

TOR LOVIN -  
 if you read far enough  
 you'll see where my  
 remarks in your course  
 have been  
 reproduced -

17/1/82  
 3/6

Although the historical study of the Hebrew Bible and of the world of ancient Israel continue apace, if anything new can be said to characterize current Biblical scholarship, it is a frustration with history and historical method. It is not that anyone disparages the discipline of historical criticism per se, or that the field has lost its curiosity about who the Hebrews were, where they came from, how they lived, what really happened in their world. It is, rather, that many of us have lost confidence in the results of historical analysis and given up hope of ever gaining convincing answers to our questions.

There was a time just less than a century ago when the nature of ancient Israel and the datings of the Pentateuchal sources as reconstructed by Julius Wellhausen, S. R. Driver, and others found wide acceptance. Israel's monotheism evolved through the impetus of the prophets, and its cult, with all its ramifications, was organized by the priests after the Exile of 587 B.C.E. Contrary stirrings by Hermann Gunkel and others who saw a background of oral and common ancient near eastern material behind the Pentateuch barely shook the Wellhausian foundations until the middle of this century. Research into the civilizations and literatures of the ancient Near East, still under heavy excavation, and comparative study of newly recovered sources led to a vision of ancient Israel's history that conformed remarkably to the Bible's own chronology. The narratives about Abraham, it was typically argued, accurately mirror the culture and migrations of the early second millennium. The descent of the Hebrews to Egypt reflects either the takeover of Egypt by the Asiatic Hyksos or the pattern of (seminomadic) Canaanite trade, all appropriate to the middle of the second millennium. The conquest of Canaan by the Israelites accounts for the evidence of destruction at several sites dated to around 1200 B.C.E. Such a trusting perspective on the Biblical narrative's historicity informed the popular Anchor Bible commentary on Genesis by E.A. Speiser and Nahum Sarna's Understanding Genesis (still available in Schocken paperback). John Bright's revised third edition of A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) reaffirms the general historical authenticity of the milieu evoked by the Torah's accounts.

One serious defect with this Pollyannish reconstruction, however, is that its conclusions result from a circular method. Consider this sentence from Bright's third edition (p. 69): "We now have texts by the literal tens of thousands contemporaneous with the period of Israel's origins." Archaeologists unearth texts from 18th century Mari. Certain social patterns, customs, and terminology match the descriptions of Israel's patriarchs, which by the admission of Bright and virtually all scholars were composed at a later time. Because Bright and others seek parallels to the patriarchs in the early second millennium, they find them there. Consider now another sentence from Bright (p. 70): "...the newly discovered Ebla texts from northern Syria (about 16,000) which, although they come from a still earlier period (ca. the mid-third millennium) and have not yet been published and analyzed, will undoubtedly cast much light on the question of Israel's origins." How does Bright know that undeciphered texts will illuminate the circumstances surrounding the emergence of Israel? He knows because his method prescribes it: he will connect whatever turns up in Ebla to early Israel.

The ambiguousness, to be charitable, of such comparative historical reconstruction can be illustrated with the case of the parallel between the covenant between the pieces (Gen. 15) and an intertribal conciliation described in a Mari letter. (For a correct translation of the letter, see Moshe Held, Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research no. 200 [1970], p.70) There is indeed a similarity in form and function between the Mari practice and the ritual ascribed to Abraham. But such a similarity does not bear on the dating of the Abraham

1220 B.C.E.. But what does "Israel" here mean? And what historical value does this vague reference have? Israel was not, after all, wiped out.

Because the reconstruction of early Israel's history is at best learned guesswork, a growing number of Biblicists shy away from historical study. At present, there is little opportunity to confirm or disconfirm competing hypotheses. But there are other reasons for the mounting frustration with historical method in Biblical studies. A major motive is epistemological. It used to be taken for granted that the way to best explain the meaning of a Biblical story, say, would be to trace its history. How did this story evolve into what it is in the text? If we could recount its history, we could explain its meaning. Why, for example, are there two accounts of Creation in Genesis, differing in style and substance? A historically oriented answer is: the two accounts were originally composed separately, in different contexts, from different perspectives. A redactor later juxtaposed them, leaving the original shape of each intact. Each must, therefore, be read separately. They have different meanings. What about the fact that someone has taken a great deal of trouble to include both accounts, and in a certain sequence? This problem becomes especially acute when we consider the Flood story. Here, source criticism convincingly argues, two texts have been spliced together. Should each source, JE and P, be read on its own after a redactor has taken pains to interlace them? Yes and no. Yes, if we are interested in the historical significance of each source. No, if we want to understand the story as it has been transmitted to us in the Bible, which is, after all, the only way we know it. Nobody preserved the Priestly source. The Jewish community has indeed preserved the Torah in its redacted shape. Nobody canonized JE or P or even, Josiah's Reform notwithstanding, D. If they had been canonical, would they have been ravaged by the redactional process? No, it was the process of redaction that created the sacred scripture that is Torah. See, e.g., James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). If the Torah is revealed, revelation took the form of redaction.

