

Sacrifice: In Animal Death, Teaching Reverence for Animal Life

As I've remarked before somewhat ironically, Biblical law concerning sacrifice and slaughter of animals has much to teach in regards to reverence for animal life. Modern-day mechanization of agriculture may be guilty of treating domesticated livestock as mere "food factories," but this is far removed from the perspective of traditional societies such as the Bible's. To the contrary, Biblical sacrificial law underscores a recognition of the sacred value of animal life.

One of the strongest evidences for reverence for animal life as sacred can be found in Ahare Mot, Leviticus Chapter 17. Verse 3 presents a law which seems to have been abrogated or modified by other Torah legislation, but seems to reflect an ideal: At least during their 40-year sojourn in the Wilderness, the only permitted way to slaughter any cattle, goats, or lambs (probably including all sheep) was as sacrifices. As such, their fats and their blood, as well as some other parts, were required to be brought to the Tent of Meeting. Thus, non-sacrificial slaughter of animals seems here to have been completely prohibited, although it seems to have been permitted in later periods. Our section of Leviticus seems to state an all-out blanket prohibition, and the punishment for violating is quite severe, as well: A man who slaughters without sacrificing parts at the Tent of Meeting is said to have "spilt blood" [on his hands] and his punishment is "Karet," to be "cut off" from Israel. Why such a severe punishment? Because, the text implies, if the man hadn't brought a sacrifice to the Tent of Meeting, it must mean that he had slaughtered the animal as a sacrifice to demons or other gods! This section of Leviticus finds it unthinkable that anyone would take the life of any domesticated animal except as a sacrifice! Thus if the animal wasn't brought as a sacrifice to our God, it perforce meant that the animal had been sacrificed to another deity, and hence the non-presentation of an animal for sacrifice is punished as if it were idolatry! The animal's life was universally revered, by Israelite as well as by pagan, as sacred, and in recognition of this the animal's blood, which circulated God's breath of life within it, must be poured out in sacrifice back to Him who gave the animal the Breath of Life.

The section goes on to prescribe this same punishment, being "cut off (karet)" from Israel, to anyone who eats any blood, among Israelites or any others who sojourn among Israel. To eat the animal's blood is to act as if we ourselves "created" its life, and is tantamount to idolatry, since it denies recognition that Our God Alone is responsible for endowing all living animals with the Breath of Life. Wild game, of course, cannot be offered as sacrifices, so their blood cannot be brought to the Tent of Meeting. Nonetheless, their blood cannot be eaten, nor left in the open to rot. Rather, their blood must be respectfully "buried," by covering it with dirt. Even the life of wild game must be valued as coming from God and, as a sign of this, its blood must be treated with this gesture of respect.

The last law of Chapter 17 deals with the one who eats of carrion or of previously mauled or "torn" animals, rendering the person impure and seemingly bearing some "sin" thereby. This animal, too, was not brought as a sacrifice, giving its blood and hence its life the proper respect which was its due as a creature of God. Since its life was not shown this proper respect, we have no right to partake of it. In short: The way we treat dead animals, even when at times we may partake of them, should ideally show how we reverence and value the life of our fellow animal creatures. Even when we have certain rights to them and are permitted to kill and partake of them, they cannot be killed wantonly. Indirectly, in teaching us how to properly kill animals, spilling their blood and partaking of them in a permitted way, the Torah teaches us teaches us reverence and care for animal life. It is no wonder, then, that even later practices of kosher ritual slaughter were based upon this sacrificial law and, at least ideally, are expected to inculcate, even and especially in dealing with animal death, a reverence for God-given animal life.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Ahare Mot

April 29-30, 2022 | 29 Nisan, 5782

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 480 | Haftarah: p. 948

Kaplan: p. 584 | Haftarah: p. 1262

Candle Lighting | 7:32 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Youth Shabbat Program | 10:00 am | Meet up in the Fidanque Youth Room | *Led by our new Youth Directors, Gabi & Raph!*

Kiddush | Levy | following services | *Sponsored in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Sebastian Lipschutz*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | 6:50 pm

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 7:35 pm

Habdala | 8:31 pm

Rosh Hodesh Iyar begins on Saturday night.

