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פרשת ראה תשפ״ו

The Blood That Became Water

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Parshas Re'eh contains a very interesting pasuk that caught my attention in a way that once you see it, it completely changes.

> בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה׳ אֱלֹקֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגֹּדְדוּ וְלֹא תָשִׂימוּ קָרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֵת (דברים יד:א)

You are children of Hashem your God. You shall not cut yourselves, nor shall you make a bald patch between your eyes for the dead.

The Torah responds to death with the words בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה׳ אֱלקיכֶם— you are children of Hashem. Two comforts are contained here.

First, you are always Hashem's child. A parent does not cease to desire the good of his child. Even when death enters a person's life, and even when the loss is entirely beyond our understanding, Hashem has not stopped being our Father. The good may be hidden from us, but the relationship remains.

Second, Hashem is still here. Death takes away someone upon whom we depended and leaves us feeling exposed, abandoned, and alone. The Torah reminds the mourner: you have lost someone precious, but you have not been left without a Father.

Therefore, לא תתגודדו: do not tear yourself apart, and do not allow death to convince you that your relationship with Hashem has been severed.

חז״ל reveal another meaning: לא תעשו אגודות אגודות — do not form separate factions (יבמות יג ע״ב). The same word that forbids cutting the body forbids cutting the nation into separate groups. Because we are all children of one Father, death must not be allowed to produce פירוד (*division*) — from Hashem, from כלל ישראל, or from one another.

One might ask why חז״ל would draw this specifically from a pasuk about mourning. But that is exactly the point. Death is where פירוד begins. When someone passes, the questions come almost on their own: who is next in line, who receives the property, who was most beloved, what did he really think of each of us, what did he truly intend. A death can pull a family — and a people — into factions faster than almost anything else. So the Torah places the warning precisely here. לא תתגודדו — do not let loss become a knife, neither against yourself nor between you and one another.

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Children Who Remain תלמידים

The ספרי teaches regarding ושננתם לבניך: לבניך אלו תלמידיך — your children are your students (ספרי דברים לד).

A תלמיד is called a בן. A רב does not merely transmit information; he gives spiritual form and life to the תלמיד.

This lends בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה׳ אֱלֹקיכֶם an additional depth. כלל ישראל are not only Hashem's children; we are also His תלמידים, the receivers of His תורה. Our closeness does not mean that we have outgrown receiving. It means the opposite — that we remain close enough to be taught.

And this is the precise correction of קרח. קרחה contains the very letters of קרח; the connection is not incidental. קרח's claim — כולם קדושים — was that closeness to Hashem dissolves the need to receive through another. He rejected משה not merely as a person or a leader, but as the מקבל through whom תורה שבעל פה enters the world and becomes livable. He wanted קדושה without submission to ציווי (*command*), and תורה without the מסורה that determines how תורה takes root in life. Because he understood, he believed he no longer needed to remain a תלמיד.

The opposite of קרח is not merely unity. The opposite of קרח is remaining a תלמיד.

A תלמיד may possess insight and greatness, yet he knows that his understanding remains beneath the ציווי. He does not use the תכלית (*purpose*) to uproot the צורה (*form*). תורה descends from שמים, but it must take root in the ארץ — in מסורה, פרטים, and lived מעשה.

The questions of טלית שכולה תכלת and בית מלא ספרים express one underlying claim (תנחומא קרח ב; במדבר רבה יח:ג). If the garment already possesses the תכלית of תכלת, why should it require the commanded צורה of ציצית? If the house is filled with ספרים, why should it require a מזוזה? קרח wanted the purpose without the commanded form.

In this sense קרח wanted the holiness of שמים without the grounding of ארץ. He attempted to stand upon תורה while denying the ground it must root in — and the ground opened beneath him. A rootless Torah could no longer hold him up.

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The Mouth That Was Waiting

Before following קרח into the ground, it is worth asking what the ground is — because the same ground receives both his rebellion and, generations earlier, the blood of הבל.

The ground is never inert. In the language of פנימיות התורה, the ארץ is נוקבא — the receptive realm of מלכות, that which receives from above and brings forth life below. And מלכות has nothing of its own: לית לה מגרמה כלום. It does not act from itself, and it does not react from its own grievance. What it brings forth is what has been placed within it — the רצון that stands above it, disclosed at its level.

