

## MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT ASSEMBLY

Pearl River, Louisiana | miqdashbethel@gmail.com

## TORAH LAW EDUCATIONAL COURSE

## The 613 Mitzvot of Yahweh

Bereishit • Shemot • Vayikra • Bamidbar • Devarim | The Tanakh Writings

## LESSON 14

Negative Laws #253 &amp; #254

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:28 — Not to Cut the Body / Not to  
Tattoo the Body

וְשָׂרֵט לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּבִשְׂרֵיכֶם וְכִתְּבֹת קַעֲקַע לֹא תִתְּנוּ  
בְּכֶם

*Ve'seret la'nefesh lo titnu be'vsar'khem u'kh'tovet qa'afa' lo titnu vakhem*

**"You shall not make any cuts in your flesh for the dead, nor make any  
tattoo marks on yourselves."**

*The Body as Covenant Sanctuary: Yahweh's Claim on the Flesh He Created — and the  
Covenant Mercy of Return*

**Four Spheres: Individual • Community • Nation • World**

**Authority: The Tanakh — The Word of Yahweh Alone**

Standard: Devarim 19:15 — Two or Three Witnesses

March 2026 | 613Course\_Lesson14\_Vayikra1928\_TattoosAndCuttings.docx

## SECTION I — THE HEBREW TEXT

וְשָׂרֵט לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּבָשָׂרְכֶם

וְכִתְּבֵת קַעֲקַע לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּכֶם

*Ve'seret la'nefesh lo titnu be'vsar'khem u'kh'tovet qa'aqa' lo titnu vakhem*

**"You shall not make any cuts in your flesh for the dead, nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves."**

Vayikra 19:28 is one verse carrying two distinct prohibitions: the prohibition on ritual body-cutting for the dead, and the prohibition on tattooing. Both flow from the same foundational covenant principle: the body belongs to **Yahweh**. It is not the property of culture, grief, personal expression, or religious devotion to false gods. It is **Yahweh's** creation, declared very good (Bereishit 1:31), and it is to be kept as the covenant was given it.

**Context in the 613 Laws:** These prohibitions fall within Vayikra 19 — the great holiness chapter — which begins with Yahweh's direct declaration: **"You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your Elohim am holy."** (Vayikra 19:2). The entire chapter is a cascade of covenant holiness laws governing every domain of community life: treatment of the poor, honest weights, care for the vulnerable, treatment of workers, and — in verse 28 — the treatment of the body itself. The holiness principle is the thread running through every verse: Yisra'el is a covenant people set apart from the practices of surrounding nations, and that separation must be visible in every domain — including what is done to the body.

**Connection to Devarim 14:1:** Devarim 14:1 runs parallel to this verse: **"You are the children of Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead."** The two passages together — Vayikra 19:28 and Devarim 14:1 — form the Two Witness corroboration for the cutting prohibition. Devarim 14:1 adds the covenant family identity reason explicitly: you shall not do this because you are the children of Yahweh. The prohibition on cutting is inseparable from the **covenant identity of Yisra'el as Yahweh's own people.** Your body declares whose you are.

## SECTION II — PRIMARY LEXICAL ANALYSIS

### A. שָׂרֵט (Seret, H8296) — "Incision, Cutting" — Prohibition #1

**BDB:** "incision, cutting" — a noun from the root שָׂרַט (*sarat*, H8295), BDB: "to scratch, cut." The cutting of the flesh as a mourning practice. **Seret** appears only here in Vayikra

19:28 and in Vayikra 21:5 (where the same prohibition is applied to the priests specifically). The specificity of the term establishes that this is not accidental cutting or medical incision — it is the deliberate, ritualized cutting of the flesh as a cultural-religious practice.

**HALOT:** "incision made in the flesh" — used for the pagan mourning ritual of slashing or cutting the body as an expression of grief or devotion to the dead. HALOT confirms the term is specifically associated with mourning practices in the ancient Near East.

