח לא בעלי הנפש ... וכאשר היה במבול שניצולו בזכותו של נח והקריב מהם קרבן והיה לרצון לו - התיר להם השחיטה ... והנה התיר גופם אשר חי בעבור האדם, שיהיה להנאתו ולצרכו של אדם, ושתהיה הנפש שבהם לכפרה לאדם, בקרבים לפניו יתברך, לא שיאכלוהו.

It seems that the reason that it is forbidden to eat blood is that this substance is meant to be cast against the altar to achieve atonement for our souls... Now the LORD created all of the lower creatures for the sake of mankind, for our species is the only one capable of recognizing the Creator. Still, at first humans were not granted the right to eat animals, and had to subsist on vegetation alone... However, during the flood it was Noah's merit which rescued the animal kingdom, and it was he who offered sacrifices to God which the Almighty accepted. In response, God allowed people to slaughter animals for food. God permitted man to use the bodies of these creatures for his benefit and his needs, and directed that their souls [inherent in their blood] serve as atonement for human transgressions, to be offered up to God but not to be eaten.

Vayikra (Leviticus) - Chapter 17

3 Any man of the House of Israel, who slaughters an ox, a lamb, or a goat inside the camp, or who slaughters outside the camp,

ג איש איש מבית ישראל אשר ישחט שור או־כֶּשֶׂב או־עֵז במחנה או־אשר ישחט מחוץ למחנה:

4 but does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to offer up as a sacrifice to the Lord before the Mishkan of the Lord, this [act] shall be counted for that man as blood he has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people;

ד ואל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לא הביאו להקריב קרבן ליהוה לפני משכן יהוה דם יחשב לאיש שהוא דם שָׁחַט וְנִקְרַת האיש ההוא מקרב עמו:

10 And any man of the House of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My attention upon the soul who eats the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

י ואיש איש מבית ישראל ומגוי הגר בחוגם אשר יאכל קַלְדָּם וְנַתְתִּי מִנִּי בַנְפֶשֶׁת האִכְלָת אֲדַתְהֶם וְהִקְרַתִּי אֹתָהּ מִקְרַב עַמִּי:

11 For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I have therefore given it to you [to be placed] upon the altar, to atone for your souls. For it is the blood that atones for the soul.

יא כי־נֶפֶשׁ הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּדָּם הוא וְאִנִּי נַתַּתִּיו לָכֶם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם כִּי־הַדָּם הוּא בַנְפֶשֶׁת יִכְפֹּר:

12 Therefore, I said to the children of Israel: None of you shall eat blood, and the stranger who sojourns among you shall not eat blood.

יב עֲלֵיכֶם אֲמַרְתִּי לְבַנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּלְיֶנְפֶשֶׁת מִבָּם לֹא־יֵאָכַל דָּם וְהַגֵּר הַיֹּדֵעַ בְּתוֹכְכֶם לֹא־יֵאָכַל דָּם:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) - Chapter 12

20 When the Lord, your God, expands your boundary, as He has spoken to you, and you say, "I will eat meat," because your soul desires to eat meat, you may eat meat, according to every desire of your soul.

כ כִּי־יִרְחַב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־גְּבוּלְךָ בְּאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכַלָּה בֶּשֶׂר כִּי־תִאֶמַר נַפְשִׁי לֹאֲכַל בֶּשֶׂר בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ נַפְשִׁי תֹאכַל בְּשֵׂר:

21 If the place the Lord, your God, chooses to put His Name there, will be distant from you, you may slaughter of your cattle and of your sheep, which the Lord has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your cities, according to every desire of your soul.

כא כִּי־יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם וְנִבְחַתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לְךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ נַפְשִׁי:

22 But as the deer and the gazelle are eaten, so may you eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat of them.

