

Blood and Soul

Study Guide Aharei Mot

Source Sheet by Judith Spicehandler

Leviticus 17:10-14

And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them partakes of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood; I will cut that person off from among kin. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: No person among you shall partake of blood, nor shall the stranger who resides among you partake of blood. And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, that person 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.

Leviticus 19:26

(26) You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying.

ויקרא י"ז:י"ד

וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִן־הַגֵּר הֹגֵר
בְּתוֹכְכֶם אֲשֶׁר יֹאכַל כָּל־דָּם וְנָתַתִּי פָנָי
בַּנֶּפֶשׁ הָאֹכֶלֶת אֶת־הַדָּם וְהִכַרְתִּי אֹתָהּ
מִקְרֹב עִמָּהּ: כִּי נֶפֶשׁ הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּדָּם הוּא
וְאֲנִי נֹתְתִיו לָכֶם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר
עַל־נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי־הַדָּם הוּא בְּנֶפֶשׁ יִכָּפֵר:
עַל־כֵּן אֶמְרָתִי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ מִכֶּם
לֹא־תֹאכַל דָּם וְהֹגֵר הֹגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם
לֹא־יֹאכַל דָּם: וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וּמִן־הַגֵּר הֹגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה צִיד חַיָּה
אוֹרֵפוֹ אֲשֶׁר יֹאכַל וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת־דָּמוֹ וְכִסְהוּ
בְּעָפָר: כִּי־נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר דָּמוֹ בְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ הוּא
וְאָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דָּם כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר לֹא
תֹאכְלוּ כִּי נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר דָּמוֹ הוּא
כָּל־אֹכְלוֹ יִכָּרֵת:

ויקרא י"ט:כ"ו

(כו) לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל־הַדָּם לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא
תְעוּנְנוּ:

Genesis 4:10-11

“What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground! Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

בראשית ד'י"א-י"ב

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים
 אֵלַי מִן־הָאֲדָמָה: וְעַתָּה אָרְוִר אֹתָהּ
 מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָהּ אֶת־פִּיהָ לְקַחַת
 אֶת־דַּמִּי אֶחָיִךְ מִיָּדְךָ:

Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 46:7

(7) Although blood was very unclean in the eyes of the Sabaeans, they nevertheless partook of it, because they thought it was the food of the spirits; by eating it man has something in common with the spirits, which join him and tell him future events, according to the notion which people generally have of spirits. There were, however, people who objected to eating blood, as a thing naturally disliked by man; they killed a beast, received the blood in a vessel or in a pot, and ate of the flesh of that beast, whilst sitting round the blood. They imagined that in this manner the spirits would come to partake of the blood which was their food, whilst the idolaters were eating the flesh: that love, brotherhood, and friendship with the spirits were established, because they dined with the latter at one place and at the same time; that the spirits would appear to them in dreams, inform them of coming events, and be favourable to them. Such ideas people liked and accepted in those days; they were general, and their correctness was not doubted by any one of the common people. The Law, which is perfect in the eyes of those who know it, and seeks to cure mankind of these lasting diseases, forbade the eating of blood, and emphasized the prohibition exactly in the same terms as it emphasizes idolatry: "I will set my face against that soul that eateth blood" (Lev. 17:10). The same language is employed in reference to him "who giveth of his seed unto Molech"; "then I will set my face against that man" (ibid. 20:5). There is, besides idolatry and eating blood, no other sin in reference to which these words are used. For the eating of blood leads to a kind of idolatry, to the worship of spirits. Our Law declared the blood as pure, and made it the means of purifying other objects by its touch. "And thou shalt take of the blood . . . and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his