This is why the Torah records that the mouth of the earth was not improvised in the moment of קרח's sin. It was prepared at the very edge of creation:

> עֲשָׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרְאוּ בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: פִּי הָאָרֶץ... (אבות ה:ו)
>
> *Ten things were created on the eve of Shabbos at twilight, and these are they: the mouth of the earth...*

פי הארץ heads the list. And when the גמרא asks how a new creation could be spoken of at all — והא לאקרובי פתחא (סנהדרין קי ע״א): the answer is כתיב אין חדש תחת השמש — nothing was made, the opening that already existed was brought near. רש״י on the pasuk reads ואם בריאה as חדשה, and brings the pre-existence reading only as ורבותינו פירשו; the רמב״ן holds that the ground opened and closed כאדם הפותח פיו וסוגרו (*like a person who opens and closes their mouths*), a נס prepared among the עשרה דברים of בין השמשות, and he calls it סוד מופלא, מִי חָכָם וְיָבֵן אֵלֶּה (רמב״ן במדבר טז:ל).

קרח's punishment was therefore not improvised in response to the moment. Its instrument had been prepared, and what happened at the עת (*time*) was that an opening already there was brought near.

This bears on the question of whether the ground "acts against" the sinner. The mouth that opened for קרח was not summoned by his rebellion; it was already there. מלכות does not assert — it brings forth what was set within it. To the one who imagined the ground was nothing, mere matter to be used and denied, that disclosure feels like reaction. But it is only the ground being what it was made to be: a vessel that reveals רצון.

Sin treats the ground as empty and is answered by its fullness. Mitzvah lives in the truth of what it is.

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קין, הבל, and the Ground That Would Not Conceal

דם enters the Torah in קין's murder of הבל, and there in the plural construct: דמי אחיך. It enters the Torah's law only after the מבול, and it enters already as a law of return:

> שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם (בראשית ט:ו)
>
> *Whoever spills the blood of man, by man shall his blood be spilled.*

The verb is שפך — the verb that will carry every law of blood that follows.

> וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה (בראשית ד:י)
>
> *He said: What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.*

The letters דם already stand within both אדם and אדמה. The אדם is formed עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה, and the דם flows within him as the bearer of physical life: כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנָּפֶשׁ But the word itself does not appear until the death of הבל. It was hidden within אדם and within אדמה, and becomes independently named only when it is violently separated from the אדם — placed into the אדמה, and given a קול. The murder of הבל expresses דם as an independent entity where it was only within אדם and אדמה beforehand.

There is a second sin here, folded into the first. קין did not only spill blood; he buried the deed. He put the blood into the ground to conceal — to make the murder disappear, to leave no witness

and no accounting: השומר אחי אנכי, לא ידעתי. He treated the אדמה as a place of disposal, as empty matter that hides whatever is forced into it.

But if the ground is נוקבא, then the ground was never empty, and it does not conceal on the murderer's terms. It discloses what is true, and the truth of דם נקי (*innocent blood*) is a קול before Hashem. קין put blood in to silence it; what was placed in the ground disclosed itself, and the blood was given a voice rather than a grave. The place he used to hide his crime became the place that testified against him.

The Torah later says that the land cannot be cleansed of such blood without justice:

> וְלֹא תַחֲנִיפוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ... וְלָאָרֶץ לֹא יְכֻפַּר לַדָּם אֲשֶׁר שֻׁפַךְ בָּהּ כִּי אִם בְּדַם שֹׁפְכוֹ (במדבר לה:לג)

You shall not corrupt the land in which you live... and the land cannot be granted atonement for the blood spilled within it except through the blood of the one who spilled it.

Note what the pasuk says: it is the ארץ that is not granted כפרה. The ground was not the sinner; it was made to carry דם נקי forced upon it, and what it carries requires rectification. It cannot conceal that blood, and it cannot be granted כפרה for it on any terms but justice. Here too the ground has nothing of its own — it is not appeased and it does not forgive. It holds what was placed in it until the רצון above it is satisfied.

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פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ

The Torah does not use this image loosely. In Chumash the phrase פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ belongs to two events and no others — the murder of הבל, and the rebellion of קרח.

> וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אָתָּה מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ לָקַחַת אֶת דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדֶךָ (בראשית ד:יא)

> וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא ה׳ וּפָצְתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת פִּיהָ וּבָלְעָה אֹתָם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם וְיָרְדוּ חַיִּים שְׁאֹלָה וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי נִאֲצוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת ה׳ (במדבר טז:ל)

> וַאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְדָתָן וְלַאֲבִירָם... אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע (דברים יא:ו)

Two men and one verb. The Torah is quoting itself, and the second occurrence is meant to be read against the first.