כב אֲדַ כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵאָכַל אֶת־הַעֵזִי וְאֶת־הָאֵילָן כֵּן תֹּאכְלֶנּוּ הַטָּמֵא וְהַטְהוֹר יַחְדָּו יֵאָכְלֶנּוּ:

23 However, be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh.

כג רַק תִּזְק לְבַלְתִּי אֲכַל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנְּפֶשֶׁת וְלֹא־תֹאכַל הַנְּפֶשֶׁת עִם־הַבֶּשֶׂר:

24 You shall not eat it, you shall spill it on the ground, like water.

כד לֹא תֹאכְלֶנּוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֶנּוּ כַּמַּיִם:

25 You shall not eat it, in order that it be good for you, and for your children after you, when you do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord.

כה לֹא תֹאכְלֶנּוּ לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לְךָ וּלְבְנֶיךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי־תַעֲשֶׂה הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

The implication is clear: whoever kills an animal for non-sacramental purposes is guilty of bloodshed, of murder; the term *shefikhut damim* applies equally to the slaughter of man and animal. Under a certain aspect, the life of the animal has been placed on an equal plane with that of man. Why?

We have seen that life in the natural-organic realm is not something in *toto genere* different from divine life. On the contrary, all life is rooted in God and can be traced to Him. "Life" in the Bible is a unique attribute of God that conveys the real essence of Him. If there is life in a creature, it is because God grants a spark of His own living being to the world.

...and [God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

In a rather naturalistic description, the man became a living soul

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because God blew in his nostrils the breath of life – nothing is told here of *tzelem*. Man breathes with God's *nishmat hayyim* (breath of life); man lives by it and through it.⁴

Hence, a new concept evolves. All life is considered by Judaism as belonging to God. He has exclusive, absolute ownership rights to all living creatures, to everything that has been redeemed from lifelessness and dead matter, and raised to the plane of life. God holds every living being in His private ownership and exercises full dominion over it. Even as the whole universe is held by God, there is a unique juridic relationship of possession and dominion to life. All living beings enjoy only the rights of tenancy; they do not exercise dominion over their holdings. This tenancy may become extinguished at any time; the freeholder may be dispossessed of his temporary rights. There is no contractual legal protection of the tenant against the will of the owner. The latter has the sole right of possession and dominion, and while He granted His creature some lease on life, He did not relinquish juridical power and control over it. On the contrary, the living being owes Him unequivocal allegiance; any sin or error renders the whole relationship void. Man and animal forfeit their relative, conditioned rights by the slightest error or offense. Any failure to perform their servitudinal obligation exposes them to the danger of losing their existence. Life of finite, temporal beings is rooted in the life of the infinite, eternal being. The ebbing of life is synonymous with the waning of the divine breath. The union begins to dissolve.

For She'ol cannot praise You, death cannot celebrate You; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Your truth (Isa. 38:18).

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living (Ps. 116:9).

The concept of *korban* (animal sacrifice) flows directly from these metaphysico-mystical springs. Every life is indebted to God, is held by God absolutely and must surrender itself upon demand. And indeed, God demands sacrifices, including the very life of man. The pagan ritual of human sacrifice was prompted by a motif which was basically true. The error of paganism consisted in separating the ethos from the cult. Ritual demands human sacrifice; the ethos, appreciating life as precious, forbids. Judaism was the first religion that combined both and therefore introduced basic changes in the idea of *korban*, sacrifice, stripping it of its barbarism. We evolved the substitution for the human sacrifice by the physical sacrifice in general, by mental and spiritual surrender to God.

However, no one is allowed to destroy organic life. Murder is usurpation of something not belonging to me, the act of interfering with exclusively divine prerogatives.⁵ Murder is *hamas*,⁶ for I rob another person of his life which was granted to him by God.

Whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man (Gen. 9:6).

Tzelem actually signifies life as a divine grant to man. By slaying man, the murderer is committing *hamas*, taking illegitimate possession of divine rights.

Only God, who gives life, can take life away. "The Lord kills, and gives life: He brings down to the grave, and brings up" (1 Sam. 2:6). Not only human life, but *life in general* is divine, is

held by God absolutely, and He is the only master who exercises unlimited dominion over it. Each life must be surrendered to God; this is the only way life shall be terminated. Destroying life because of selfish motives is forbidden. This applies to man and animal alike. With respect to human sacrifice, the religious ethos-experience interfered with the cult-experience and converted the actual sacrifice to a mental one, expressed in submission and surrender. Animal sacrifice, however, was retained by the Torah. The sacral act of offering a life to God is the only legitimate shedding of animal blood.