This is, of course, epigrammatically expressed in the formula of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig: R- Rabbenu. Perush Rashi: The redactor whom source critics designate by the siglum "R" is the one who transmitted Torah to us in its sacred, canonized form. Although R cannot be credibly identified with Moshe Rabbenu, R is our teacher nonetheless and can be esteemed as Rabbenu. Our teacher was not a transcriber or author, but rather a redactor:

It appears that a book like the Book of Genesis could not have been put together like a cheap newspaper, with the help of scissors and paste. Many expressions and turns of phrase formerly thought to be characteristic of one or another 'source' increasingly reveal their meaning and their intent within a well-ordered whole. Such a rounded unity is not necessarily the finished work of a single, early author. My ear, too, distinguishes a variety of voices in the chorus. Even the most ancient memories are likely to have been preserved from a variety of motives and will accordingly have been rendered in a variety of tones...And yet, this story has an amazingly homogeneous character, although the homogeneity did not exist from the beginning, but developed in time. (Martin Buber, *On the Bible*, New York: Schocken, 1968; new ed. 1982, p. 24.)

If the Torah is so homogeneous in its story and storytelling, does that mean there were no sources? Hardly. The Torah itself quotes sources, the "Book of the Wars of YHWH" in particular (Num. 21:14). Many times the narrator acknowledges the distance in time between his material and his own situation (Gen. 2:24; 12:6; 22:14; etc.). What it does mean is that the Torah comprises a joining of material such that a striking amount of literary and thematic coherence is obtained. How, then, should the Torah be read to be understood? In pieces, by

Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978), pp. 336-48; Bernard W. Anderson, "From analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978), pp. 23-39. Viewed as an outline, from what I call an aerial view of the text, the Flood narrative may appear smooth in its present form. But from the ground, the level at which we actually hear or read the text, this particular narrative is jagged. We are thrown back and forth between passages by contrasts in style, jarring repetitions, and, especially, downright factual contradictions that recur in the text. Here, Friedman's approach is useful. Where the literary form appears not artful but political, a later redactor interfering with an earlier version of the story, the most fruitful reading may be historical. Thus, the earlier Flood narrative of J is interlaced with the later version of P in order to "correct" elements of the J account which were unacceptable to P. According to P, only a priest may offer an offering to God, and then only at the ordained sanctuary. In building his own altar and offering up animals to God, Noah, from a Priestly perspective, was way out of line. So in P's version, Noah brought only two of each of the pure animals with him; he didn't need extras for offerings, which J's seven of each kind provided.

If P was, as seems likely, not only the compiler of the P materials but also the redactor of the Torah - note, as a simple example, that Gen. 1 and most of Deut. 34, the framework of the Torah, are P; or note that the backbone of Genesis, the ten *toledot* passage, is P - why did P include those materials of JE, as well as D, alongside or intertwined with the revised P versions? It's a "mystery," Friedman admits. The answer is elusive, but one may try anyway. Friedman's own suggestion is that P incorporated other, divergent sources into the Torah because they all were traditionally ascribed to the same author, Moses. More likely, the redactor, whatever his orientation, felt compelled to include materials other than P because those materials were already precious, if not sacred, to the Judean community in or after the Exile.

It is also possible to see the motivation of including divergent sources in one Torah more or less as Buber did: the art of the Torah, the structuring that created a canonized text out of hitherto profane, or unauthoritative, materials, was in redacting. Our Torah is not a painting but a collage. The final result is the art. See Joel Rosenberg, "Meanings, Morals, and Mysteries: Literary Approaches to Torah," Response no. 26 (1975), pp. 67-94. This assumes a redactor not entirely convinced of the early P ideology, but it could be accounted for by a revised Priestly orientation in the Exile, a position taken by Friedman.