The אור החיים reads the two together explicitly. On וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא he brings that from the day of קין's curse פי הארץ was נסתם ונחתם — sealed and shut — and that משה was asking for that very mouth to open once more:

> וְאוּלַי כִּי זֶה יִהְיֶה לָהּ תִּיקּוּן לְמַה שֶׁפָּצְתָה לִבְלוֹעַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק, עַתָּה תִּפְצֶה פִּיהָ לִבְלוֹעַ אוֹיְבֵי ה׳ (אור החיים במדבר טז:ל)

And perhaps this will be a תיקון *for it — for having opened its mouth to swallow a righteous man; now let it open its mouth to swallow the enemies of Hashem.*

The ground bore a stain from what was forced through it at קין's hand, and what it bore was answered.

And the account of קרח does not stop at the opening. It closes with a covering:

> וַיֵּרְדוּ הֵם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם חַיִּים שְׁאֹלָה וַתְּכַס עֲלֵיהֶם הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל (במדבר טז:לג)

They went down alive to שאול, *and the earth covered over them, and they were lost from among the assembly.*

ותכס — the same root as כיסוי הדם. So these are not merely two abuses of the ground. They are two poles of covering, and the mitzvah of כסוי הדם will stand as the third.

קין forced a נפש into the ground in order to conceal it, and the ground refused to cover: it gave the blood a קול. But קרח denied the ground, and the ground covered him — וַיֹּאבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל, erased from the assembly. Between the covering that was refused and the covering that erased stands the covering that honors: וְשָׂפַךְ אֶת דָּמוֹ וְכִסָּהוּ בֶּעָפָר

Why should the ground refuse concealment to קין and grant it to קרח? Because in both cases it discloses rather than reacts. A נפש forced down to be hidden cannot be received as hidden; the ground will not hold a lie, and the blood speaks. But the man who denied that תורה has a ground beneath it is answered by the ground exactly: he is removed from the קהל, the very channel he refused to receive through.

One might add that קרח himself is absent from משה's recollection in דברים because he belongs, instead, inside the warning meant to prevent his sin — לא תשימו קרחה.

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בזיון of קין, קרח, and Two Faces

The two men may now be set beside one another, and the unity lies not in their sin but in the ground's disclosure. קין treated the ground as worthless matter — a disposal, a place to hide a deed, something with no dignity and no voice. קרח treated the ground of תורה — the מסורה, the channel of משה, the נוקבא which bears תורה שבעל פה — as illegitimate: כולם קדושים, as if תורה could stand with no ground to root in and no channel to pass through.

Both are בזיון (*disgrace*) of מלכות, in two faces: one disgraces it as nothing, the other as unnecessary. And to each the ground answered not by asserting itself but by disclosing what was always within it. קין forced blood into a ground he took to be a void, and the void spoke. קרח stood on a Torah he took to need no ground, and the ground consumed him — held up, in the end, by nothing.

Two men, then, and one ground — a ground that will not be used against its own nature. קרח shows this at the level of תורה. קין shows it at the level of blood, and it is there that the ground's nature is displayed most completely. To that we now turn.

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How the Blood Returns

Begin with what the Torah says plainly. Blood is the נפש:

> רַק חֲזַק לְבִלְתִּי אֱכֹל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְלֹא תֹאכַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ עִם הַבָּשָׂר (דברים יב:כג)

This is not a metaphor in the Torah's mouth; it is the reason behind the laws of blood. The גמרא distinguishes דם הנפש, the life-blood, from דם התמצית, the residual blood that drains after the נפש has already gone — and only the former atones:

> דָּם שֶׁהַנֶּפֶשׁ יוֹצְאָה בּוֹ מְכַפֵּר, וְשֶׁאֵין הַנֶּפֶשׁ יוֹצְאָה בּוֹ אֵינוֹ מְכַפֵּר (כריתות כב ע״א; ועיין פסחים סה ע״א)

Blood by which the נפש departs atones; blood by which the נפש does not depart does not atone.

The derivation is from כִּי הַדָּם הוּא בַּנֶּפֶשׁ יְכַפֵּר the very pasuk that makes blood the vehicle of כפרה restricts כפרה to the blood that carries the נפש.

And the נפש was drawn from the ground. The animal נפש is first brought forth from the ground: עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה and becomes a נפש חיה. אדם, too, is formed תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ (בראשית א:כד). The נפש carried by blood belongs to embodied life that emerged from the earth. When life is taken, its blood is not treated as refuse; it is returned to the realm from which embodied life was brought forth. That ground is מלכות, whose whole nature is to receive what descends to it. The blood does not merely fall to the earth — it is received.

