

# IN A HEARTBEAT

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Whoever spills the blood of man- in man -his blood shall be spilled because in "the image of G-d"- He made man. (Breishis 9:6)

What is the meaning of "the blood of man in man"? They learned in the name of Rabbi Yishmael that a Ben Noach (Gentile) is guilty for murdering a fetus. (Sanherdin 57)

Rabbi Akiva explained, "Anyone who spills blood, the verse considers as if they had diminished the Image of G-d!" (Midrash Aggada)

Why is there a justification for murdering a murderer? A few verses earlier man had been given permission to eat from the animal kingdom as it is written, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you like the green herbage I have given you. (Breishis 9:3) Because of the diminished spiritual stature of man the boundary between a man and an animal may become blurred. An error in thinking might creep into the human psyche and confuse the newly granted right to dispose animals to also include the license to eliminate humans. It was aptly observed by Professor Shmuel Hugo Bergman in remarks made at Yad Va-Shem, "The philosophy that lead to the rise of Nazism was the 19th Century insistence on seeing man as a zoological specimen."

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch ztl. in Horeb writes, "...he who kills a man destroys all the activities in him which he could have contributed to the physical world in the service of G-d. Hence, our Sages say, man was created singly in order to teach that he who kills a man destroys a whole world"

A senior study partner related to me an incident he vividly recalled from his early days in Yeshiva. The Rebbe for their class came into the classroom, just as any other day in Yeshiva. He

noticed that the boys were in an unusually giddy mood. Some secret or news was detectable from the smirks they bore on their faces. The Rebbe asked them what was up and one of the fellows told him with a chuckle, "You know those two bums that squat in the basement of the Yeshiva? Last night it seems they couldn't get their dose of booze so they drank paint thinner and one of them died and the other went blind." The Rebbe went pale from the report. He looked at the class with ferocious anger and disappointment. He raised both hands and banged them with all his might on the desk and crying bitter tears declaring repeatedly, "What are you laughing for? A sky scraper has fallen! Class dismissed!" That was the lesson of the day and for all time!

A fine middle aged businessman I was learning with for many years came to our meeting with a look

of deep concern on his face one day. It didn't take him long to spill the beans. He told me that his wife was expecting. The two other children were already quite a bit older and he wasn't sure this was the "the right time" for this in their lives. We don't need to spell out every detail of the discussion here but suffice it say that he understood in the end that the only moral option on the table was to do everything possible to be sure that mother and child have the best chance to be happy and healthy together. Years later he was bragging to me how precocious this little girl- Haley is and how she is the "light of their lives". I reminded him of our earlier discussion and he shuddered visibly when revisiting the terribleness of the option he had then considered.

What then is the strain of blindness that puts this point "above the pay grade" of the supposed "most enlightened" and leads so many to think something's new under the sun? That should be cause to pause and wonder- what lurks in the mind of one who would blithely delete another **in a heartbeat?**

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