

## Slaughtering in the Tanakh

By Yochanan Zaqantov

Today we look at the subject of slaughtering in the Tanakh. This is one of those areas that we are told there is not set standard in the Tanakh. We know slaughtering was done before the entering of Yisrael into Cannan. But is there any indication of a slaughtering method in the Tanakh.

The Hebrew word for slaughter or slay in the Tanakh is Shachat (Shin-Chet-Tet) reference number 7819 and is found in the NEHC on page 1251 and in the BDB on page 1006. It is a verb. It appears in most cases, as a slaying of an offering. However, it also represents one slaying another man.

Bereshit/Genesis 22:1-10

1 Some time afterward, HaElohim put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." 2 And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." 3 So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which HaElohim had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you." 6 **Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.** 7 Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "Elohim will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together. 9 They arrived at the place of which HaElohim had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 And Abraham picked up the knife **to slay (lish'chot לִשְׁחַת)** his son.

The story of course ends with the slaughter of a instead. But we see the elements of what would be needed to do a sacrifice. Firewood, Flintstone, and Knife. This indicates to us that 1 a knife is used for slaughtering. You will notice it never says how big a knife it was or what material it was made of only that it was able to do the job.

Shemot/Exodus 12:1-10, 21-23

1 Yehovah said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2 This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. 3 Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. 4 But if the household is

too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. **5** Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. **6** You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall **slaughter** (**veshachatu וְשַׁחֲטוּ**) it at twilight. **7** They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. **8** They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. **9** Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted—head, legs, and entrails—over the fire. **10** You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it.

**21** Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, pick out lambs for your families, **and slaughter** (**veshachatu וְשַׁחֲטוּ**) the passover offering.

**22** Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. **23** For when Yehovah goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and Yehovah will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

How do we know that the Israelites knew how to slaughter? They would have been exposed to slaughtering while in Egypt. So therefore, they would not have to be taught how to slaughter since they new how. Here is a quote from a website on ancient Egyptian culture.

“The animal was led by a rope in lieu of a nose ring, often the noose was fastened to the lower lip as well. The butchers tied a rope to one of its legs, passed it over the animal's back and pulled it up. Then the cow was wrestled to the ground, its legs bound together, its head pulled back, and with a hand-long knife its throat was cut. The blood was collected in shallow vessels. Much of the slaughtering went on in temple slaughter yards, where the animals offered by the rich were killed.”

<http://www.terraflex.co.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/butchering.htm>

You can see that slaughter by the neck was an accepted form of slaughter for cattle in Egypt. So the Israelites knew about that too. In fact if we go back further we say that Avaham knew how to slaughter. The point is that slaughtering was not some secret way of slaying the animal. It was done since Noach offered up animals after the flood. Since it would be know to them how to do it there would be no step by step guide like we have for the parts of sacrificing. If we look at the ritual slaughter in Vayiqra/Leviticus we see that Moshe was more concerned with the handling of the blood (dam) and fat (chelev). Our rabbinic brothers want us to believe that these slaughtering instructions were given in another set of spoken instructions.

Exodus 29: 11, 16, 20

11 **Slaughter (Shachat'ta וְשַׁחַטְתָּ)** the bull before Yehovah, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, 12 and take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; then pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 13 **Take all the fat that covers the entrails, the protuberance on the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat on them, and turn them into smoke upon the altar.** 14 **The rest of the flesh of the bull, its hide, and its dung shall be put to the fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.** 15 Next take the one ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the ram's head. 16 **Slaughter (Shachat'ta וְשַׁחַטְתָּ)** the ram, and take its blood and dash it against all sides of the altar. 17 **Cut up the ram into sections, wash its entrails and legs, and put them with its quarters and its head.** 18 Turn all of the ram into smoke upon the altar. It is a burnt offering to Yehovah, a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to Yehovah. 19 Then take the other ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the ram's head. 20 **Slaughter (Shachat'ta וְשַׁחַטְתָּ)** the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the ridge of Aaron's right ear and on the ridges of his sons' right ears, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet; and dash the rest of the blood against every side of the altar round about.

Yehovah explained to Moshe what to do with the Bull and two Rams for Aharon and his four sons. He tells him what to do with different parts but not specific with how to slay them and we can only rely on the earlier account of Avraham to tell us there must have been some knowledge of slaughtering and what they did was good enough to remove the blood.

Shemot/Exodus 34:25

25 **You shall not offer (lo tish'chat – not you slay לֹא-תִשַׁחַט)** the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened; and the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover shall not be left lying until morning.

