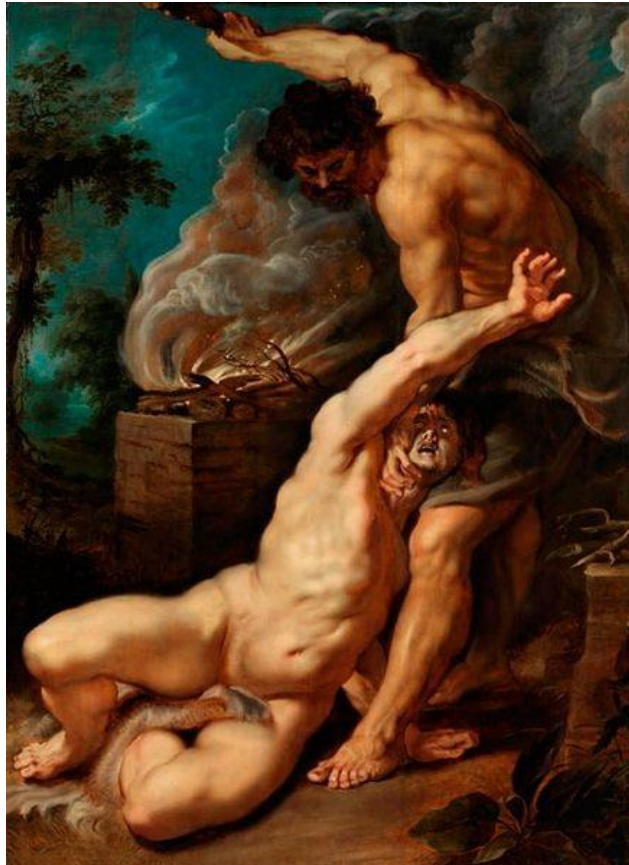


ונקה לא ינקה

אבנר רמו



Cain slaying Abel by Peter Paul Rubens (1608-9)

Already in the fourth chapter of the Bible we encounter a murder case. We hear God telling Cain:

מה עשית; קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי מן-האדמה.
ועתה ארור אתה מן-האדמה אשר פצתה את-פיה, לקחת את-דמי אחיך מידך.
“What had you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground.
And now cursed are you from the ground, which had opened her mouth to receive your
brother's blood from your hand” (Gen 4:10-11).

Five chapters latter we find:

ומיד האדם, מיד איש אחיו-אדרש את-נפש האדם.
שפך דם האדם, באדם דמו ישפך: כי בצלם אלהים עשה את-האדם.
“And at the hand of man, [even] at the hand of [every] man's brother, will I require the life
of man.

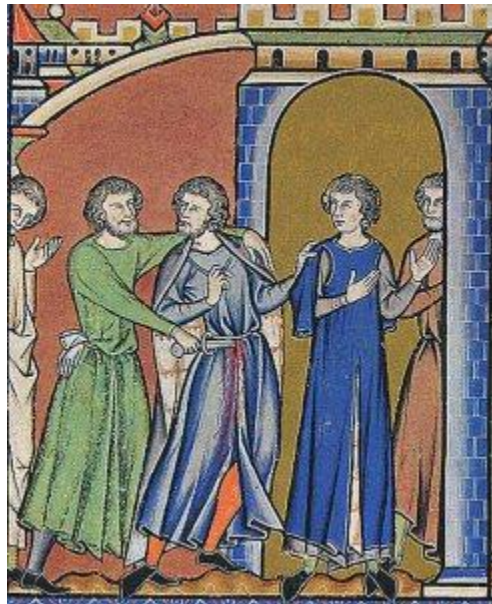
Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man” (Gen 9:5-6).

The reading of: **כי הדם הוא הנפש** - “**for the blood is the life**” (Deu 12:23), indicates on the connection between verses Gen 9:5 and Gen 9:6, but it is not clear whether verse 9:5 is about a person killing his brother, or about the obligation of a person to avenge the blood of his murdered brother.

Similarly, in the Book of Numbers we read:

ולא-תחניפו את-הארץ אשר אתם בה, כי הדם הוא יחניף את-הארץ; ולא-יכפר לדם אשר שפך-בה, כי-אם בדם שפכו.