Friedman approximates a Buberian posture when he discusses the theology that emerges from the text once it has been combined or redacted. "The juxtaposition of the JE and Priestly Creation accounts," Friedman writes (p.120) "... precipitated a narrative synthesis with exegetical possibilities which neither of the original documents possessed independently." JE depicts a God intimate, personal, and doting. For a striking characterization of J and J's God, see now Harold Bloom's "Introduction" to the reprinting of Martin Buber's *On the Bible* (see above). P's God is more transcendently perceived. He won't even use angels (thus, for example, P must tell of Jacob's renaming as Israel apart from the wrestle with God in Gen. 32). In P's Creation account in Gen. 1, God is cosmic and creates a harmonious order. JE's account in the Garden of Eden narrative introduces an intimate God, grappling with the conflicts of his creatures in a disorderly scene. The truth is conveyed by neither version. The ongoing tension between the ideal and the all-too-real, which comes as close as one can to the truth, is evinced by the pitting of the one account against the other. Why couldn't the two versions be editorially combined? I would use the following analogy. Imagine a painting in which red and blue paint were mixed and then applied to an entire canvas. Now imagine a canvas painted half red and half blue. The colors bounce off, responding to and

unconscious. Hence it is perhaps in that direction that one would need to pursue the present study, to pursue the reading of the text - its dissemination, not its truth" (Image/Music/Text, pp. 140-41). The text embraces an apparent contradiction, one attributed by source criticism to different documents. According to Gen. 32:23, Jacob crossed the Jabbok; Gen. 32:24 says he crossed over his party. Did he cross, or didn't he? If he did not, the struggle connotes the triumph of a hero over the deity (demon?) who guards the river (so Sarna, Understanding Genesis, p. 204, and just about everyone else). If he did cross, his struggle was clearly a rite de passage, a spiritual, symbolic, psychoanalyzable wrestling, implied already in the midrash in which the combatant is saro shel Esav. Need the text be read in an either/or fashion, which is to select what will be considered and what will be discarded or benignly neglected? Barthes says, no. The two readings are inextricably "tangled" together in the text. It is not for us to disentangle them, but to hold them in tension. In fact, just as the text continues to refer to Jacob by both names, Jacob - the conniver - and Israel - the one who strived with God, so the story here holds both perceptions open. Again, if the text as redacted keeps the readings open, is it fitting for the audience to close one in favor of the other?

Peter D. Miscall in The Workings of Old Testament Narrative (Philadelphia/Chico: Fortress/Scholars, 1983) pleads with us to leave open that which the text itself does not close. Through a reading of several passages related to Abraham and David, Miscall concludes that the morals of both figures are left ambiguous. We should not assume, for example, that Abraham followed the divine command to go to a new land out of any but selfish motives. After all, does the text share his motives with us? Miscall's arguments provide a welcome caution against overreading, assuming more than we are permitted to insinuate into the text. But his own readings are not neutral, but rather super-skeptical. He distrusts the ways in which the Bible presents its characters to us. He is correct, however, in reprimanding commentators for exploiting and distorting what the text says in order to draw lessons from it.

Returning to the problem of how to read "tangled" texts, we may ask whether we are supposed to identify different blocks of source material in it, or different traditions which speak to or at one another in the text. It has been eloquently argued by Robert Polzin, for example, that the narrator of Deuteronomy both frames and comments upon the words of Moses, ultimately superseding Moses' authority in presenting God's word to the community. That way, the narrator has commanded the respect he needs to carry Moses' materials further into the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua-Kings) and legislate for the audience living at the tail end of that history. See Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History (New York: Seabury, 1980). Polzin's reading, however, hinges on the audience's perceptions of the breaking in and dropping off of the narrator's voice, perceptions of which I, at least, am not always convinced. He sees the narrator purposely undermining the authority of Moses and the uniqueness of Israel in order to interpose his own authority and ideology. But whether the audience will perceive this subtle argument within the rhetoric of Moses' own speeches is questionable.

In his analysis of the Garden of Eden story in Prooftexts, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1981), pp. 1-27, Joel Rosenberg, too, suggests that the components of a text are identifiable. The braid of composite Biblical narrative, to use our earlier metaphor, comprises strands of different colors. We observe their interrelation even as we retain our perceptions of the individual members. Rosenberg characterizes this aspect of Biblical style as "an art of quotation," adducing various components of the Israelite tradition. The "redactional level of meaning," the meaning of the text that emerges as the parts of the text comment on one another, "is sometimes at odds with the story's plain or apparent meaning." He tries "to show that the logical analogies established in the story arise from relations of its traditional units..." (p. 20). Again, my quarrel with such an approach is that the text itself does not signal our perceptions