The Torah says this in its plainest form for ordinary meat. פרשת ראה permits בשר תאוה, meat eaten for desire, outside the מזבח — and even there forbids the blood. But it does not merely forbid; it prescribes what must be done with it:

> רַק הַדָּם לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֶנּוּ כַּמָּיִם (דברים יב:טז, יב:כד)

Only the blood you shall not eat; upon the earth you shall pour it like water.

The ספרי insists that the blood be poured upon the earth itself:

> עַל הָאָרֶץ – וְלֹא לְתוֹךְ יַמִּים וְלֹא לְתוֹךְ נְהָרוֹת וְלֹא לְתוֹךְ כֵּלִים; כַּמַּיִם – וְלֹא לְתוֹךְ מַיִם עַצְמָם (ספרי דברים עא)

"Upon the earth" — and not into seas, and not into rivers, and not into vessels; "like water" — and not into water itself.

It is not consigned to a receptacle for disposal; it is returned openly to the ground. And even the blood of a בהמה, which is פטור מכיסוי (חולין פד ע״א; the ברטנורא sources the כמים of that derasha to בכור בעל מום, טו:כג:דברים), is still poured out על הארץ. Exemption from covering is not exemption from showing proper כבוד to the דם.

Why כמים? Not because water is refuse. חז״ל read the comparison as a statement of what water does: הרי הוא כמים להכשיר את הזרעים — blood, like water, is מכשיר; it renders produce able to receive (ספרי שם; רש״י דברים יב:טז). What produce becomes able to receive is טומאה, but that is only the halachic index that a thing has become a receiver at all. הכשר is the end of inertness — and the ground, as we have said, is never inert. Water is the one element that goes down into the ground and returns up as life. To pour blood כמים is to return the נפש in the manner of water: not דין crushing the sinner, but life given back to the ground so that it may bring forth again.

Now the קרבן. Here the blood does not simply return to the ground; an עבודה is laid upon it first. And the Torah identifies the blood, precisely because it carries the נפש, as the vehicle of כפרה:

> כִּי נֶפֶשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם הִוא וַאֲנִי נְתַתִּיו לָכֶם עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם כִּי הַדָּם הִוא בַּנֶּפֶשׁ יְכַפֵּר (ויקרא יז:יא)

For the נפש of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to atone for your souls; for the blood atones by means of the נפש.

The blood that atones is the blood as נפש.

But the עבודה does not keep the blood. Only part of it is taken up in the מתנות; the rest is poured out at the base of the מזבח:

> וְנָתַן֮ הַכֹּהֵן֒ מִן הַדָּם֙ עַל־קַרְנ֣וֹת מִזְבַּ֔ח קְטֹ֖רֶת הַסַּמִּ֑ים לִפְנֵ֣י ה֗׳ אֲשֶׁ֛ר בְּאֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵ֖ד וְאֵ֣ת כָּל־דַּ֣ם הַפָּ֑ר יִשְׁפֹּ֕ךְ אֶל־יְסוֹד֙ מִזְבַּ֣ח הָעֹלָ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר פֶּֽתַח־אֹ֖הֶל מוֹעֵֽד׃ (ויקרא ד:ז)

And all the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of the burnt-offering.

And the descent does not stop at the יסוד: from there the blood drained through the אמה of the נחל קדרון out to עזרה, ending in the earth (ו:יומא ה; ב:מדות ג). And the verb is the same verb throughout. The blood of חולין is תשפכנו, poured to the ground; the blood of the קרבן is ישפך, poured to the יסוד; and in ראה itself even the קרבן's blood-service is named by that root (כז:יב דברים). One verb runs from ט:בראשית ו to the יסוד of the מזבח.

The return to the ground is therefore not the exception even for the holiest blood; it is the constant beneath the עבודה. The elevation does not abolish the descent. It gives the blood an עבודה before it returns.