מורה נבוכים, חלק ג' מ"ז:
 (ז) ודע - כי הדם היה טמא מאד בעיני הצאבה ועם זה היו אוכלים אותו מפני שהיו חושבים שהוא מזו השדים וכשאכל אותו מי שאכלו כבר השתתף עם השדים. ויבואוהו ויודיעוהו העתידות כמו שידמו ההמון ממעשי השדים. והיו שם אנשים שהיה קשה בעיניהם אכילת הדם כי הוא דבר שימאסהו טבע האדם והיו שוחטים בהמה ומקבלים דמה בכלי או בחפירה ואוכלים בשר השחיטה ההיא סביב דמה - והיו מדמים במעשה ההוא שהשדים יאכלו הדם אשר הוא מזונם והם יאכלו הבשר; ובזה תהיה האהבה והאחווה והרעות להם בעבור שאכלו כולם על שולחן אחד ובמושב אחד - ויבואו להם השדים ההם לפי מחשבתם בחלום ויגידו להם העתידות ויועילו להם. אלו כולם דעות שהיו נמשכים אחריהם בזמנים ההם ובוחרים אותם והיו מפורסמות לא היה ספק לאחד מן ההמון באמיתתם. ובאה התורה השלמה ליודעיה - להסיר אלו החליים הנאמנים ואסרה אכילת הדם; ועשתה חיזוק באיסורו כמו שעשתה ב'עבודה זרה' בשוה - אמר ית' "ונתתי פני בנפש האוכלת את הדם וגו'" - כמו שאמר ב'נותן מזרעו למולך' "ונתתי את פני בנפש ההיא וגו'". ולא בא זה הלשון ב'מצוה' שלישית מלבד 'עבודה זרה' ו'אכילת דם' - שאכילתו היתה מביאה למין ממיני 'עבודה זרה' והיא עבודת השדים. וטיהרה הדם ושמה אותו מטהר מי שיגע בו "והזית על אהרן ועל בגדיו וגו' וקדש הוא ובגדיו". וצוה להזותו על ה'מזבח' ושמה העבודה כולה - לשפכו

garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him. And he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons," etc. (Exod. 29:21). Furthermore, the blood was sprinkled upon the altar, and in the whole service it was insisted upon pouring it out, and not upon collecting it. Comp. "And he shall pour out all the blood at the bottom of the altar" (Lev. 4:18); "And the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the Lord thy God" (Deut. 12:27). Also the blood of those beasts that were killed for common use, and not for sacrifices, must be poured out, "Thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water" (ibid. ver. 24). We are not allowed to gather and have a meal round the blood, "You shall not eat round the blood" (Lev. 19:26). As the Israelites were inclined to continue their rebellious conduct, to follow the doctrines in which they had been brought up, and which were then general, and to assemble round the blood in order to eat there and to meet the spirits, God forbade the Israelites to eat ordinary meat during their stay in the wilderness: they could only partake of the meat of peace-offerings. The reason of this precept is distinctly stated, viz., that the blood shall be poured out upon the altar, and the people do not assemble round about. Comp. "To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices, which they offer in the open field, even that they may bring them unto the Lord. . . . And the priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar, . . . and they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto the spirits" (Lev. 17:5-7). Now there remained to provide for the slaughtering of the beasts of the field and birds, because those beasts were never sacrificed, and birds did never serve as peace-offerings (Lev. iii.). The commandment was therefore given that whenever a beast or a bird that may be eaten is killed, the blood thereof must be covered with earth (Lev. 17:13), in order that the

