

PARSHAS TZAV – RAFFI MAURER

"כָּל דָּם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ. בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֵי־תֵיכֶם לְעוֹף יְלִבְיָהֶמָּה" (פרק ז', פסוק כו')

"And you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwelling places, whether from birds or from animals" (Vayikra 7:26)

In this week's פרשה, we learn of the prohibition of consuming blood, a commandment which is one of the core כשרות laws. The תורה goes on to say that anyone who does consume blood will be cut off from the Jewish people. What is reason for this prohibition? What is so serious about the act of consuming blood for it to warrant being utterly cut off from the nation?

The רמב"ם explains that consumption of blood was a major component of עבודה זרה (idol worship), which was particularly prominent in biblical times. In order to create a defined boundary in which to confine בני ישראל and protect them from evil influences, the תורה forbids engagement in activities that may lead to serving עבודה זרה. Blood consumption is considered one of these activities.

On the flip side, the רמב"ן, in his commentary on the תורה, takes an entirely different perspective on this commandment. He says that the juxtaposition of the negation of blood consumption to the laws of קרבנות (sacrifices) is in fact the reason behind it. Blood was one of only two elements of a קרבן that was totally consumed by the fire on the altar, thus being totally transferred to Hashem. If then, the blood 'consumption' is attributed exclusively to Hashem, it would be disgraceful for human to decide to take it for himself.

But both answers can be challenged by the fact that they are based upon scenarios and principles that no longer apply: עבודה זרה no longer poses the worrying threat that it once did and קרבנות are no longer offered up. Why then, has this law remained intact?

The גמרא in Kiddushin 37b states that the תורה's inclusion of the words "בכל מושבתיכם" – "in all of your dwelling places" implies that this law is not bound to any particular period or era, irrespective of the fact that it was determined by concerns that were contemporary to the biblical era. This verse stresses that no blood may be eaten - in any place, at any time.

Rabbi Eliezer Papo, in his sefer Pele Yoetz has a totally alternative view on the entire concept of drinking blood. His view indicates that the prohibition is unrelated to its connection to עבודה זרה, or to its relevance to the קרבנות. He says that there was no proper need for the תורה to prohibit drinking blood, as man by his very nature is opposed to drinking blood. Rabbi Eliezer Papo says that it was simply a means of Hashem providing extra מצוות to further our spiritual strength and dignity. As it says in Meseches Avos:

"רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר: רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, שנאמר: ה' חפץ למען צדקו, יגדיל תורה ויאדיר."

"Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says: Hashem wanted to give Yisroel merit, therefore he gave them multitudinous mitzvos - as it says: Hashem desired, for the sake of Israel's righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious"

This comes to teach us a fundamental lesson in the understanding of the Torah in general. The crux of a מצוה doesn't always lie in its simple understanding. The Torah isn't a just a list of laws that must be kept one by one – it's a guide for all Jews to assist them in leading lives that are more moral, spiritually and physically acceptable and meaningful. Keeping a single mitzvah in the Torah won't make you into the ultimate righteous man, rather, the collective effect of all of the מצוות working in harmony with each other is what builds a person up and elevates him to a high level of spiritually. As Rabbi Chananya so brilliantly says, Hashem gave us a large amount of מצוות so that we would feel rewarded and thus strengthened and improved by their influence.

That, says Rabbi Eliezer Papo, is the reason for not drinking blood. He says that the prohibition is unrelated to the problems with drinking it, but that it is more to do with the fact that not drinking it contributes to the uplifting effect of the תורה. Without the תורה, the Jewish people would not be able to exist, and without each and every מצוה, the תורה would not be able to serve its purpose.