Killing an animal for the sake of satisfying my carnal desire – *besar ta'avah* – was classified as bloodshed and was therefore forbidden. Only after the people entered the Land of Israel did the Torah make a concession and begin to tolerate the slaughtering of animals for non-sacral purposes. To this compromise, however, many conditions were attached that make the slaughtering of the animal and its consumption the most complicated process. By committing the slightest error man may forfeit his privilege to enjoy the meat of the animal. But even as the Torah came to terms with the lusty sensual human being concerning the meat, it retained full possession and dominion over the blood. Blood is life, and as such it can never become the object of man's desire or lust – hence the many prohibitions against blood consumption (e.g., Lev. 17:11–12; Deut. 12:23). Blood shall be sacrificed to God on His altar, never misused by man for satisfying his carnal drives.

Ramban, Vayikra 1:9 – The Korban is in place of the sinner.

Since the acts of man are comprised of thought, speech, and action, God commands that when an individual sins and brings an animal sacrifice, he should rest his hands upon its head, corresponding to the element of action; he should verbally confess what he did wrong, corresponding to the element of speech; he should burn the innards and kidneys that are the seat of all human thought and passion, and the animal's limbs, corresponding to the sinner's hands and feet, which carry out all of his activity; and he should cast the sacrifice's blood upon the altar to bring to mind the phrase, "his blood will be on his soul." [This is] so that the person doing [or watching] all of these actions will come to realize that he has sinned against God with his body and his soul, and that he deserves that his own blood be spilled and his body burned, had it not been for the compassion of the Creator who has accepted a substitute instead. Therefore the sacrifice atones by its blood corresponding to the sinner's blood, its soul corresponding to the sinner's soul, its limbs corresponding to the sinner's limbs; and the portions (that are given to the priests) will give life to Torah teachers, who in turn will pray on his behalf.

כי בעבור שמעשי בני אדם
נגמרים במחשבה ובדבור
ובמעשה, צוה השם כי כאשר
יחטא יביא קרבן, יסמוך ידיו
עליו כנגד המעשה, ויתודה
בפיו כנגד הדבור, וישרוף
באש הקרב והכליות שהם כלי
המחשבה והתאוה, והכרעים
כנגד ידיו ורגליו של אדם
העושים כל מלאכתו, ויזרוק
הדם על המזבח כנגד דמו
בנפשו, כדי שיחשוב אדם
בעשותו כל אלה כי חטא
לאלקיו בגופו ובנפשו, וראוי
לו שישפך דמו וישרף גופו
לולא חסד הבורא שלקח ממנו
תמורה וכפר הקרבן הזה
שיהא דמו תחת דמו, נפש
תחת נפש, וראשי אברי
הקרבן כנגד ראשי אבריו,
והמנות להחיות בהן מורי
התורה שיתפללו עליו.

**R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Chumash Masores Harav
Vayikra P. 15.**

Nachmanides inquired deeply into the idea of sacrifice, elevating the concept to a sublime mystical height. The requirement to sacrifice flows from the Attribute of Judgment (*midas hadin*). God demands the human burnt offering. The manifestation of God-awesome and all-powerful-negates a world that is sequestered in the borders of otherness and content with the relative and the temporal. Din jealously guards the absolute uniqueness of God and demands the annulment of finite independent being. God will not tolerate the arrogant man. Man who has become alienated from his Creator through a horrifying ontic pride must mount the altar of God. The revelation of the *Akeidah* imperative suddenly erupts from the silent twilight of transcendence, addressing the guardian who has betrayed his task and misappropriated his Master's work. Build an altar. Arrange the wood. Kindle the fire. Take the knife to slaughter your existence for Me. This is the command of the awesome God who suddenly appears out of an absolute separation. This approach is the very foundation of prayer. Man hands himself over to God. He approaches the awesome God, expressing this movement in sacrifice and binding of oneself. (Worship of the Heart, pp 162-163)

ontic adjective

on·tic (ˈän-tik ◀▶)

: of, relating to, or having real being