And there is a third case: חיה and עוף slaughtered as חולין. Their blood is not returned plainly like the blood of בהמת חולין, nor does it undergo the blood-service of a קרבן; it is poured and then covered בעפר:

> וְאִ֣ישׁ אִ֗ישׁ... אֲשֶׁ֤ר יָצוּד֙ צֵ֣יד חַיָּ֔ה אוֹ־עוֹף֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר יֵאָכֵ֔ל וְשָׁפַ֖ךְ אֶת־דָּמ֑וֹ וְכִסָּ֖הוּ בֶּֽעָפָר׃ (ויקרא יז:יג)

Any man... who hunts an edible wild animal or bird shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

The Torah binds חיה and עוף together in one phrase — צֵיד חַיָּה אוֹ עוֹף — and the רמב״ם reads the pasuk as binding them for שחיטה as well, with the pouring itself as the mechanism. He derives חיה from בהמה, and then:

> וּבְעוֹף הוּא אוֹמֵר אֲשֶׁר יָצוּד צֵיד חַיָּה אוֹ עוֹף וְגוֹ׳ וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת דָּמוֹ – מְלַמֵּד שֶׁשְּׁפִיכַת דַּם הָעוֹף כִּשְׁפִיכַת דַּם הַחַיָּה (רמב״ם הלכות שחיטה א:א)

And of a bird it says, "who hunts an edible wild animal or bird... and pours out its blood" — teaching that the pouring of a bird's blood is like the pouring of a wild animal's blood.

The עוף enters the category through the שפיכה of its blood. And the covering is itself a מצות עשה. The grouping is a גזירת הכתוב, not a claim about the animals' nature. Here the addition to the return is not elevation but burial.

And the halachah shows that the form of the return follows the act, not the creature: כיסוי הדם... נוהג בחולין אבל לא במוקדשין (ב:רמב״ם הלכות שחיטה יד; פג ע״ב, א:משנה חולין ו). An עוף brought as a קרבן receives no כיסוי; the same עוף shechted as חולין does. Same creature, different return — because the blood stands in a different act.

So there are not two treatments of blood but three, and they are governed under one rule in three forms. The rule is that spilled blood — the נפש — returns to the earth and is not treated as refuse. What varies is the form of the return, not its rank. The קרבן returns by the long way, an עבודה laid upon the blood first and the descent running through the יסוד. The חיה and עוף of חולין return it by covering. The בהמת חולין returns it plainly: no act is prescribed upon that blood

beyond the pouring itself — על הארץ, and not into a vessel. The manner of the return is the whole of what is asked. One might add that elevation and burial are not more and less of the same thing but opposite motions, and that both end in the ground.

✦

כיסוי הדם: The Same Meeting, Turned

Return now to קין, for against this whole structure his act reads with a terrible precision.

קין spilled his brother's blood into the אדמה and then denied what he had done. He treated the ground as though it could absorb the crime into silence. But blood is the נפש, and the נפש was meant to be returned to the ground — openly, as something given back. קין took a נפש that should have been returned and forced it down to be hidden. He used the true destination of blood for a false purpose: the ground that receives a נפש home received, instead, a crime to conceal. And the ground does not conceal on the murderer's terms: what was placed in it disclosed itself, and the blood was given a voice rather than a grave.

The Torah commands כיסוי הדם — וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת דָּמוֹ וְכִסָּהוּ בֶּעָפָר — as the exact reversal of that act. It is not the same physical act; קין performed no כיסוי. But it is the same meeting of blood and earth, turned from concealment into commanded dignity. קין expected the blood absorbed into the אדמה to vanish into silence; כיסוי הדם pours the blood openly and only then covers it in the עפר, to declare that a life mattered. Covering as concealment, and covering as כבוד. The blood is acknowledged first — poured out in the open — and only then covered, the way one buries a person rather than the way one disposes of evidence.

And this is why חז״ל place the origin of both ברכות at the burial of הבל. The midrash teaches in the name of ר׳ אלעזר בן פדת:

> עוֹפוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְחַיּוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת קָבָרוּהוּ, וְנָתַן לָהֶן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂכָרָן ב׳ בְּרָכוֹת שֶׁמְּבָרְכִים עֲלֵיהֶן: אַחַת לִשְׁחִיטָה וְאַחַת לְכִסּוּי הַדָּם (בראשית רבה כב:ח)

The birds of heaven and the pure חיות *buried him, and the Holy One gave them their reward — two* ברכות *we recite over them: one for* שחיטה *and one for* כיסוי הדם.

They would not leave הבל exposed in בזיון; and so their own blood is not left exposed. The same meeting of blood and earth that קין expected to erase a life becomes, in their hands, an act of covering-in-honor. They gave כבוד to the disgraced dead, and the Torah gives כבוד to their blood.

