



Among the laws presented in Parashat Acharei-Mot is the prohibition against the consumption of blood, a law for which the Torah provides the following explanation: "For the soul of every flesh is the blood, and I have placed it for you upon the altar, to atone for your souls..." (17:11). God designated animal blood as a means of atonement through its placement upon the altar as part of the sacrificial rite, and it is therefore forbidden for human consumption.

Beyond the philosophical concepts referred to in this verse, the Talmud in Masekhet Yoma (59b) detects within the Torah's phraseology a statement concerning the halakhic status of sacrificial blood. God here declares that blood is placed upon the altar "for you," alluding to a degree of personal possession over sacrificial blood. On this basis the Talmud determines that one who derives some kind of personal benefit from sacrificial blood (such as soil fertilization) does not transgress the prohibition of *me'ila*, misusing sacred property. As opposed to the rest of the animal, which is deemed hallowed and is thus forbidden for personal use, the sacrificial blood is designated as *lakhem*, "property" of the individual, and may thus be used for personal benefit.

Elsewhere, however, the Talmud indeed applies the *me'ila* prohibition to sacrificial blood. In Masekhet Me'ila (12b), the Gemara writes that if blood is let from an animal consecrated for a sacrifice, one who derives benefit from that blood has transgressed the *me'ila* prohibition. To reconcile this ruling with the aforementioned comment in Masekhet Yoma, many *Rishonim* (Medieval halakhists), including Maimonides (Hilkhos Me'ila 2:11), distinguish between blood taken from a live sacrificial animal, and blood spilt during the slaughtering of a sacrifice. In Masekhet Yoma, the Gemara clearly speaks of the blood "placed upon the altar," meaning, the blood spilt during slaughtering. Such blood is excluded from the *me'ila* prohibition. In Masekhet Me'ila, however, the Gemara addresses the status of blood removed from an animal designated as a sacrifice, before it is slaughtered, and this blood is indeed subject to the laws of *me'ila*.

Maimonides explains the rationale for this distinction as follows: "But if one lets blood from a consecrated animal, it is forbidden for personal use... Since it [the animal] cannot live without blood, it is like its body." This means that intrinsically, a consecrated animal's blood is never subject to *me'ila*, because, as mentioned, it is considered the "property" of the individual. However, while the animal is alive, it obviously depends upon its circulation of blood to live. The dependence on blood renders the blood an

integral part of the consecrated animal, such that it, too, obtains the animal's "consecrated" status with respect to the prohibition of *me'ila*. After the animal's death, of course, the blood is no longer functionally related to the rest of the animal, and it therefore loses its status as "consecrated" with respect to *me'ila*.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Yalkut Yehuda* (Denver, 1934), adds that Maimonides' explanation of this *halakha* may shed light on an otherwise enigmatic passage in Masekhet Berakhot (31a). The Gemara there establishes that one should not begin praying immediately after pondering a difficult and complex halakhic issue, as his thoughts will likely be preoccupied with the given topic during prayer. Instead, the Gemara advises, one should begin praying after studying a *halakha pesuka*, a straightforward, clear-cut *halakha*. Among the examples mentioned by the Gemara is the aforementioned *halakha* concerning the blood taken from a sacrificial animal, that it is subject to the laws of *me'ila*. The Gemara points to this statement as a classic example of a straightforward law worthy of study just prior to prayer.

Rabbi Ginsburg suggested that the significance of this *halakha* with regard to prayer can be understood on the basis of Maimonides' comments cited above. The animal's blood is intrinsically unworthy of the "sacred" status required to be subject to the laws of *me'ila*, but its vital service to the rest of the animal's body elevates it to this status. Rabbi Ginsburg explained that this is precisely how a Jew must view himself as he prepares to stand before God in prayer. Individually, he is likely undeserving of God's favor, forgiveness and kindness. Can anybody honestly claim to have satisfied all his religious obligations to the point where he can rightfully demand the Almighty's assistance? Our right to stand before God in prayer and ask for our lives, health and success evolves from each individual's indispensable role as part of *Am Yisrael*. Just as an animal cannot live without its constant flow of blood, so can the Jewish people fulfill its eternal mission only with the active involvement and participation of each and every one of its members. And any member that commits himself to do his share, and proves himself to be an indispensable asset to the righteous among the nation, is entitled to come before God and present his requests.

Thus, before one begins to pray, he is advised to consider the law of *ha-makiz dam be-behemat kodashim*, the halakhic status of blood taken from a consecrated animal. He should recommit himself to fulfilling his indispensable role as part of the Jewish people, whereby he may then rely on the collective merits of *Am Yisrael* as he approaches God in prayer.