“**And you shall not pollute the land wherein you are; for blood, it pollutes the land; [and no expiation can be made] for the land (would not be atoned) for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it**” (Num 35:33).



Joab stabs Abner in the stomach. The P. Morgan Bible (France, c. 1240)

After informing the reader that Joab had slayed Abner we read:

ויואב ואבישי אחיו הרגו לאבנר: על אשר המית את-עשהאל אחיהם

“**And Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel**” (2 Sam 3:30; see also: 2 Sam 3:27).

This reading suggests that verse Gen 9:5 is not about an event similar to that of Cain killing Abel, but about the obligation of a brother to avenge the shedding of the blood of his kin. In fact, this divine’s directive could be viewed as God’s payback to Humanity for Cain’s brotherly crime.

The obligation of avenging the kin’s blood is not limited to the brother, and already in the Book of Numbers we find the term **גאל הדם** - “**The avenger of blood**” (Num 35:19, 21, 24, 25, 27).

It was translated to Greek as: “the one doing the relative’s blood duty”, and when this term appears in the Books of Joshua (Jos 20:3, 5, 9) and Samuel (2 Sam 14:11) it was translated to Greek as “the next of kin in blood.”

Abner had killed Asahel **בגבעון-במלחמה** - “at Gibeon in the battle” (2 Sam 3:30), and later, King Solomon characterized this act of Joab as **דמי חנם, אשר שפך יואב** - “the blood, which Joab shed without cause” (1 Ki 2:31). King Solomon’s ruling indicates that the obligation of avenging a kin’s blood was dependent on the circumstances of the slaying.

In the Book of Samuel we hear Jonathan telling his father Saul:

ולמה תחטא בדם נקי, להמית את-דוד חנם.

“Wherefore then will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?” (1 Sam 19:5; see also: 1 Sam 25:31; Pro 1:11).

The first time that we find in the Bible the term: **דם נקי** - “innocent blood” it is in the Book of Deuteronomy where we read:

ולא ישפך דם נקי בקרב ארצך, אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך נחלה; והיה עליך דמים.

“And innocent blood be not shed in the midst of your land, which *YHWH* your God gives you for an inheritance, and so blood be upon you” (Deu 19:10).

This statement is followed by an explanatory note:

וכי-יהיה איש שנא לרעהו, וארב לו וקם עליו, והכהו נפש ומת; ונס אל-אחת הערים האל. ושלחו זקני עירו, ולקחו אתו משם; ונתנו אתו ביד גאל הדם-ומת. לא-תחוס עיניך עליו; ובערת דם-הנקי מישראל וטוב לך.

“And if any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die; and he flee into one of these cities;

Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you” (Deu 19:11-13).

We also read in this book: **כי-תעשה הישר בעיני יהוה: ואתה תבער הדם הנקי-מקרבך:**

“And shall you put away the innocent blood from the midst of you, when you shall do that which is right in the eyes of *YHWH*” (Deu 21:9).

On the other hand we read about King Manasseh:

וימלא את-ירושלם דם נקי; ולא-אבה יהוה לסלח

“For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and *YHWH* would not pardon” (2 Ki 24:4).

Remarks in regard to **דם נקי** - “innocent blood” are not limited to the Book of Deuteronomy, and they are found also in the Books of Joshua (Jos 2:19), Samuel (1 Sam 19:5; 2 Sam 3:28), Kings (2 Ki 21:16; 24:4), Isaiah (Is 59:7), Jeremiah (Jer 2:34; 7:6; 19:4; 22:3, 17; 26:15), Joel (Joel 4:19), Jonah (Jon 1:14), Psalms (Ps 94:21; 106:38), and Proverbs (Pro 6:17).

We may conclude that **דם נקי** - “innocent blood” is a blood shed without a justified cause. The shedding of such blood could not be forgiven and must be avenged.