The root of כפרה through blood may lie here, at הבל. This is the first blood the Torah shows us, and it shows it as נפש that cries out to Hashem and is heard: קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ. Before the Torah gives the laws of מזבח and קרבן, it has already shown a נפש-blood that reaches Hashem and is heard. כפרה is that same reaching, turned from accusation to atonement: כִּי הַדָּם הוּא בַּנֶּפֶשׁ יְכַפֵּר The first נפש-blood to rise before Hashem rose as a cry from the ground; the עבודה of כפרה is that same rising, received rather than accusing. קין's act was the inversion of כפרה — a נפש forced down to be silenced, where כפרה is a נפש offered up to be heard.

On this reading, כיסוי הדם is man ceasing to treat the ground as a dump. He returns the blood to the עפר as to a vessel of רצון, with כבוד, where קין had expected the earth to provide concealment. He is not triggering a reaction and not appeasing a grievance; he is bringing his act into line with

what the ground already is. That is the shape of the תיקון. The ground itself bears something requiring rectification — וְלָאָרֶץ לֹא יְכֻפַּר לַדָּם אֲשֶׁר שֻׁפַּךְ בָּהּ — but what it bears is not a guilt of its own; it is the stain of what was forced through it. So the repair is not that the ground must become something other than it is, but that what was done to it must be answered, and that man must again stand before it as before a vessel that receives. It is not a void to be used, and what returns to it is treated with כבוד.

And the halachah of what may serve as the covering points the same way. רשב״ג states a כלל in the משנה: מכסין בו צמחין שמגדל בו ,דבר מכסין בו אין צמחין שמגדל בו ושאינו (חולין ו:ז, פח ע״ב). This is not the only qualifying path — a substance may also serve because the Torah calls it עפר — but it remains one of them, and it admits materials that nothing else would: נסורת של חרשים and נעורת של פשתן are fit precisely because things grow in them (תוספות ביצה ח ע״א). So the measure of a fit covering is, at least in part, whether it can bring forth. The blood is not merely put beyond sight; it is given to what grows, and the covering that honors a נפש is made of the material in which life rises again.

✦

The Reunion of the Brothers

The mitzvos of repairing דם is more than קין's single act. They repair the פירוד his murder created between two worlds.

These are not תיקונים of קין and הבל as individuals — הבל needs no תיקון. Rather, הבל belonged to the צאן and קין to the אדמה. Their worlds should have complemented one another, the animal living from the produce of the earth, both directed toward Hashem. קין joined them through murder, when the blood of the shepherd entered the ground of the farmer. The Torah reunites them through מצוה: the נפש of the animal returning to the ground, life given back to its source.

כיסוי הדם is performed specifically with עפר — the blood that carried the נפש returned to the very material from which embodied life was formed, ground to ground. And the very creatures the מדרש honors for burying הבל are themselves elevated through this same מצוה: the עץ יוסף explains that the pure birds and חיות by their nature flee blood and the smell of death, so that their permission through שחיטה and כיסוי הדם is a זכות that raises them (עץ יוסף על בראשית רבה כב).

✦

Mother, רחם, and רחמים

The distinction between בהמה and עוף returns in the מצוות of parent and child. By בהמה:

> וְשׁוֹר אוֹ שֶׂה אֹתוֹ וְאֶת בְּנוֹ לֹא תִשְׁחֲטוּ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד (ויקרא כב:כח)

You shall not slaughter it and its young on one day.

And by עוף, the mother is sent away from the nest:

> לֹא תִקַּח הָאֵם עַל הַבָּנִים... שַׁלֵּחַ תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת הָאֵם (דברים כב:ו-ז)

You shall not take the mother together with the young... you shall surely send away the mother.

The גמרא treats אם על הבנים and אותו ואת בנו together in discussing the maternal relationship (חולין עח ע״ב); the רמב״ן discusses both as restraints against אכזריות and against the destruction of a generation together with its source (רמב״ן דברים כב:ו). Both stand on the side of the mother: man may take life, but he may not take everything; he may not erase the present generation and its source of future life together.

חז״ל read דמי אחיך, in the plural, as הבל's blood and the generations that would have emerged from him (סנהדרין לז ע״א; רש״י בראשית ד:י). קין did not only kill a man; he destroyed a future. כיסוי הדם gives dignity to the life already taken; אותו ואת בנו prevents two generations slaughtered together; שילוח הקן releases the source so that future life remains.

This illuminates the tie between רחם and רחמים. A רחם does not sustain through nourishment alone; it encloses, separates, and protects — admitting what the child needs while keeping danger out, giving developing life a defined place, an exact measure, and time before emerging. The nourishment is חסד; the protection, limitation, and precision are דין.

