

IN THE MIDST OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

וְלֹא תִטְמָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹכָהּ
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You shall not defile the land that you inhabit,
in the midst of which I dwell;
for I, Adonai, dwell in the midst of the children of Israel.

You shall not defile the land that you inhabit—Most of all, you shall not remain indifferent to the loss of innocent human life, which has been created by the will and in the image of God— because ignoring the demands of “Justice, Love, and Morality” destroys the foundations of the “social well-being of the life of the people” (S.R. Hirsch). *In the midst of which I dwell*—“You shall not cause me to abide in uncleanness” (Rashi). By remaining in the impurity of your indifference you become increasingly estranged from Me, lending to the appearance of My powerlessness among the people. *For I, Adonai, dwell in the midst of the children of Israel*—“Even during the time when they are unclean, the Divine Presence is among them (Siphre)” (Rashi). My mercy and compassion are always present—it is always possible to be at one with Me—so the land and the people need never be permanently estranged from holiness.

* Numbers 35:34 (in Maasei)