They are not to slaughter or slay on leavened bread the Pesach that is a reference to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 1:5 (4-6), 11 (10-13)

4 He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him. 5 The bull shall be **slaughtered (veshachat וְשַׁחַטְתָּ)** before Yehovah; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. 6 The burnt offering shall be flayed (vehif'shit 6584 and he shall put off (its skin) וְהִפְשִׁיט) and cut up into sections.

We can see that Aharon and his sons are told simply to slay but it tells them to skin the Bull and cut it into pieces. The blood is to be handled in a specific manner. The focus is not in how the animal was slayed but instead on the handling the animal after it was slayed.

10 If his offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. 11 **It shall be slaughtered (veshachat וְשַׁחַט)** before Yehovah on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. 12 **When it has been cut up into sections, the priest shall lay them out, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar.** 13 **The entrails and the legs shall be washed with water; the priest shall offer up and turn the whole into smoke on the altar.** It is a burnt offering, an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to Yehovah.

Again after slaughter, the handling of the animal is what was important to document and teach.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 8: 15 (13-17)

13 Moses then brought Aaron's sons forward, clothed them in tunics, girded them with sashes, and wound turbans upon them, as Yehovah had commanded Moses.

14 He led forward the bull of sin offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of sin offering, 15 **and it was slaughtered (vayish'chat וַיִּשְׁחַט).**

**Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, cleansing the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it in order to make expiation upon it.**

16 **Moses then took all the fat that was about the entrails, and the protuberance of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar.** 17 **The rest of the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its dung, he put to the fire outside the camp—as Yehovah had commanded Moses.**

Here Moshe actually does it. Here would also be a good time for Moshe to have documented the method of slaying if he wanted to make sure it was done in a specific way. If he is detailing what to do about the animal after slaying then why not detail slaying it. Again one would have to think they knew how to do slaying and it was something that was done by themselves as well as peoples around them to slay animals.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 17: 3

2 Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelite people and say to them: This is what Yehovah has commanded: 3 if anyone of the house of Israel **slaughters (yish'chat וַיִּשְׁחַט)** an ox or sheep or goat in the camp, or does so outside the camp,

4 and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to Yehovah, before Yehovah's Tabernacle, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that

man: he has shed blood; that man shall be cut off from among his people. 5 This is in order that the Israelites may bring the sacrifices which they have been making in the open—that they may bring them before Yehovah, to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and offer them as sacrifices of well-being to Yehovah; 6 **that the priest may dash the blood against the altar of Yehovah at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and turn the fat into smoke as a pleasing odor to Yehovah;** 7 **and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons after whom they stray. This shall be to them a law for all time, throughout the ages.**

8 Say to them further: If anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice, 9 and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to offer it to Yehovah, that person shall be cut off from his people.

11 And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them partakes of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood, and I will cut him off from among his kin. 11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation. 12 Therefore I say to the Israelite people: No person among you shall partake of blood, nor shall the stranger who resides among you partake of blood.

13 And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them **hunts (yatzud 6679 יִצַּד)** down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, **he shall pour out its blood and**

**cover it with earth.** 14 For the life of all flesh—its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off.

15 Any person, whether citizen or stranger, who eats what has died or has been torn by beasts shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean. 16 But if he does not wash [his clothes] and bathe his body, he shall bear his guilt.

This is where the people were told to no longer slay doing sacrifice on their own. The handling of the blood and fat was extremely important to Yehovah as well as fidelity with him. Here it appears they were worshipping another El or God that was linked to the Hairy Goat. Goat Demon is not a good translation. Also, it tells them how to handle hunted animals and the handling of blood. Then lastly, that if they were to consume which we see later naturally dead or torn animal then they were unclean.

Bamidbar/Numbers 14:16

16 'It must be because Yehovah was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them on oath **that He slaughtered them (vayish'chatem וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם)** in the wilderness.'

Moshe warned Yehovah what they people around would think if he did not bring them into the land. The word for slay is shown here and is used in a general fashion for kill.

Shemot/Judges 12:5-6

5 The Gileadites held the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any fugitive from Ephraim said, “Let me cross,” the men of Gilead would ask him, “Are you an Ephraimite?”; if he said “No,” 6 they would say to him, “Then say *shibboleth*”; but he would say “*sibboleth*,” not being able to pronounce it correctly. Thereupon they would seize him **and slay him** (vayish’chatuhu וַיִּשְׁחָטוּהוּ) by the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites fell at that time.

Again the killing of another human being to show that shachat is generally used for kill. And so what about as I have instructed you?

Devarim/Deuteronomy 12:21

20 When Yehovah enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish. 21 If the place where Yehovah has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, **you may slaughter** (vezavach’ta 2076 – **and sacrifice you** וְזָבַחְתָּ) any of the cattle or sheep that Yehovah gives you, as I have **instructed you** (tzivvitikha 6680 – **Commanded you** צִוִּיתִיךָ); and you may eat to your heart’s content in your settlements. 22 Eat it, however, as the gazelle and the deer are eaten: the unclean may eat it together with the clean.