decades. The comparative method maintains that to know the text best, I should examine it in contrast with other texts. To know Genesis 1 best, for example, I should see how it distinguishes itself from Enuma elish, or another ancient near eastern creation account. A literary method would seek out the patterns and recurrent formulae of the text, note the effects of its diction, follow its allusions (if any), and so forth. It may be best to utilize both approaches, wherever possible. But a literary approach will hold that the text gives away its meaning by means of its formal and rhetorical devices. Literary analysis, then, best serves its practitioners by exposing the means by which the text communicates. In recent years, in addition to literary analysis another method of revealing what the text means has proved fruitful, especially for finding the levels of significance a text may have beneath the surface of its stories: structural anthropology. It is to the results and procedures of actual studies of the meanings of the Torah that we now turn.

\* \* \* \*

I began by indicating a growing unease among Biblicists with history and historical method. The problem with history is that when we reach back to the age preceding the monarchy, and some would say to the ages preceding the monarchies (Israel and Judah), we find very little solid on which we can fasten. The problem with historical method is that many of us have come to feel that we know our object better by examining its structure and texture than by investigating its past. Such frustrations encourage the trend to employ a literary method and read the Biblical narrative not as history, but as story. To the extent that the Torah's story moves in patterns and articulates the people Israel's perceptions of their place in the world and the meaning of their existence, as well as their concerns and anxieties, that story is myth. See especially Northrop Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); for a concise discussion, see Eduardo Rauch, "Toward an Understanding of the Forgotten World of Myth--An Essay in Definition," The Melton Journal no. 13 (Winter 1982), pp. 4, 18-19. The rehabilitation of "myth" as a certain kind of narrative, and not only stories about gods, is a happy contribution of literary, anthropological, and religious writing.

It is obvious that the Torah does not tell us everything that happened in its world, even within its own time-frame. What, for example, did Abraham do for the first seventy-five years of his life? Of all that Abraham did later, the Torah selects two stories in which he represents his wife to be his sister. For what reason does such behavior merit a double recounting in a narrative that omits nearly all description of Abraham as husband and father? Clearly the material that was not only selected but preserved, transmitted, and variously transformed until the Torah book was produced, somehow expressed the underlying ideas and concerns of the communities to whom it was precious, sacred. The narrative of the Torah, and the Former Prophets that continue the narrative, may present themselves as a form of history. But they are far too sketchy and idiosyncratic to serve that function for an audience concerned primarily with history. The audience almost certainly responded to underlying messages and values.

To read the Torah for its underlying meaning is hardly new to Jewish tradition. The effort to draw out that which lies behind or concealed in the Torah is the impetus of Midrash. Few texts make this more explicit than the Zohar:

Rabbi Simeon said: Alas for the man who regards Torah as a book of mere tales and profane matters. If this were so, we might even today write a Torah dealing in such matters and still more excellent. In regard to earthly things, the kings and princes of the world (in their chronicles?) possess more valuable materials. We could use them as a model for composing a Torah of this kind. But in reality

Leach properly sees a major function of myth in mitigating conflicts between the real and the ideal, between what a society possesses and what that society professes.

What Leach and many other structural anthropologists want for is sensitivity to the social environment in which kinship practices, rituals, and myths develop. Textual analysis must take into consideration and be controlled by ethnological data. The meaning of myths can be discerned only when they are related to the structure of a particular society. For whereas "the interpretation of myth...is the analysis of structure, and though the rules of structuring may derive from some general properties of the human mind, the forms and contents of given structures derive from particular societies." The article from which that quotation is taken - Nathaniel Wander, "Structure, Contradiction, and 'Resolution' in Mythology: Father's Brother's Daughter Marriage and the Treatment of Women in Genesis 11-50," Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University 13 (1981), pp. 75-99 - adopts the original program of Levi-Strauss (who himself admittedly violated it) to perform analysis of myth within an ethnographic context. He then shows the rhetorical means by which the text of Genesis treats women, certain women, in order to mitigate a practical societal tension.

But where does Wander get an ethnography of ancient Israel? Archaeology is not suited to fill so large a bill; ancient near eastern texts offer only fragments and refractions of real life. Thus, with nowhere better to turn, Wander looks to studies of modern Semitic societies, especially Middle Eastern bedouin. For while some aspects of bedouin social structure have been bent by technological and geopolitical changes, kinship structures have been less susceptible to the corrosive forces of modernity. Characteristic of Semitic marriage is that the most preferred wife is one's father's brother's daughter, that is, one's first cousin on the father's side. Such a practice serves a system in which inheritance and authority in the family pass through the father's line, a patrilineal system. Now what happens after two generations is that the father's brother's daughter turns out to be a relative through the mother's line, too. Take, for instance, Rachel/Leah, who is Jacob's cousin by his father and his mother. Women in such an ambiguous position are dangerous to the social structure because widespread misinterpretation could lead to a reinterpretation of the society by its members as matrilineal, or patri- and matrilineal.

