

Parshiot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5783, 2023:

The “Taste” of the Mitzvot

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The prohibition of eating blood is one of the best-known *mitzvot* in Parashat Acharei Mot.

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, on *Sefer Vayikra* 17:10-11, the Ramban (1194-1270) notes that many of the verses that proscribe the consumption of blood employ the word, “*nefesh*,” as we see in the following examples:

For the soul of the flesh is in the blood...

For [regarding] the soul of all flesh, its blood is in its soul, and I said to the children of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the soul of any flesh is its blood; all who eat it shall be cut off.

However, be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh. (*Sefer Vayikra* 17:11, 14 and *Sefer Devarim* 12:23, all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

This leads the Ramban (1194-1270) to a deeply insightful analysis of this *mitzvah*:

... if a person eats the soul of all flesh (that is, blood), and joins it with his blood, they become united in his being; this results in an obdurate nature and arrogance in the soul of man. Moreover, he will enter into a [spiritual] state that is close to the animal soul that has been eaten... and the man’s soul will be combined with the blood of the animal. Therefore, the text states, “For [regarding] the soul of all flesh, its blood is in its soul...” (*Sefer Vayikra* 17:14) for in all the flesh of both man and the animals, the soul is to be found in the blood. [Moreover,] it is not fitting to mix the soul that has been cut off [that of the animal that has been killed] with the soul that continues to live [that of the man] ... And this is the reason why I [Hashem] have said to the Jewish people [not to eat blood], since the blood is the soul, and it is not fitting for a soul to eat another soul. (*Commentary on Sefer Vayikra* 17:11-12, translation, underlining and brackets my own)

The Ramban's spiritually oriented interpretation of our *mitzvah* focuses on several major elements: Ingesting blood results in a thickness and arrogance in the soul of a person; eating blood will cause a person to enter a spiritual state that is similar in kind to that of the animal he/she has eaten; it is untoward to mix the soul that has been cut off with the soul that continues to live.

In general, my rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the "Rav" by his followers and disciples, championed the Ramban's interpretation of *ta'amei HaMitzvot*—the "taste" of the *mitzvot*, such as the one we have discussed, over the Ramban's (1135-1204) rationalistic and historical explanations, as found in the *Moreh HaNavuchim (Guide for the Perplexed)*. The Rav based this position on, "the incontrovertible fact that such [rationalistic] explanations neither edify nor inspire the religious consciousness." (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought*, page 92) What, then, are the hallmarks of the religious consciousness? The Rav provides a poetic answer:

Man seeks God out of a thirst for the freedom of life, a desire to expand and deepen the universe. The search for God means liberation from the burden of tyrannical nature weighing heavily upon him, release from the blind forces besetting man's life. Weary from the travail of dull life, man flees to the region of complete liberty and conjoins with God. Man desires peace of mind and seeks to wipe the tears of sorrow from his face. Out of the totality of spiritual experience that flows from the inner uniqueness and independence of the creative spirit that rises ever higher, the religious experience is revealed. (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *And from There You Shall Seek*, translation, Naomi Goldblum, pages 41-42)

May we be *zocheh* to come ever closer to Hashem. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Ray](#)