**Gesenius:** "a cutting, incision in the flesh" — the Gesenius lexicon notes this was a widespread practice among surrounding nations: Canaanites, Phoenicians, and others cut or gashed themselves as mourning rituals, often in connection with worship of the dead or the underworld. The Baal prophets in 1 Melakhim (Kings) 18:28 demonstrate this practice directly: *"And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them."* What the Baal prophets did — **Yahweh** prohibits Yisra'el from doing.

**TWOT:** H8295 — the root **שרט** appears in a context where body-cutting is explicitly connected to pagan mourning and cultic practices. TWOT confirms the prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28 and 21:5 are directed at exactly this kind of religiously motivated self-mutilation.

**לְנֶפֶשׁ (la'nefesh):** "for a person / for the dead" — **נֶפֶשׁ (nefesh, H5315)** — BDB: "soul, living being, life, person" — here used with the preposition **לְ** to mean "for" or "on account of" a dead person. This is the mourning context — the cutting is done in grief for a deceased person. The prohibition is not on all grief but on this specific expression of grief that mimics the practices of nations around Yisra'el who worshipped the dead.

## B. כְּתוּבַת קַעֲקַע (Ketovet Qa'aqa', H3793 + H7085) — "Tattoo Mark" — Prohibition #2

**This is a hapax legomenon — appearing only once in the entire Torah.** The phrase **כְּתוּבַת קַעֲקַע** appears nowhere else in the Written Tanakh. This uniqueness does not diminish the law's force — it confirms that **Yahweh** designated a specific, precise term for this specific act and prohibited it once, with the authority of the Torah's two-witness corroboration from Devarim 14:1 for the broader body-marking framework.

**כְּתוּבַת (ketovet, H3793):** BDB: "an inscription, a writing, a tattoo mark" — from the root **כָּתַב (katav, H3789)**, BDB: "to write, inscribe." HALOT: "inscription, writing, tattoo." Gesenius: "a writing, inscription; specifically a tattoo mark." The word designates a written or inscribed mark — deliberately made, intentionally permanent. It is not accidental marking. It is the deliberate inscription of the body.

**קַעֲקַע (qa'aqa', H7085):** BDB: "incision, imprinting by incision" — a word describing the method: the mark is made by incision into the skin. HALOT: "tattoo mark" — specifically the mark made by incising the skin and introducing pigment. Gesenius: "an incised

mark, a tattoo." The combination **כְּתִיבָהּ קַעֲקֵעַ** designates exactly what modern tattooing is: an inscription made by incision into the skin. The Torah's term is as precise as the practice it prohibits.

**לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּכֶם (lo titnu vakhem):** "you shall not put/place on yourselves" — **נָתַן (natan, H5414)** — BDB: "to give, put, set." The Qal imperfect second person plural: ongoing, unconditional prohibition applying to the entire covenant community. Not only the priest but every person in Yisra'el. **בְּכֶם** — "on yourselves, among you" — the community-level scope. This is not a prohibition limited to a priestly class — it governs every person in the covenant community.

## C. The Covenant Design of the Human Body — The Foundation

The Covenant Design of the Human Body document (found at [www.miqdashbethel.org](http://www.miqdashbethel.org)) establishes the theological foundation underlying both prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28: *"The body is not the person's own. It is Yahweh's creation — the vessel He formed from the dust of the earth (Bereishit 2:7), into which He breathed the breath of life (nishmat chayyim). The nishmat of Yahweh dwells in the body. The body is therefore not neutral property to be marked, cut, or modified at will. It is a covenant vessel — a miqdash (sanctuary) — that bears the image of Yahweh (Bereishit 1:27) and is to be treated accordingly."*

The document continues: *"The nations around Yisra'el treated their bodies as their own to mark, cut, and deform as culture or grief demanded. Yahweh says: this body is Mine. Do not defile it. The prohibition on tattoos and cuttings is not an arbitrary cultural rule — it is a covenant declaration that the body belongs to Yahweh, that the image of Yahweh in the human person is not to be deliberately defaced, and that grief is to be expressed within the covenant framework Yahweh provided — not through the mourning rituals of nations that do not know Him."*

This is the covenant foundation: **Yahweh** is the Creator and Owner of every human body. Bereishit 2:7 — **"Then Yahweh Elohim formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."** The body is Yahweh's creation from the dust, animated by His own breath. To mark it permanently, to cut it ritually, is to treat as one's own property what belongs to **Yahweh**.