So we see that what he commanded us to do was not how we slayed but how we were to handle the blood and fat. It is interesting that zavach is used here instead of shachat because zavach is to sacrifice not simply slay. The domesticated animals were sacrificed normally. The instruction/command was to drain the blood and cover it with earth. We know it was not a sacrifice because both clean and unclean could eat it. We see that command in Vayiqra/Leviticus 17.

Leviticus 17:13-14

13 And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them **hunts** (yatzud 6679 יִצֹד) down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, **he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.** 14 For the life of all flesh—its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off.

This is what he commanded them not specifically how to slay the animal. Only to drain out all the blood. The next Hebrew word is for the English word torn.

The Hebrew verb for torn in the Tanakh is Taraf (Tet-Resh-Final Fey) reference number 2963 and is found in the NEHC on page 485 and in the BDB on page 382. It is a verb.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:20

20 And of Gad he said: Blessed be He who enlarges Gad! Poised is he like a lion To **tear off** (vetaraf וְטָרַף) arm and scalp.

Here we see the metaphor of Gad being like a Lion which tears off the arm.

Exodus 22: 13(12)

12 If it **was torn** (tarof yitoref וְטָרַף יִטְרַף) by beasts, he shall bring it as evidence; he need not replace what has been torn by beasts.

This shows that to be torn utterly was done by other animals. Here we see the judgment to be used if an animal is torn.

Bereshit/Genesis 37:33 (31-33)

31 Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood.  
32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?" 33 He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph **was torn** (tarof toraf –utterly torn וְטָרַף טָרַף) by a beast!"

His brothers as being killed by an animal portrayed Yosef. His father stated he was utterly torn, as in there was no doubt.

Bereshit/Genesis 44:28

27 Your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons.  
28 But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he **was torn** (tarof toraf –utterly torn וְטָרַף טָרַף) by a beast! And I have not seen him since. 29 If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.'

Again Yisrael says the same thing about his son Yosef. We can see from these references that a beast is one who tears or caused other animals or human beings to be torn. You will not find a reference to a slaughtered or sacrificed animal as being torn.

There is one place which actually refers to food specifically in this way.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 30:8

8 Keep lies and false words far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches, But provide me with my daily bread (hat'rifeni lechem chuqi – the tearing mine bread my due (הַטְּרִיפְנִי לֶחֶם חֻקִּי),

Again tear or torn but this time for lechem/bread which can be literally bread or food in general.

The Hebrew masculine noun for torn one or Prey in the Tanakh is Teref (Tet-Resh-Final Fey) reference number 2964 and is found in the NEHC on page 485 and in the BDB on page 383.

Bereshit/Genesis 49:9

9 Judah is a lion's whelp; **On prey (miteref – from torn one מִטְּרֵף)**, my son, have you grown. He crouches, lies down like a lion, Like the king of beasts—who dare rouse him?

Like a Lion, Judah was to grown upon that which he tears.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 5:29

29 Their roaring is like a lion's, They roar like the great beasts; When they growl and seize a prey (teref טְרֵף), They carry it off and none can recover it.

Here the people sent against Yehovah's people will act like Lions that tear at their prey.

Tehillim/Psalms 111:5

5 He gives **food (teref טְרֵף)** to those who fear Him; He is ever mindful of His covenant.

We see teref used for food in general which must mean that this can not be meat as it is torn. Since a torn animal is also food for a beast. It is using it in a general form of food.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 31:15

15 She rises while it is still night, And supplies **provisions (teref טְרֵף)** for her household, The daily fare of her maids.

Again we know that we are not to eat torn meat so this would have to be for none meat food like the bread earlier verse.



Malakhi/Malachi 3:10

10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be **food (teref טֶרֶף)** in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said Yehovah of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you;

We know that the tenth was the first fruits of the Harvest as well as the firstlings of the animals. Animals would not be stored in the storehouse but in the fields thus we can determine this was grain and other storable food. The grain gift offering was also food for presentation to Yehovah. We see that teref is again not for slaughtered animals but of torn animals as food for beast and of non-animal food for people and Yehovah.

The Hebrew feminine noun for torn one in the Tanakh is T'refah (Tet-Resh-Fey-Hey) reference number 2966 and is found in the NEHC on page 485 and in the BDB on page 383. This is derived from the masculine noun Teref..

Bereshit/Genesis 31:39 (36-39)

36 Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, “What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?

