

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

THE BLOOD THAT CRIES OUT FROM THE GROUND

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One of the most famous passages in rabbinic literature is the one in which a witness in a capital trial is warned, in the strongest possible terms, that perjury is a sin. It is in this mishnah that we find the famous sayings about saving one life is equal to saving the entire world and that one should remember that the universe was created just for them.

However, given the world situation, with the ground at Ground Zero not rebuilt, the war in Iraq not really resolved and the problems of the State of Israel and as we head toward a rather depressing part of the Jewish calendar as we move toward Tisha B'Av, a different part of this mishnah may be more important. The first murder ever committed is described in the story of Cain and Abel. A point of grammar causes the sages to ask questions and provide answers. Genesis 4:10 reads as follows: "And [God] said: What have you done? The sound of your brothers' bloods cries out to me from the earth." Why does the Torah text say "bloods" instead of "blood"? Because ...

*In capital trials his [the executed one's] blood and all the offspring that would come to him depend on this witness until the end of the world. For we [similarly] found about Cain of whom it is said: Your brother's bloods cries out to me from the ground. (Genesis 4:10)
(M. Sanhedrin 4:5)*

But not all blood cries out. At a brit milah (circumcision) we recite these words from Ezekiel: 'I shall pass over you and see you wallowing in your blood and I said to you, 'In your blood shall you live and I say, in your blood shall you live.' (Ezekiel 16:6) The voice of the child (who usually puts up a protest) calls out and the blood from the circumcision changes him forever.

Discussion Questions:

1. There are places on earth where the blood still seems to cry out from the earth: ground zero, Nazi death camps, ground zero for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gettysburg. Is it possible to "cure" the ground in such places? How can we help mend such places?
2. The story of Cain and Abel is one of the oldest stories about a tension that still exists today between farmers and shepherds. These two groups are often at loggerheads because the farmers tend their crops and then the shepherders send their herds into the fields. Could farmers and shepherds get along? Or are they destined to be hostile to each other?
3. There is so much violence in so many places. Is there a place on earth where no blood has been shed? How can we make new places where the blood does not cry up from the ground?