## SECTION III — WHAT THESE LAWS ARE TEACHING

### A. The Pagan Context — What Surrounding Nations Were Doing

The prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28 are not given in a cultural vacuum. The Covenant Design of the Human Body document establishes: *"The cutting and tattoo prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28 are given in direct contrast to surrounding nation practices. Egypt, Canaan, Phoenicia, and Mesopotamia all practiced forms of body-cutting and body-marking in their mourning rituals and religious devotion contexts."*

The specific practices the Torah prohibits include:

- **Ritual mourning cuttings:** The widespread ancient Near Eastern practice of cutting or gashing the body as a grief expression for the dead — practiced by Canaanites, Phoenicians, and others, and explicitly demonstrated by the Baal prophets in 1 Melakhim 18:28
- **Dedication tattoos:** In Egypt and Mesopotamia, tattoos were used to mark devotion to specific deities — permanently inscribing the name or symbol of a god on the body as an act of religious dedication. The Torah's prohibition directly opposes this: Yisra'el's bodies are dedicated to **Yahweh** alone — no other name belongs on the covenant body
- **Mourning baldness:** Devarim 14:1 connects the cutting prohibition with the prohibition on shaving baldness between the eyes for the dead — another mourning ritual of surrounding nations. The Torah gives Yisra'el alternative covenant expressions of grief (Vayikra 19:27's beard-trimming prohibition context)

The Covenant Design document states: *"Yahweh's prohibition on these practices is an act of covenant separation — He is drawing a clear line between how His people express grief, devotion, and identity, and how surrounding nations do. The body of a covenant person declares: I belong to Yahweh. Not to Baal. Not to Osiris. Not to Marduk. The uncut, unmarked body of Yisra'el was itself a covenant testimony to the nations."*

### B. The Two Prohibitions Compared

While both prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28 flow from the same covenant principle, they differ in their specific contexts:

Reference	Teaching / Witness
<b>CUTTING — שָׂרַט</b>	Mourning context — done in grief for the dead. Paralleled in Devarim 14:1 and Vayikra 21:5. The body is cut as an expression of grief, or as part of the pagan worship of the dead.

	Yahweh provides covenant frameworks for grief that do not involve self-mutilation.
<b>TATTOOING</b> — כְּתִיבָה קֶעֶקַע	Permanent inscription context — a deliberate, permanent mark made in the skin. Not limited to mourning — includes devotion marks, identity marks, decorative marks. The body is inscribed as if it were the tattooist's or the wearer's canvas. Yahweh's declaration: the body is not a canvas — it is a covenant vessel.

The Covenant Design document addresses the modern tattoo context directly: *"The modern tattoo industry operates on the premise that the body belongs to the person and can be marked as personal expression, identity declaration, or artistic canvas. The Torah's covenant framework directly opposes this premise. **The body does not belong to the person — it belongs to Yahweh.** Personal expression through permanent body marking is not a right the Torah acknowledges, because the Torah does not acknowledge the premise of personal body ownership on which that right rests."*

### C. The Brit Milah Distinction — The One Authorized Covenant Body Mark

A careful student of the Torah will recognize an important tension: if the body is not to be marked, how does **brit milah** (circumcision — Bereishit 17:9-14) fit within this framework? The Covenant Design document addresses this directly:

*"Brit milah is the one authorized covenant mark on the human body — given by Yahweh Himself, at His command, with His specified timing, for His covenant purpose. It is not human initiative marking the body. It is Yahweh's own covenant signature placed on the body of every covenant male. The distinction between brit milah and the prohibited markings of Vayikra 19:28 is the distinction between Yahweh marking His own property and human beings marking what belongs to Yahweh without His authorization."*

This distinction is absolute:

- **Brit milah:** Commanded by **Yahweh**, specified by **Yahweh**, for **Yahweh's** covenant purpose, on **Yahweh's** timeline, as the sign of the covenant **Yahweh** made with Avraham and his descendants. It is the mark of the Owner on His covenant people.
- **Tattoos and cuttings:** Initiated by humans, for human purposes (expression, grief, decoration, devotion to other gods), permanent without authorization from **Yahweh**. These are the marks of those who have forgotten that the body belongs to **Yahweh** — or who deliberately reject His claim.