The danger of such women is tamed by Israelite myths in which the text goes out of its way to show that what seem like father's brother's daughters are not so. Sarah's status is blurred: is she or isn't she a relative? Rebekah is a condensation of a relative and a non-relative and gives birth to two sons, one in the lineage of Israel, one without. Leah and Rachel are a split father's brother's daughter (actually with an extra generation added, but see how the text itself skips a generation in Gen. 29:5). The text refers to the marriages of Jacob as mother's brother's daughter liaisons (Gen. 27:43-46; 28:2, 13). Esau's father's brother's daughter marriage to Basemat is disguised in the text as a marrying out, and Lot's liaisons with his daughters seem to abridge the generational span (FBD marriage becomes D marriage). Because Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel are important in the lineage, they are compromised in the text: through barrenness and, except for Rebekah, substitutions by stand-in wives. Because the ideal of FBD marriage suffers potential confusion and redefinition in reality, the myths of Genesis mitigate the society's anxieties.

Although Wander has space only to deal with it in a footnote, his study uncovers another tension in societies similar in structure to ancient Israel's. Ideally, the oldest son receives the larger share of his father's estate. But older sons also leave home sooner. While the younger sons grow up, the father may increase his estate such that the younger sons hanging on may wind up with a share larger than that of the enterprising older son. This scenario seems likely to explain, on one level, the numerous passages in the Bible in which a younger son achieves higher

The entire world is evil, they have polluted the ground (see Tikva Frymer-Kensky's article in Biblical Archeologist vol. 40, no. 4, Dec. 1977, pp. 147-55), so in a most extreme form of expulsion God annihilates them and the ground from beneath them by flood. God's destruction of the cities of the plain is a limited version. That this is God's way - removing people from their land for having sinned - takes on a remarkable form in Gen. 15, for there God tells Abram that the latter's descendants will have to suffer a temporary exile and persecution because God cannot yet displace the native inhabitants of Canaan. They haven't amassed enough sinfulness yet (see verse 16). The lesson is restated in Deut. 9:4, where Moses admonishes the Israelites: "Do not say in your heart (i.e., think) when the Lord your God sweeps them away from before you, 'By dint of my righteousness has the Lord brought me to possess this land,' for it is by dint of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord dispossesses them before you." Moses fills his recounting of the Israelite history, from Deut. 1 to the song in Deut. 32, with reminders of Israel's apostasy and recalcitrance. When the Exile comes, Israel will know why.

It is perhaps worth mentioning in this connection that recent studies call attention to the large amount of north Israelite tradition in the Book of Deuteronomy. See, e.g., Alan W. Jenks, The Elohist and North Israelite Traditions (Missoula: Scholars, 1977) and H. L. Ginsberg, The Israelian Heritage of Judaism (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982). It would then be likely that, as Ginsberg has argued, there already existed a core edition of Deuteronomy in the reign of Hezekiah. The theology of the late eighth century Deuteronomy would serve the function, among other things, of interpreting the destruction of Samaria to the southern kingdom. A later edition of Deuteronomy, taking into account the abominations of King Manasseh, would speak directly to the Judeans.

Having an explanation of the Exile would be consoling to many Judeans. If they knew how they got into it - violating the covenant - they would know how to get out of it - strict adherence to the covenant. But even so, the Judeans must have been dubious about the power of their ancestral God. The oracles of the Second Isaiah, mocking the pagan gods and beatifying the Lord of Israel as Creator and Controller of events, are clearly addressed to such a skeptical, if not disbelieving, Judean audience. Many, if not most, Judeans, must have questioned the covenantal promises, must have wondered how, if they were a special people of God, 'am segulla, they could live in such a state of humiliation and powerlessness.

