

Jews & Blood?!

Why would anyone think the blood libel is true?

It Doesn't Make Sense

There is a very interesting law about the wine used for Kiddush and the Four Cups. In general, on the average Shabbat it is best to use red wine if you can, for red wine is more prestigious. However, if for any reason one enjoys white wine more, he may by all means recite the Shabbat Kiddush on it. But when it comes to Pesach, the Alter Rebbe writes in the Shulchan Aruch, "It is a mitzvah to buy a specifically red wine, (That is, unless for some reason white wine is considered better where you live) for red wine symbolizes the Jewish blood that Pharaoh spilt. Today, (this was 200 years ago) however since there are blood libels. it has become the custom to use white wine on Pesach."

So, on Pesach there is a special reason to use red wine - to remember the blood. However, during the time when blood libels were rampant they began using only white wine.

If you think about it, the very fact that people ever believed that Jews would use blood in their matzos is absurd. Could the Jewish people, who were taken by G-d out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai so G-d could command them "Do not eat blood," eat blood to commemorate G-d's taking them out of Egypt? The Torah clearly states, in three places, "Blood you shall not eat!" Even putting your finger into your mouth when you get a paper-cut is forbidden for Jews. How could those people still believe it? As

the lawyer Grosenberg, who headed the defense in one of the last blood libel trials, said in his opening remarks, “Jews and blood; how do these two even come together?!”

Pesach and Blood

But in a different way, the holiday of Pesach does have a few connections with blood. The Haggadah says, “You shall live by your blood”; this is, of course, referring to the blood of circumcision and the paschal lamb.

These two mitzvos were given to the Jews on their last night in Egypt as a way for them to earn their freedom. To slaughter the paschal lamb was a real sacrifice for the Jews, for the Egyptians considered sheep divine and worshiped them. If the Egyptians could have, they surely would have punished the Jews for slaughtering their god. And to top it off, the paschal lamb could not be eaten by the uncircumcised and most Jews didn't keep this mitzvah in Egypt. Hence, most men had to be circumcised that day – which was an enormous sacrifice.

That night G-d commanded the Jews to take the lamb's blood and smear it on their doorposts. This way, when G-d passed through Egypt killing the firstborn, He would see the blood and pass over the Jewish homes.

But let me ask you a question:

Why did G-d need us to smear blood on our doorposts? Surely He knew which homes were Jewish and which were Egyptian. He also surely didn't need a sign to know whether the Jews had fulfilled the two mitzvos He had given them that day.

The only explanation is that G-d wanted the blood to remind us of something. Just like the mezuzah reminds us about G-d so did this mitzvah remind them about something - but what?

Where else in Torah do we find blood?

The Root Cause

The truth is that if you look back to the cause of our slavery in Egypt, you will find blood. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, which led to our being enslaved in Egypt, they sprinkled blood on his colorful cloak to convince Jacob that he was dead. You see, it was sibling rivalry, brothers hating each other that led to the first exile.

Hatred is also the reason for our still being in exile now. We're not in exile because Jews speak during the Torah reading or because Jews don't come to shul every Shabbat. In fact, none of the mitzvahs that are between man and G-d are the cause for our exile. Specifically, those interpersonal mitzvahs, those that govern how we treat each other—when ignored they bring us *tzoros* like a 200 year slavery in Egypt.

This is what G-d was reminding us about by having us paint our doorpost with blood. He was telling us to remember why we were enslaved in the first place. He was also reminding us of how to free ourselves from exile - through unadulterated love for one another. This is why we do so many things on Pesach that remind us of blood, so we should remember and rectify the reason for our journey through exile.

Be A Warm Jew

There is one more thing that happened on Pesach with blood – the first plague was blood. All of the waters in Egypt turned into blood. The Rebbe explains that there is a lesson here for us. Water represents coldness while blood represents heatedness. Jews must be hot blooded about their Judaism. Even though being hot blooded can sometimes lead us to do unruly things, the pros outweigh the cons. For when you're heated the things you do can ultimately be channeled to holiness. But when a person is cold he's like a corpse.

Warmth is a sign of life. This is another reason for all of the symbolisms of blood on Pesach, to remind us to be warm Jews. Let's all be warm Jews and do mitzvahs with excitement, with warmth and with Jewish pride!