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: **8:00 am** | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 6:30 pm

2022 ANNUAL SPRING FUNDRAISER

Sanctuaries & Cities:

Synagogues of the World and the Stories They Tell

An 8-Part Lecture Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

with in-person and virtual experiences

NEXT SESSION: This Tuesday, May 3 | Virtual Only

Join **Rabbi Soloveichik** on a unique tour of historic synagogues around the world. Learn how the communities and extraordinary edifices in London, Krakow, Rome, Prague, Newport, Cairo, Amsterdam, and Venice came into being, the controversies and legends that suffused them, and the sacrifices and faith they embody. To rediscover these synagogues is to encounter Jewish history itself and we will discover them together. (Note: these lectures won't be recorded.)

Registration is free, but sponsorships are greatly appreciated as this special series serves as our Congregation's annual Spring Fundraiser and provides essential support to our Congregation.

For the full schedule, lecture titles, and to sponsor or register, visit

shearithisrael.org/springfundraiser2022.

Sponsorship Opportunities:

SERIES UNDERWRITERS	SESSION SPONSORS
Torah \$18,000	Luhot \$1,800
Hekhal \$10,000	Etz Hayyim \$1,000
Rimonim \$5,000	Yad \$360
Ner Tamid \$3,600	Kahal Kodesh \$250

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Sebastian Lipschutz**, son of **Cecilia Michelson**, upon becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Aviva & Marvin Sussman on the birth of a great-grandson, born to Yael & Ohad Merlin. Congratulations to grandparents Rina & Avi Sussman.

Aviva & Marvin Sussman on the birth of a grandson, born to Ilana & Jon Uretsky.

SHABBAT YOUTH PROGRAM

Shabbat Youth Program

Shabbat Mornings | 10:00 am | Meet up in the Fidanque Youth Room

Led by Gabi & Raph, our new Youth Directors

Now that Passover is behind us, Gabi and Raph, our new Youth Directors, are back and raring to make Shabbat at Shearith Israel fun and meaningful for our youth. So bring your kids and have your kids bring their friends so they can enjoy our reinvigorated Shabbat youth program.

Stay tuned for an exciting **Lag La'Omer** program!

COMING UP

Super Soccer Stars & Shearith Israel present

Sunday Soccer on Paved Paradise

Sunday Mornings | 8 West 70th Street | April 24-June 26

Ages 1-8 | View details and register at tinyurl.com/csi-soccer

Members, use our promo code "Shearith15" for a 15% discount!

Do you want to enjoy bonding with your toddler over soccer? We've got a class for that! Does your kid want fun, non-competitive, and educational soccer classes?

We've got you covered! Is your kid already a pro and wants something more advanced? We've got that too!

Visit tinyurl.com/csi-soccer to view all the options being offered, and select the right one(s) for your child(ren).

Mets Game Outing

Sponsored by the Lewin Family

Sunday, May 15 | 1:00 pm | Citi Field

Now that the baseball season is back on schedule, Shearith Israel youth and their families are invited on this highly subsidized trip to watch the Mets play the Mariners – only \$15 a ticket (actual ticket price: \$40)!

Registration now open at shearithisrael.org/mets.

Shearith Israel Chorale

Wednesdays | 7:00-8:15 pm | Led by **Hazzan Eliot Alderman**

Please join us on Wednesday evenings for a new and exciting musical opportunity. Learn to sing pieces from our congregation's musical heritage and beyond. Led by hazzan & choirmaster Mr. Eliot Alderman of the UK, this new offering is open to anyone with an interest in singing and learning our musical tradition. The ability to read music is a plus but is not required.

Suggested donation is \$15 per session (or as you are able). Register at

shearithisrael.org/chorale.