### D. The Modern Tattoo Industry — The Research

The tattoo research document compiled for this lesson provides the following data on modern tattooing. These figures confirm the Torah's framework from the direction of documented harm and documented regret:

## Prevalence and Demographics

- Approximately 32% of Americans have at least one tattoo (Ipsos polling data)
- Among those aged 18-34, the prevalence is approximately 38%
- Tattoo industry revenue exceeds \$1.6 billion annually in the United States alone
- The industry has grown over 300% in the past decade, driven largely by social normalization and celebrity influence

## Regret Data

- Approximately 17-25% of tattooed individuals report regretting at least one of their tattoos (various surveys including British Association of Dermatologists study)
- The most commonly cited reasons for regret: the tattoo no longer reflects their identity (42%), poor quality work (29%), and placement they wish they had chosen differently (23%)
- Regret increases with age — the tattoo acquired at 18 as a statement of identity often becomes the tattoo regretted at 35 when identity has changed
- Laser tattoo removal is a multi-billion dollar industry, confirming the scale of regret — but removal is expensive, painful, time-consuming, and frequently incomplete

## Health Risks

- **Infection:** Staphylococcus aureus (Staph) infections are among the most common complications from tattooing. Unsterile equipment can transmit Staph, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and in rare cases HIV
- **Allergic reactions:** Certain tattoo inks — particularly red, yellow, and orange pigments — contain metal compounds (mercury sulfide in red, cadmium sulfide in yellow) that can cause severe allergic reactions. These reactions can emerge years after the tattoo was applied
- **MRI complications:** Metal-based tattoo inks can cause burning sensations, swelling, or image distortion during MRI procedures. This is a documented medical complication that affects tattooed individuals for the lifetime of the tattoo
- **Keloid scarring:** Persons prone to keloid scarring may develop raised, enlarged scars at tattoo sites
- **Granulomas:** Small bumps can form around tattoo ink as the body's immune system reacts to pigment particles deposited in the dermis
- **Bloodborne pathogens:** Hepatitis B and C transmission through unsterile tattoo equipment is documented globally — the WHO identifies tattooing as a risk factor for Hepatitis C transmission in both clinical and non-clinical settings

The Covenant Design document establishes the framework for understanding these medical risks: *"The Torah's holiness laws are not arbitrary restrictions — they are covenant wisdom that protects the body Yahweh created from damage the human body*

*was not designed to sustain. The health risks of tattooing are the independent medical confirmation of the covenant wisdom embedded in Vayikra 19:28. Yahweh prohibited tattoos millennia before medical science documented why."*

### **Permanence — The Irreversibility Factor**

The tattoo research document notes a critical dimension relevant to the Torah's covenant framework: tattoos are designed to be permanent. The ink is deposited in the dermis — the deep layer of the skin — precisely so that it cannot be shed with normal skin cell turnover. The permanence is the intent.

Laser tattoo removal — the most advanced removal technology available — is: expensive (average \$2,000-\$4,000 per tattoo for full removal), painful (often described as more painful than the original application), time-consuming (multiple sessions over months to years), and frequently incomplete (certain colors and inks resist laser removal entirely, leaving permanent partial marks). A tattoo acquired in a moment may require years of painful, expensive effort to partially remove.

This permanence dimension connects directly to the Torah's covenant framework: what **Yahweh** gave the body was given permanently. The tattoo that permanently alters the covenant body is not undone easily or cheaply. The covenant wisdom of Vayikra 19:28 protects the person from a permanent mark applied in a non-permanent state of mind.