שם לא לאספו - ואמר "ואני נתתיו לכם על המזבח לכפר"; ושם ישפך - כמו שאמר "ואת כל הדם ישפוך" ואמר "ודם זבחך ישפך על מזבח ה' אלוקיך". וציוה לשפוך דם כל בהמה שתשחט אף על פי שאינה 'קרבן' - אמר "על הארץ תשפכנו כמים". ואחר כן הזהיר מלהתקבץ סביבו ולאכול שם ואמר "לא תאכלו על הדם". וכאשר התמיד מרים ונמשכו אחרי המפורסם אשר גדלו עליו מהתחבר אל השדים באכלם סביב הדם ציוה ית' שלא יאכל 'בשר תאוה' ב'מדבר' כלל אבל יהיה הכל 'שלמים'; ובאר לנו סיבתו כדי שישפך הדם על המזבח ולא יתקבצו סביבו - ואמר "למען אשר יביאו בני ישראל וגו' ולא יזבחו עוד את זבחייהם לשעירים וגו'". אבל נשאר ענין 'החיה' וה'עוף' מפני שלא יבוא 'קרבן' מ'חיה' כלל ולא יקרב 'עוף' 'שלמים'; וציוה ית' אחר זה שכל 'חיה ועוף' שמותר לאכלם כשישחט יכוסה דמו בעפר - עד שלא יתקבצו עליו לאכול סביבו. ונשלמה הכונה להפר האחוה' בין מי שאחזם שד באמת ובין שדיהם: ודע שזמן זאת האמונה היה קרוב לימי משה רבינו והיו בני אדם נמשכים אחריה מאד ונסתים בה - תמצא זה כתוב ב"שירת האזינו" "יזבחו לשדים לא אלוק אלוקים לא ידעום וגו'"; וכבר בארו ה'חכמים' ענין אמרו 'לא אלוקי' - אמרו שהם לא פסקו מעבודת דברים נמצאים עד שעבדו דמיונות - לשון "ספרי" "לא דין שהם עובדים חמה ולבנה כוכבים ומזלות אלא שעבדו בבואה שלהם" - ו'בבואה' הוא שם הצל: ונשוב אל מה שאנחנו בו. -

people should not assemble round the blood for the purpose of eating there. The object was thus fully gained to break the connexion between these fools and their spirits. This belief flourished about the time of our Teacher Moses. People were attracted and misled by it. We find it in the Song of Moses (Deut. xxxii.): "They sacrificed unto spirits, not to God" (ibid. 17). According to the explanation of our Sages, the words *lo eloha* imply the following idea: They have not only not left off worshipping things in existence; they even worship imaginary things. This is expressed in Sifri as follows: "It is not enough for them to worship the sun, the moon, the stars; they even worship their *babuah*. The word *babuah* signifies "shadow." Let us now return to our subject. The prohibition of slaughtering cattle for common use applied only to the wilderness, because as regards the "spirits" it was then the general belief that they dwelt in deserts, that there they spoke and were visible, whilst in towns and in cultivated land they did not appear. In accordance with this belief those inhabitants of a town who wanted to perform any of those stupid practices, left the town and went to woods and waste places. The use of cattle for common food was therefore allowed when the Israelites entered Palestine. Besides, there were great hopes that the disease would become weakened, and the followers of the doctrines would decrease. Furthermore, it was almost impossible that every one who wanted to eat meat should come to Jerusalem. For these reasons the above restriction was limited to the stay of the Israelites in the wilderness.

Leviticus as Literature by Mary Douglas

In the rite of atonement the blood of the sacrificed animal is used to anoint the altar, to sprinkle on it, and then it is poured out at the base. The body of the member of the congregation who must never eat meat with blood in it parallels again the altar which does not have blood burnt on it. The reason for not eating the blood is simply, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make

דע שלא נאסר 'בשר תאוה' אלא
 ב'מדבר' לבד. כי מן הדעות ההם
 המפורסמות - שהשדים שוכנים
 במדברות ושם ידברו ויראו ואמנם
 במדינות ובישוב אינם נראים - עד שמי
 שירצה מאנשי המדינות לעשות דבר
 מאלו השגעונות יצא מן המדינה ליערות
 ולמקומות שאינם מיושבים. ולזה הותר
 'בשר תאוה' אחר שנכנסו לארץ. ועוד
 שתגבורת החלי ההוא תמעט בלא ספק
 וימעטו הנמשכים אחר הדעות ההם גם
 כן. ועוד שהיה כבוד מאד קרוב לנמנע
 ויבוא כל מי שירצה לאכול 'בשר בהמה'
 ל'ירושלים' ומפני אלו הטעמים לא אסר
 'בשר תאוה' אלא ב'מדבר':

atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life' (Lev 17: 11), and again: 'the life of every creature is the blood of it' (17: 14). Chapter 17 is nearly all about blood: 'I have given it to you to make atonement for your own lives.' Note again that this is the second half of Leviticus, but these enlargements of context and declarations of sameness (life = blood) are not causal explanations. They locate the rule in a series of associated classifications.