דין does not mean only punishment. It gives גבול, form, distinction, measure. חסד gives and expands, but without גבול even giving can overwhelm rather than nourish. The רחם gives life because its חסד is enclosed within the precise boundaries of דין — the two held in the balance the Zohar calls the מתקלא.

True רחמים is the מיזוג of the two, חסד and דין brought into one. This is why יעקב is the מידה of רחמים: I have seen in the name of the גר״א that יעקב is איש תם because in him חסד and גבורה are merged into their proper unity. תם is the שלימות of that מיזוג — the middle line that holds the right and the left together.

The same balance governs the taking of animal life. The Torah permits taking but surrounds it with exact limits: you may take, but not everything; you may slaughter, but not without גבול. This is רחמים expressed through דין — the איסור creates the boundary, and the boundary protects life and preserves continuity. כיסוי הדם follows the pattern: the animal may be slaughtered, but its blood may not be abandoned; the act is given a precise צורה — poured and covered בעפר. דין provides the exact command; חסד provides the dignity.

This also names the injustice against the ground. קין's act was taking without גבול — he killed הבל, destroyed his future, and forced דם נקי upon the אדמה. The ground did nothing wrong, and yet it bears what was forced upon it and requires that it be answered. And man's relationship with the receptive realm must again be governed by חסד and דין together.

✦

קין, קן, נקי, and ונקה

The word קן is קין with the ׳י removed. קין was the first to take life without גבול; and at the קן the Torah sets man before a mother and her young and teaches where taking must stop — לֹא תִקַּח הָאֵם עַל הַבָּנִים. You may take, but you may not become קין.

And the same letters that spell קין spell נקי. The Torah repeatedly names murder as the spilling of דם נקי (דברים יט:י). קין spilled the first דם נקי and then tried to present himself as נקי — לא ידעתי — but the blood would not let him declare himself clean. It remained in the earth and cried out. The

ground that would not conceal is also the ground that would not let him be נקי through concealment.

This lends depth to the final word of the י״ג מידות:

> נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל רִבֵּעִים (שמות לד:ז)

He bears iniquity, rebellion, and sin, and cleanses.

Hashem carries sin and holds it back from immediately destroying the sinner; ונקה goes further — the stain itself can be cleansed. חז״ל explain: מנקה הוא לשבים ואינו מנקה לשאינם שבים — He cleanses those who return, but not those who refuse (יומא פו ע״א). Cleansing does not mean that guilt never existed; it belongs within תשובה and כפרה, not within denial.

The count that stops at ונקה — excluding לא ינקה and פוקד עון אבות, which retain an element of דין — is the count of רבינו תם (תוספות ראש השנה יז ע״ב), and it is the one we follow. Within the thirteen everything is turned to רחמים, with ונקה standing at their culmination.

This is the true path from קין to נקי. קין wanted to become נקי through concealment — to force the ground to hide the crime and so declare himself clean. The י״ג מידות teach that true נקיות comes only through ונקה: acknowledgment, תשובה, כפרה, a genuine cleansing. Not by pretending the blood was never spilled, and not by forcing the ground to conceal.

✦

The Return of the קול

קין קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ — קול הבל never speaks in the Torah; and after his murder, his blood acquires a קול. קין used his hand to silence הבל's living voice, and the ground disclosed the voice he had tried to bury.

The pattern of the brothers returns in יעקב and עשו. When יעקב receives the ברכה, עשו answers exactly as קין did:

> וַיִּשְׂטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת יַעֲקֹב עַל הַבְּרָכָה... וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ יִקְרְבוּ יְמֵי אֵבֶל אָבִי וְאַהַרְגָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב אָחִי (בראשית כז:מא)

עשו hated יעקב because of the blessing... and עשו said in his heart: The days of mourning for my father draw near, and I will kill my brother יעקב.

One brother receives a ברכה, the other answers with threatened bloodshed — but this time the murder does not occur. And the distinction between them is drawn in exactly the terms of קין and הבל:

> וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיְמֻשֵּׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו (בראשית כז:כב)

The voice is the voice of יעקב, but the hands are the hands of עשו.

The קול once trapped in blood beneath the ground becomes the living קול of יעקב — the קול of תורה and תפילה. The hand no longer silences the קול; the קול directs the hands. And the first קל in that pasuk is written חסר, missing its ו׳ — the voice that was taken from הבל and has not yet fully returned.