## SECTION IV — TWO/THREE WITNESS CORROBORATION

Per Devarim 19:15 — two or three independent Tanakh witnesses confirm every teaching. The following establishes the full covenant force of both prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 19:2</b>	The governing principle of the entire chapter: "You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your Elohim am holy." The holiness principle is the foundation of every law in Vayikra 19, including verse 28. First foundational witness.
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 19:28</b>	Primary text — both prohibitions stated in a single verse: the cutting prohibition and the tattoo prohibition. Second direct witness.
<b>Devarim (Deut.) 14:1</b>	"You are the children of Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead." The cutting prohibition repeated with the covenant identity reason stated explicitly: you shall not do this BECAUSE you are Yahweh's children. Third witness — and the most powerful covenant-identity statement.
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 21:5</b>	"They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh." The cutting prohibition applied specifically to the priesthood — with even stricter standards for the covenant servants. Confirms the broader principle applies to all and the priestly class specifically. Corroborating witness.
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 1:27,31</b>	"Elohim created man in His image... and it was very good." The body as Yahweh's good creation — in His image. The covenant foundation: what Yahweh declared very good is not to be permanently defaced. Corroborating creation witness.
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 2:7</b>	"Yahweh Elohim formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." The body as Yahweh's direct formation — His breath animates it. It is His creation, not ours. Corroborating creation-ownership witness.
<b>1 Melakhim (Kings) 18:28</b>	"And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them." The Baal prophets demonstrating exactly the practice Yahweh prohibits — confirming the pagan context of the cutting prohibition. Historical narrative witness.

**Covenant Design Doc.**

"The body is Yahweh's creation — the vessel He formed from the dust of the earth, into which He breathed the breath of life. The nishmat of Yahweh dwells in the body. The body is therefore not neutral property to be marked, cut, or modified at will. It is a covenant vessel — a miqdash." Miqdash Bethel library witness confirming the covenant framework.

## SECTION V — WHAT THIS LAW IS TEACHING (CONTINUED)

### A. The Body as Miqdash — Yahweh's Sanctuary

The **Covenant Design of the Human Body** document introduces the foundational covenant designation for the human body: **מִקְדָּשׁ (miqdash, H4720)** — sanctuary, holy place. BDB: "sacred place, sanctuary, holy place." The document establishes:

*"If Yahweh's presence dwells in the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and later in the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) — making those structures holy and governing how they are to be treated — then the body, which contains the nishmat (breath) of Yahweh Himself (Bereishit 2:7), is the primary miqdash. The Mishkan was built to house the presence of Yahweh among His people. The human body was created to house the nishmat of Yahweh within His people. The body is the first and most intimate miqdash."*

This miqdash framework governs the tattoo and cutting prohibitions directly: just as no one could place unauthorized marks on the walls of the Mishkan or the Beit HaMikdash — the design was given by **Yahweh** and nothing could be added to it without His authorization — so the body-miqdash carries no unauthorized permanent marks. The body belongs to **Yahweh**. Its markings are His to authorize. What He did not authorize — the tattoo, the ritual cutting — is a defilement of the miqdash.

### B. The Nishmat Framework — Yahweh's Breath in the Body

The Covenant Design document establishes the **נִשְׁמַת (nishmat)** framework: *"Bereishit 2:7 states that Yahweh breathed His own breath — nishmat chayyim — into the human body. This is the only moment in the creation account where Yahweh directly breathes into what He has made. The animals were created by divine command; the human being was formed by Yahweh's own hands and animated by Yahweh's own breath. The nishmat that dwells in the human body is Yahweh's direct gift. The body that carries this nishmat is not ordinary matter — it is the vessel of Yahweh's own breath."*

The covenant application is direct: to tattoo or ritually cut the body that carries the nishmat of **Yahweh** is to treat as one's own canvas what **Yahweh** has claimed as His own vessel. The permanent mark on the body is the human declaration: "This body is mine to mark." Yahweh's covenant answer: "No. This body is mine. It bears My breath. You shall not mark it without My authorization."