Although it appears that the avenging of kin's blood was an obligation only in regard to murders where **דם נקי** - "innocent blood" was shed, there was always the risk:

פן-ירדף גאל הדם אחרי הרצח, כי-יחם לבבו, והשיגו כי-ירבה הדרך, והכהו נפש; ולו אין משפט-מות, כי לא שנה הוא לו מתמול שלשום.

"Lest the avenger of blood pursue the manslayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and smite him mortally; whereas he was not deserving of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past" (Deu 19:6).

To minimize the odds of such an event, God instructed the Israelites:

והקריתם לכם ערים, ערי מקלט תהיינה לכם; ונס שמה רצח, מכה-נפש בשגגה. והיו לכם הערים למקלט מגאל; ולא ימות הרצח עד-עמדו לפני העדה למשפט.

"And you shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer that kills any person through error may flee thither.

And the cities shall be to you for refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation for judgment" (Num 35:11-12; see also: Num 35:15; Jos 20:3, 9).

If the slaying would be judged to have been unintentional, then the slayer will be able to live in a city of refuge, but if he ever leaves its boundaries (prior the death of the great priest; Num 35:25, 28, 32), the avenger of the kin's blood is entitled to kill him (Num 35:26-27).

In the Book of Joel we read:

מצרים לשממה תהיה, ואדום למדבר שממה תהיה; מחמס בני יהודה, אשר-שפכו דם-נקיא בארצם. ויהודה לעולם תשב; וירושלם לדור ודור. ונקיתי דמם לא-נקיתי; ויהוה שכן בציון.

"Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. And I will hold as innocent their blood that I have not held as innocent; and YHWH will dwell in Zion" (Joel 4:19-21).

The English translation of **ונקיתי דמם לא-נקיתי** as: **"And I will hold as innocent their blood that I have not held as innocent"** makes little sense, if any. The Greek translator wrote here: "I will avenge their blood and I will not hold it guiltless" which suggests that he believed that here: **ונקיתי דמם** (*veniqeithi damam*) is a letter-substitution error of **ונקמתי דמם** (*venaqm^{thi} damam*) - "And I will avenge their blood." This understanding is in line with the content of: **יודע בגיים (בגוים) לעינינו; נקמת דם-עבדיך השפוך blood that is shed be made known among the nations in our sight"** (Ps 79:10; see also: Deu 32:43; 2 Ki 9:7).

It is therefore suggested that in verse Joel 4:21 the expression: **ונקיתי דמם לא-נקיתי** (*veniqeithi damam lo niqai^{thi}*) is a letter-substitution error of: **ונקמתי דמם, לא-נקיתי** (*venaqm^{thi} damam, lo niqai^{thi}*) - "And I will avenge their blood, I will not acquit" (e.g. the Greek translation of verses Ex 20:6; see also: Deu 5:10). When the words **לא ינקה** (*lo inaqeh*) appear

in the Book of Proverbs (Pro 6:29; 16:5; 17:5; 19:5, 9; 28:20) they consistently are being translated as: “**shall not go unpunished.**” Therefore, the alternative understanding of **לא-נקיתי** (*venaqmthi damam, lo niqithi*) is: “And I will avenge their blood, I will not let them go unpunished.” This interpretation is in line with the divine instruction, that blood, in particular innocent blood, should be avenged and should not go unpunished.

We have seen that the Bible indicates repeatedly that shedding of **דם נקי** (*dam naqi*) - “**innocent blood**” “**will not go unpunished**”, or in Hebrew **לא ינקה** (*lo inaqeh*). Although the meaning of these words seems to be unrelated, they have a similar sound. In addition, Hebrew words that mean “avenge” are of the root **נקמ** (*nqm*), which also have comparable sound.

In the Book of Exodus we also read:

יהוה, אל רחום וחנון-ארך אפים, ורב-חסד ואמת. נצר חסד לאלפים, נשא עון ופשע וחטאה; ונקה לא ינקה-פקד עון אבות על-בנים ועל-בני בנים, על-שלשים ועל-רבעים.

“**YHWH, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; Keeping mercy to the thousand generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation**” (Ex 34:6-7).