✦

Back to בנים אתם

> בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה׳ אֱלֹקֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגֹּדְדוּ וְלֹא תָשִׂימוּ קָרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֵת (דברים יד:א)

You are children of Hashem your God.

You are always Hashem's children. Even in the presence of death, Hashem remains your Father, and you are not alone. But בנים אלו התלמידים — we are also His תלמידים. The תורה teaches us how to respond to death, how to take life, how to receive loss, and how to remain connected.

Therefore לא תתגודדו: do not tear yourself from Hashem, and do not divide His children into factions. And לא תשימו קרחה: do not deny the ground beneath תורה — do not believe that closeness frees you from remaining a תלמיד, that קדושה frees you from ציווי, or that grasping the תכלית permits abandoning the commanded צורה.

קין treated the ground as nothing and expected it to swallow his crime in silence; instead the blood was given a voice, and the ground would not cover. קרח treated the ground of תורה as unnecessary, a Torah needing no channel and no מסורה; the ground he denied is what covered him, and he was lost from among the קהל. Each staked his sin on the ground being empty, and in each case the ground proved full. The Torah's answer to both is the third covering: וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת דָּמוֹ וְכִסָּהוּ בֶּעָפָר Pour it על הארץ כמים. Return the נפש to its source rather than forcing it down to be hidden. Let even death be grounded in תורה, shaped by מסורה, and turned into עבודה.

קין turned עבודה into murder; קרח turned עבודה into מחלוקת. The Torah turns death back into עבודה, unrestrained taking into measured רחמים, blood into water, and פירוד back into בנים.

May we merit to remain true children and תלמידים of Hashem, to live in the truth of the ground beneath us, and to see all pain and פירוד turned to כפרה, רחמים, שמחה, and everlasting life.

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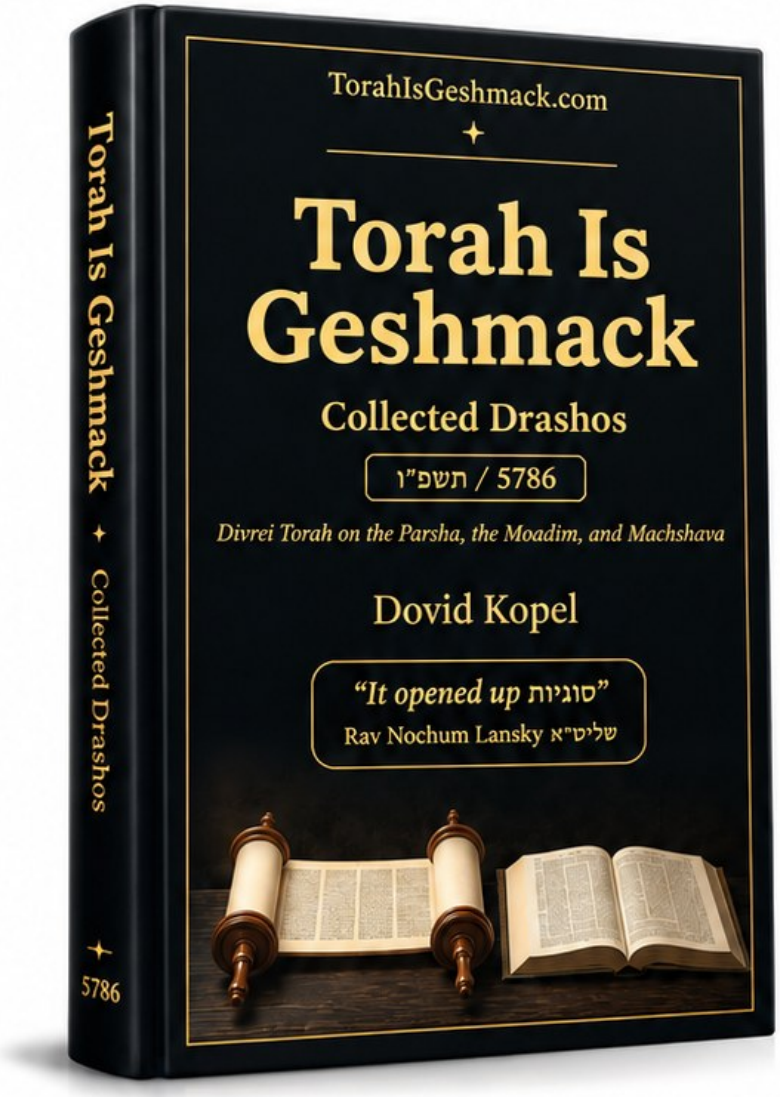
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