

א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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אחרי מות

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The Reason Behind Not Eating Blood

By Tehilla Huff

This week's פרשה, אחרי מות, examines the laws surrounding different types of קרבנות. Specifically, the prohibition of eating blood initially introduced in פרשת צו, is repeated here. "וְנִתַּתִּי פָנַי בְּנֹשֵׁא הָאֲכֵלָת אֶת־הַדָּם" (ויקרא י"ז:). In the following פסוק an explanation is given for this prohibition "כִּי גִפְשׁ הַבֶּשָׂר בַּדָּם הוּא" (ויקרא י"ז:א). "for the essence of the flesh is in the blood." While seemingly important, it is unclear what the true significance and value of this מצוה is. What is the violation of drinking blood? What's the connection between blood, soul, and this prohibition?

There are three possible explanations for the reason this מצוה exists. Either it's about the person who is drinking it and the effect the blood has on them. Or, the connection between ה' and blood or soul. ספר החינוך attempts to understand this מצוה with multiple answers. The first one recognizes the people as the source for the מצוה, since drinking blood expresses a lack of sensitivity. Animals don't have logic like humans, therefore the connecting factor is the soul. Therefore, it is insensitive to consume the blood of the animal as it is representative of the soul which is shared by mankind. This explanation can be applied not only to animals but also to our fellow human beings. Despite our differences, we are all connected by the same soul. This soul flows deep through the core of every person in their blood. Regardless of the external factors, the blood and soul at the center of our existence connect us all.

רמב"ן gives a different approach. He explains that the blood and soul belong to ה' and are not for humans to consume. רמב"ן recognizes that in an ideal world ה' created the animals to serve us and we would all be vegetarians. However, when נח saved the animals from the flood, he was rewarded with the ability to eat animals. While נח's reward permitted the consumption of meat, the soul and blood of the animal still ultimately belong to ה' and cannot be consumed. רמב"ן's understanding examines the complex relationship between Man and ה'.

Everything we have was ultimately given and created by ה'. It is all a gift, and we should never forget that ה' has complete control. We can not be greedy with our portion, and what ה' has given us, and should always recognize His part in our gains. Regardless of which approach you accept both bring purpose to the prohibition of eating blood. Whether this מצוה is brought to teach us sensitivity, and recognition of ה' at the essence of everyone, or to emphasize ה's ultimate control and the role He plays in all of our lives, both are focused on the significance of the blood being at the essence of our existence. We must separate ourselves from our personal motives and need to recognize the soul within us. ה' is at the core of our beings and connects us all.

Local laws vs. תורה

By Eitan Orkaby

In Judaism, we have a law that we are supposed to follow the country's law, דינא דמלכותא דינא, wherever we live. However, a פסוק from this week's פרשה seems to contradict this idea "וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ" "And in their ways do not go" (ויקרא יח:ג). Although this פסוק is referring to Egypt and כנען's rules, we get the impression that it is the laws of other countries that we are not supposed to follow. Is this פסוק talking about any law made by a country or only laws against the תורה?

To answer this question, רש"י understands the word "וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם" as corrupt rules, meaning laws whose purpose was to subdue the Jews. However, if this is true then the words "וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ" would be completely extra, as it already says don't follow in the ways of the מצרים and כנענים. רש"י therefore says that these "extra" words come to teach us to not act like the other nations in addition to not following their rules.

אבן עזרא disagrees with this interpretation, since as Jews we have one rulebook, the תורה. From the beginning of creation there was one way to live, and no other, by following the תורה. When the תורה says "וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ" it is warning us not to become overly familiar with any other rules, as the rules have already been written down, and no changes have to be made. This opinion seems to hint that we should follow other laws, but not to the extent of only following that law, so much so that when it does conflict with the תורה, the instinct would be to brush off the תורה.

This idea of completely following the תורה shows up just two פסוקים later but gives a marker for when we are not supposed to follow the תורה (which ironically is a מצוה in of itself) "וַתֵּי בָהֶם" "And live by them" (ויקרא יח:ה). This is meant to teach us that we have to choose life over violating one of the 613 commandments (while there are exceptions, this is the general הלכה).

The מקרא דעת says even stronger, that the laws of the גוים originate from עבודה זרה, therefore, it is forbidden for a Jew to follow them. Furthermore, the two nations the תורה chose to use as examples of who not to follow, are מצרים and כנען. The connection between the two is the עבירות that they would commit. These עבירות included: הרבעת בהמה and עבודה זרה, גילוי עריות, שפיכות דמים. All of these, are the עבירות that it is entirely forbidden to violate, even under threat of death.

From these different opinions, we see the importance of always following the תורה. This should be a main focus in our lives. Although we should be following the laws, we must do so in the light of תורה, otherwise, we might, be pulled into the original reason for the גוים' laws: שפיכות דמים, עבודה זרה, etc. We should create an environment where people have good מידות, and understand that the תורה is the true code of law, while also remembering that there is a מצוה to obey the laws of the government, albeit within the context of the תורה.

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