In more obvious ways and in less obvious ways the Torah, and many other Biblical writings, respond to those anxieties. The Torah's narrative ends before the end, as David J.A. Clines emphasizes in The Theme of the Pentateuch (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978). Because the Torah transports the Israelites only to the threshold of the Promised Land, with the conquest by and large ahead of them, the position of the Israelites parallels that of the Judean exiles: "the promise of God stands behind them, the promised land before them" (p. 98). The Judeans know from their Deuteronomistic History that the Israelites eventually took possession of the Land. They could hope the same for themselves. (On the narrative from Genesis through Kings as "The Earliest Bible," see also David N. Freedman's essay in The Bible and Its Traditions, a special issue of Michigan Quarterly Review, Summer 1983, pp. 167-75.)

In a succinct but precise outline of the major themes in Genesis, Everett Fox observes that its major apparent theme is that of continuity, conveyed most concretely by the toledot lists; see his "On the Book of Genesis and Its Structure," an introduction to his Hebraically flavored translation of Genesis, In the Beginning (New York: Schocken, 1983). With all its concern with continuity, however, "the undercurrent in Genesis points not to life and its continuation, but rather to its threatened extinction" (p. xxxiv). Genesis, and the Torah as a whole (look at the beginning of Exodus!), treat the threat of extinction as forever real, but also

this. God is holy, his essence utter purity. God's purity is supersensitive to ritual pollution, so that God's immediate environment--the Mishkan and secondarily the camp--must be kept free of pollution. God would reject and withdraw from an accumulation of ritual pollution, as in an allergic reaction to pollen. Thus, ritual pollution be it intentional or unintentional has an ineluctable effect on God's presence. The priests were trained to catch pollutants in offerings and persons entering the sanctuary. The community would be responsible for keeping the polluted out of their camp, to safeguard God's nourishing and protective presence among them. Just in case pollutants entered the holy presence of God unbeknownst to the priests, the sanctuary would be purified once a year whether it needed it or not, on Yom Hakkippurim. This, as Yehezkel Kaufmann explained in a retort to the Wellhausen claim that Yom Hakkippurim was instituted in the Exile to atone for the sinfulness of the nation, was what the annual purification was about.

What constitutes the holy? For the Torah the holy is that which is God's, pertaining to God - God's land, God's people (when they observe their purity), God's paraphernalia (sanctuary, ark, altar, etc.), and life. See, eg., Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System," Interpretation vol. 17, no. 3, July 1963, pp. 288-301. The best analysis of the Biblical mindset is still H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946; see also Hans Walter Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974.) After the Garden of Eden events, when humans acquire knowledge like that of God (Gen. 3:8), God is distinguished from mortals by the fact that he lives forever, he is, as I would say, livingness. The Torah's concern for maintaining this definition of boundaries comes out especially in the strange, distressingly pagan, episode in Gen. 6:1-4. The God-sons have intercourse with the human daughters and produce a hybrid race of God-people. That means there would be human beings living for a long time if not forever, and God's distinctiveness would be jeopardized. God's reaction is to make his unique characteristic firmer than ever: human beings would live no more than 120 years. No doubt this obviously un-Israelite, or un-Toraitic story was included in order to underscore this message.

Thus life is God's, blood, the primary liquid of life, is God's, and humans may not take or partake of life and blood. (See the article by Milgrom cited above.) Because blood is the quintessential material of God's, it is the one that most effectively purifies the polluted (see, e.g., Milgrom's article on the red heifer in Beth-Mikra 89-90, 1982, pp.... 155-63). Discharges of blood or other bodily fluids pollute, as does death. They are what I call leaks of life, impairments in the divine character. Until they are repaired, they are polluting.

The other quality of holiness in the Torah is the state of createdness. Things can be holy when they remain in the condition in which God made them. God demands from Israel the fresh and new; being close to their created and unused state, they properly belong to God. God wants the first fruits of the earth and the womb (Exod. 13:1 ff.; Deut. 26:5-10); an altar of unhewn stone (Exod. 20:25); a red heifer that never bore a yoke (Deut. 21:3-4); a new cart to carry the ark (2 Kings 6:3); free-flowing water for purifications (Lev. 14: 5, 52; 15:13). God created the various species in categories, and humans must respect those categories. Genesis 1 sets the pattern for the Torah's holiness laws. God proscribes hybrids, the creation of new species, because humans may not create that which God did not. This explanation of the hybrid prohibitions was, so far as I know, first pointed out by Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor, the twelfth century French commentator. Why shouldn't Israel mate different species of animals together? "You would have altered the act of creation... You would be making yourself like a Creator" (commentary to Lev. 19:19). What would happen if you did create a hybrid, say a new vegetable? Deut 22: 9-11 furnishes the answer. Because a hybrid is a new creation, and creation is God's prerogative, the hybrid is automatically "consecrated" property, property of God. Humans may not use it.