The contrast between the beginning of this paragraph, describing God as merciful and forgiving even toward transgressors and sinners, and its terminus, describing God as persistently vengeful, is somewhat problematic. As the meaning here of the words **ונקה לא ינקה** is not certain, it is not clear whether these words belong to first part of this paragraph or to last one.

In the Book of Numbers we find a shortened version of these verses:

יהוה [], ארך אפים ורב-חסד [], נשא עון ופשע []; ונקה לא ינקה-פקד עון אבות על-בנים [], על-שלשים ועל-רבעים.

“**YHWH [] is slow to anger, and plenteous in lovingkindness [], forgiving iniquity and transgression [], and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children [], upon the third and upon the fourth generation**” (Num 14:18).

Yet this verse also does not explain the contrast in God’s approach to the committers of sin described at the beginning and the end of this paragraph.

While ignoring the problematic **ונקה לא ינקה**, it appears that the writer (or a late scribe) of the Book of Deuteronomy made an effort to explain the dichotomy in God’s behavior:

כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך, אל קנא-פקד עון אבות על-בנים ועל-שלשים ועל-רבעים, לשנאי ועשה חסד לאלפים-לאהבי, ולשמרי מצותו (מצותי).

“**For I YHWH your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me, And showing mercy to the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments**” (Deu 5:8-9).

This writer attributes the difference in God's behavior by indicating that it relates to the object involved. There is a clear difference in God's attitude to his haters and to his lovers. Such an explanation may be supported by the reading in the Books of Leviticus and Nahum:

לא-תקם ולא-תטר את-בני עמך, ואהבת לרעך כמוך: אני יהוה.

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am YHWH” (Lev 19:18).

אל קנוא ונקם יהוה, נקם יהוה ובעל חמה; נקם יהוה לצריו, ונוטר הוא לאיביו.

“YHWH is a jealous and avenging God, YHWH avenges and is full of wrath; YHWH takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies” (Nah 1:2; see also: Num 31:3; Deu 32:41, 43; Jer 46:10).

However, the following is an alternative explanation to this predicament.

The previously proposed interpretation of verse Joel 4:21 suggests that in verses Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Nah 1:3 the words: **ונקה לא ינקה** (*venqeh lo inaqeh*), are a word deletion error of: **ונקה לא ינקה דם** (*venqeh lo inaqeh dam*) - “but surely blood will not be acquitted.”

If this understanding is correct then the following words:

פקד עון אבות על-בנים ועל-בני בנים, על-שלשים ועל-רבעים

“Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex 34:7; see also: Num 14:18), may specify that the obligation of the kin of the slayed person is to avenge his blood up to the fourth generation.

In the Pentateuch there are ten verses that contain words from the root **נקמ** - ‘avenge.’ Another ten such verses appear in the books of Writings. Of the remaining 37 biblical verses that contain such words, twenty-seven appear in the books of the Prophets. The largest number of such words appear in the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8; 11:20; 15:15; 20:10, 12; 46:10; 50:15, 28; 51:6, 11, 36). The writer of this book favored these words to such a degree that once he employed three of them in one verse (Jer 50:15).

In the Book of Jeremiah we also read:

**ואתה אל-תירא עבדי יעקב נאם-יהוה, ואל-תחת ישראל-כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק, ואת-זרעך מארץ שבים; ושב יעקב ושקט ושאנן, ואין מחריד.
כי-אתך אני נאם-יהוה, להושיעך: כי אעשה כלה בכלל-הגוים אשר הפצותיך שם, אך אתך לא-אעשה כלה, ויסרתיך למשפט, ונקה לא אנקד.**

“Therefore fear you not, O Jacob My servant, said YHWH; neither be dismayed, O Israel; for, lo, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall again be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid.

For I am with you, said YHWH, to save you; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered you, but I will not make a full end of you; for I will correct you in measure, and will not utterly destroy you” (Jer 30:10-11).

ואתה אל-תירא עבדי יעקב [], ואל-תחת ישראל-כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק, ואת-זרעך מארץ שבים; ושב יעקב ושקט ושאנן, ואין מחריד.

