

Introduction to Tractate Hullin

The subject of tractate *Hullin*, (secular food, that is, food not destined to the altar or to the priesthood), is the proper modes of killing and dividing the animals that are used for meat at home. Most of the rules for slaughtering an animal for God's table apply also to slaughtering one for the Israelite's own table. Food taboos pertinent to the preparation of meat cover the law against slaughtering the dam and its young on the same day; the requirement to cover up the blood of the slaughtered beast; the taboo against the sciatic nerve; cooking meat with milk; and food-uncleanness with special reference to connection. Two chapters address what is owed to the priest from the meat of animals slaughtered at home for secular purposes; the gift of first fleece to the priest; and the law of letting the dam go from the nest when one takes the eggs.

- I. Rules of slaughtering unconsecrated animals for use at home or in the Temple
 - A. General rules of slaughter
 - B. Specific regulations. *Terefah*-rules
 - C. Slaughter and illicit sacrifice
 - D. *Terefah* and valid carcasses
 - E. The affect of valid slaughter on the parts of a beast's body, e.g., on the foetus
- II. Other rules governing the preparation of food, principally for use at home
 - A. Not slaughtering "it and its young" (Lev. 22:28)
 - B. The requirement to cover up the blood (Lev. 17:13–14)
 - C. The prohibition of the sciatic nerve (Gen. 32:32)
 - D. The separation of milk and meat (Exo. 23:19, 34:26, Deu. 12:21)
 - E. Connection for the purposes of contracting uncleanness
 - F. The gifts to the priest taken from a beast slaughtered for secular purposes: the shoulder, two cheeks, and maw (Deut. 18: 3)
 - G. The gift to the priest of the first fleece of a sheep (Deu. 18: 4)
 - H. Letting the dam go from the nest when taking the young (Deu. 22: 6–7)

A very specific problem confronts the *Hullin*, namely, the relationship among the three realms of sanctification:

- (1) the holy Land,
- (2) the Temple, and
- (3) Israel the people.

The law repeatedly states in so many words what it wants to know: Does

- (1) the destruction of the Temple and cessation of the offerings,
- (2) the degradation of the Land of Israel, and
- (3) the exile of the holy people, Israel, from the Holy Land, affect the rules of

sustenance in the scriptural model of the nourishment of God in the Temple in the Land among the holy people?

Hullin's answer is that whatever the condition of the Temple and its altar, whatever the source of animals whether from the Holy Land or from unclean Gentile lands, and whatever the location of Israel whether dwelling in the Land or not, one thing persists. The sanctification of Israel, the people, endures

- (1) in the absence of the cult,
- (2) in alien, unclean territory, and
- (3) whatever the source of the food that Israel eats.

Israel's sanctity is eternal, un-contingent, and absolute. The sanctification that inheres to the people, Israel, transcends the Land and outlives the Temple and its cult. Since the sanctity of the people, Israel, persists beyond the Temple and outside of the Land, that sanctity stands at a higher point in the hierarchy of domains of the holy that ascend from earth to heaven and from humankind to God.

In order to make its statement about the eternal sanctification of the people, Israel, explicit, *Hullin* responds to three facts. First, Israelites live not only in the Holy Land but abroad, in unclean land. Second, the Temple has been destroyed. Third, consequently, animals are slaughtered not only in the Temple in the Land but in both unconsecrated space and abroad, and the meat is eaten in both cultic and in profane circumstances. The law that applied to the Temple and the home when the Temple was standing and Israel occupied the Land of Israel continues to apply with the Temple in ruins and Israel in exile. Although the sanctity of the Temple stands in abeyance, the sanctity of the Israelite table persists; although Israel is in exile from the Holy Land, Israel remains holy; although rules of uncleanness are not now kept in the Temple, they continue in force where they can be kept. Birds and animals that flourish outside of the Land when prepared for the Israelite table are regulated by the same rules that apply in the Land and even (where relevant) at the altar. So Israel, the people, not only retains sanctity but preserves it outside of the Land, and the sanctity of Israel as a people transcends that of the Temple and its altar.