37 You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two.

38 “These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. 39 That which **was torn (t'refah טֶרֶף)** by beasts I never brought to you; I myself made good the loss; you exacted it of me, whether snatched by day or snatched by night.

Here we see again t'refah is not about the way people slay or shachat animals but the way animals eat other animals.

Shemot/Exodus 22:13 (12), 31 (30)

12 If it was torn by beasts, he shall bring it as evidence; he need not replace what **has been torn (hat'refah or the torn one הַטֶּרֶף)** by beasts.

Like earlier we say as the verb taraf linked here to the feminine noun with the animal being shown as the torn one which was utterly torn.

30 You shall be holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs.

We see this is an earlier account that the people were not to eat an animal, which was torn, in the field. Later the torah tells them what to do if they do eat something torn. This I believe is the basis of using treif was a term to denote a meat which is not

slaughtered properly. Looking in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia it is listed under the word terefah.

“Term signifying originally the flesh of a clean animal that had been **torn** or mortally wounded by beasts of prey, and had been rendered thereby unfit for food. In rabbinical literature the word came to be applied to the flesh of an animal that had received a fatal injury, or suffered any one of certain diseases, or was marked by some physical abnormality, but which otherwise would be "kasher" (fit and proper as food). "terefah" in a broader sense includes also a regularly but unskillfully killed animal, in contradistinction to Nebelah, which refers to the carcass of a clean animal that has died an unnatural death or been killed irregularly (comp. Hul. iv. 2). Both flesh that is nebelah and flesh that is terefah are forbidden as food by the Mosaic law (Lev. xxii. 8).

The Talmudic rule is that when an animal is so injured that it can not live, its flesh is erefah; hence only such injury, disease, or abnormality is involved as must cause an untimely death and affect the health of the animal at the time it is slaughtered (ul. iii. 1; 42a). <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=152&letter=T&search=torn>

This article does say the original intent was only that the animal was torn by another animal. Overtime and through analogy and other types of reasoning they have expanded the meaning to being an improperly slaughtered animal.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 7:24 (21-24)

22 And Yehovah spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Speak to the Israelite people thus: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat.

24 Fat from animals that died or **were torn** (t'refah טֵרֵפָה) by beasts may be put to any use, but you must not eat it.

The fat may be used from a torn animal but not eaten.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 17:15 (15-16)

15 Any person, whether citizen or stranger, who eats what has died **or has been torn** (ut'refah וְטֵרֵפָה) by beasts shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean. 16 But if he does not wash [his clothes] and bathe his body, he shall bear his guilt.

I don't see this as permission to eat but if one finds they have eaten then they are unclean.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 22:8 (1-2, 8)

22:1 Yehovah spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Instruct Aaron and his sons to be scrupulous about the sacred donations that the Israelite people consecrate to Me, lest they profane My holy name, Mine Yehovah's.

8 He shall not eat anything that died **or was torn** (ut'refah וְטֵרֵף) by beasts, thereby becoming unclean: I am Yehovah.

The Priest had the same restriction.

Yehez'qel/Ezekiel 4:14 (12-14)

12 “Eat it as a barley cake; you shall bake it on human excrement before their eyes.

13 So,” said Yehovah, “shall the people of Israel eat their bread, unclean, among the nations to which I will banish them.” 14 Then I said, “Ah, Adonay Yehovah, my person was never defiled; nor have I eaten anything that died of itself **or was torn**

(ut'refah וְטֵרֵף) by beasts from my youth until now, nor has foul flesh entered my mouth.” 15 He answered me, “See, I allow you cow’s dung instead of human excrement; prepare your bread on that.”

Even Yehz'qel/Ezekiel followed the same restriction and understood it to mean not to eat torn animals.

Yehez'qel/Ezekiel 44:31

31 Priests shall not eat anything, whether bird or animal, that died **or was torn** (ut'refah וְטֵרֵף) by beasts.

In the future the Priest will have the same restriction.

What we find is no step-by-step guide in Tanakh for slaughtering. We find some references to the use of the knife in doing the sacrifice, which lets us assume a knife would be used for non-ritual slaying. The fact that people knew and had a tradition of slaughtering might explain why the Torah is silent on this. We would call this universal consensus. It is a way of saying people knew this through traditional observances. As it was passed on from father to son, it would continue to be done. There are traditions today by both Karaites and Rabbanites on how to properly slaughter. The Karaites based upon their sages and the Rabbanites based upon their sages. The Tanakh leave it up to us to determine the best way to slay animals. The ultimate goal was to remove the blood from the animal and thus whatever does this is an acceptable form of slaughter. You will also not that nowhere is salting and soaking shown as a method to remove the blood. All that was required was removal of the blood. Anything else is a preference.