This is the context of Genesis and the creation that rationalizes the laws of purity. God made life, the life of all creatures belongs to God. If he had not given or assigned the blood of sacrifice for that specific purpose there could be no atonement. The blood doctrine is the context for the laws against touching the carcasses of animals defined as unable to be consecrated. Their blood (which carries the life) belongs to God, his laws protect them as the laws of a feudal lord protect the lives of his vassals.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, "The real symbolism of the Paschal blood To life!" <https://jweekly.com/2007/03/30/the-real-symbolism-of-the-paschal-blood-to-life/>

[B]efore the exodus the Jews were all related to one another (as descendants of Jacob) but they were not a people. Any individual was still able to reject his or her connection to the others, and the rejection had an effect. Indeed, our tradition teaches that many in fact did not merit being able to leave Egypt at all, dying instead during the plague of darkness. Their behavior precluded them from being part of the new, holiness-charged nation.

But once the nation-entity was forged, on our ancestors' very last night in Egypt, things changed radically. With blood on their doorways and satchels filled with matzoh, they readily followed Moses into the frightening desert on God's orders, knowing not what awaited them. As the prophet Jeremiah described it, in God's words: "I remember for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me in the desert, a land where nothing is planted."

And thus the Jews began the process of becoming a living nation, an entity whose members, and descendants throughout history, are part of an organic whole, no matter what any one of them may choose to do.

As the Talmud put it: "A Jew who sins is still a Jew," in every way. There is no longer any option of "opting out."

And so, blood in Judaism is a not symbol of suffering, or torture, or even of death, but rather of birth, life and meaning.

For our part, we Jews do well to stay focused on the Pesach blood, the symbol of our birth as a people. And from there, to turn our sights to discerning and embracing the mandate of our peoplehood, the Torah — the ultimate reason for our “blood of life.”

Ellen Dannin, "Blood," <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/blood>

Why do we not eat blood? Because the life of the flesh — the *nefesh* — is in its blood. [W]hile killing an animal for food is not the problem, eating blood is, and it is no trivial matter. The penalty is to be cut off from one’s people. So perhaps eating the blood makes us unfit to be with those living proper human lives.

The first mention of blood in the Torah is God’s statement to Cain [in Genesis 4:10-11]. Here we have a killing and the pouring out of blood into the ground. The blood cries out from the ground over the injustice, leading to Cain’s curse. He is to be alone, roaming over the earth, an earth that will not give its potency to him.

So if I want to live my life so I do not eat the blood — the life — of others, how am I to do this? Are there ways in which I act toward others so that I consume their life?

To begin to answer this sort of question, I turn to our tradition for sources that help me think through the dimensions of the issue. In this case, I found the Rosh Hodesh (New Moon/Month) blessings helpful. They present a catalogue of what is good about life: “a long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of nourishment and sustenance, a life of bodily health, a life with awe for the divine, a life of love for Torah, a life free of disgrace and shame, a life of happiness and honor, a life of integrity and discernment, intelligence and knowledge.” So perhaps when we commit acts that deny these aspects of life to others, we (metaphorically) eat their blood.

Perhaps with each act that denies these blessings to others, we ourselves become progressively so calloused that we become incapable of living a human life, and thereby place ourselves into a spiritual exile. [L]iving a human life means that we must live in a way that does not infringe on the lives around us