אתה אל-תירא עבדי יעקב, נאם-יהוה-כי אתך אני []: כי אעשה כלה בכל-הגוים אשר הדחתך שמה, ואתך לא-אעשה כלה, ויסרתוך למשפט, ונקה לא אנקך.

“But fear not you, O Jacob My servant [], neither be dismayed, O Israel; for, lo, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall again be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid.

Fear not you, O Jacob My servant, said YHWH, for I am with you []; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven you, but I will not make a full end of you; and I will correct you in measure, and will not utterly destroy you” (Jer 46:27-28).

The comparison between verses Jer 30:10-11 (which were omitted from the Greek translation), and verses Jer 46:27-28 suggests that in verse Jer 46:28 the phrase:

אתה אל-תירא עבדי יעקב, נאם-יהוה - **“Fear not you, O Jacob My servant, said YHWH”** is a dittography, while the words: **נאם-יהוה, להושיעך**, - **“, said YHWH, to save you”** erroneously had been omitted.

The English translation here of the words: **ונקה לא אנקך** as: **“and will not utterly destroy you”** (Jer 30:11; 46:28) is absolutely unrelated to the English translation of the similar: **ונקה לא ינקה** which was translated as **“and that will by no means clear [the guilty]”** (Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Nah 1:3). The Greek translator wrote here: **“and when I deem innocent, I will not deem you innocent.”**

However, the content of these verses, and the frequent use of words from the root **נקמ** - ‘avenge’ in the Book of Jeremiah suggest that here the words: **ונקה לא אנקך** (*venaqeh lo anaqecha*) are a letter-deletion and a letter-substitution error of: **ונקם לא אנקמך** (*venaqom lo anaqmecha*) - **“and I will not utterly avenge you.”**

In the Book of Deuteronomy and Kings we find another meaning of the word **נקי** (*naqi*):

כי-יקח איש אשה חדשה-לא יצא בצבא, ולא-יעבר עליו לכל-דבר: נקי יהיה לביתו שנה אחת, ושמו את-אשתו אשר-לקח.

“When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the host, neither shall he be charged with any business; he shall be free for his house one year, and shall cheer his wife whom he hath taken” (Deu 24:5).

והמלך אסא השמיע את-כל-יהודה, אין נקי, וישאו את-אבני הרמה ואת-עציה, אשר בנה בעשא; ויבן בס המלך אסא את-גבע בנימן ואת-המצפה.

“And king Asa made a proclamation to all Judah; none was exempted; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasa had builded; and king Asa built therewith Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah” (1 Ki 15:22).

Now we read in the Book of Jeremiah:

כי כה אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל אלי, קח את-כוס היין החמה הזאת, מידי; והשקיתה אתו את-כל-הגוים, אשר אנכי שלח אותך אליהם.

“For thus said YHWH, the God of Israel, to me: Take this cup of the wine of fury at My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it” (Jer 25:15).

והיה כי ימאנו לקחת-הכוס מידך-לשתות; ואמרת אליהם, כה אמר יהוה צבאות-שתו תשתו.

“And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then shall you say to them: Thus said *YHWH* of hosts: You shall surely drink” (Jer 25:28).

כי-כה אמר יהוה, הנה אשר-אין משפטם לשתות הכוס שתו ישתו, ואתה הוא נקה תנקה: לא תנקה, כי שתה תשתה.

“For thus said *YHWH*: Behold, they to whom it pertained not to drink of the cup shall assuredly drink; **and are you he that shall altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink**” (Jer 49:12; see also: Jer 25:29).

The Greek translator wrote here: “and you though being deemed innocent shall not be declared innocent”, but the content of these verses suggest that here: **ואתה הוא נקה תנקה: לא תנקה** means: “and you be exempt? You will not be exempt!”

We have seen that the Hebrew word **נקי** (*naqi*) or variants of this word could mean: “Innocent”. “unpunished”, or “exempt.” In addition this word may also appear as a misspelled **נקם** (*naqom*) - “avenge.” It is suggested that the comprehension of biblical paragraphs that contain this Hebrew word is critically dependent on the proper choice of the particular meaning of the word **נקי** (*naqi*).