### C. The Personal Expression Argument — Evaluated Against the Torah

The dominant modern argument for tattooing is personal expression: the body is mine, I have the right to decorate it as I choose. This argument is a direct covenant claim — it is the assertion of ownership over the body. The Torah's covenant framework addresses this claim directly.

Devarim 14:2 provides **Yahweh's** covenant answer: ***"For you are a holy people to Yahweh your Elohim, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."*** The covenant people are **עַם סְגֻלָּה (am segulah)** — **Yahweh's** treasured possession. A possession belongs to its Owner. The body of a covenant person is Yahweh's treasured possession — not the person's own property to decorate as they choose.

The Covenant Design document states: *"The 'my body, my choice' argument that underlies modern tattoo culture is precisely the argument the Torah is refuting. It is not your body. It is Yahweh's body — entrusted to you as a steward for the duration of your covenant life. Stewards do not have the right to permanently alter what belongs to the Owner. They have the responsibility to care for it, protect it, and return it in the condition the Owner created it."*

## **D. Grief Within the Covenant — Why the Cutting Prohibition Matters Pastorally**

The cutting prohibition of Vayikra 19:28 and Devarim 14:1 is not merely a prohibition on pagan practice — it is a covenant pastoral statement. **Yahweh** knows that grief is real. The loss of a beloved person produces anguish that cries out for physical expression. The surrounding nations expressed this grief through cutting — a physical marking of pain on the body. **Yahweh** says: not this way.

Instead, the covenant community has covenant frameworks for grief: weeping (Bereishit 23:2 — Avraham weeping for Sarah), sitting shiva (the mourning community gathering around the bereaved), prayer and lament (Tehillim is full of lament), and the covenant community's active presence with the mourner. These are **Yahweh's** design for grief expression — communal, relational, verbal, prayerful. Not solitary, physical, permanent, or mimicking the practices of nations that do not know Him.

The Covenant Design document notes: *"The prohibition on cutting for the dead is not a prohibition on grief. It is a prohibition on the specific form of grief expression that treats the body as a canvas for pain rather than a covenant vessel to be protected even in the darkest moments. Yahweh's covenant people grieve — but they grieve as those who know that death is not the end of the covenant, and who do not need to cut their bodies to prove the depth of their love for the departed."*

## The Covenant Mercy of Yahweh — Sincere Repentance

Even where the Torah states a prohibition and designates a violation as defiling the covenant people, the covenant mercy of **Yahweh** is always extended to a person who sincerely repents. This is not a weakening of the law — it is the full covenant picture. Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 18:21-23:

**Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 18:21-23 — JPS 1985**

***"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him... Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord Yahweh, rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"***

The judgment of the law establishes the gravity. The mercy of Yahweh through genuine repentance establishes the covenant character. Both stand together in every lesson of this course.

For those who already carry tattoos or the marks of ritual cuttings — this covenant truth applies fully. The mark may remain on the body. Yahweh's covenant relationship is fully restored through sincere repentance and the genuine turn away from further violation.

The Covenant Design of the Human Body document establishes the framework: *"Yahweh does not discard the person who has defiled the body He designed. He restores the covenant relationship when the person returns. What was done cannot always be undone. The covenant mercy available through genuine repentance is not conditioned on undoing what is permanent."* That is the covenant character of **Yahweh**: judgment is real, mercy is greater, and repentance is the bridge between the two.

## SECTION VI — FOUR-SPHERE APPLICATION

Level	Sphere	Application	Torah Witness
INDIVIDUAL	The Body Belongs to Yahweh	The foundation: the body is Yahweh's miqdash, animated by His nishmat, formed by His hands. The personal expression argument for tattooing rests on the premise of body ownership — a premise the Torah directly rejects.	Bereishit 2:7; Vayikra 19:28; Devarim 14:2

		The covenant person is a steward of what belongs to Yahweh.	
INDIVIDUAL	The Tattoo Prohibition — Precisely Applied	The prohibition covers the deliberate, permanent inscription of the body by incision — regardless of the content or motivation. The content of the tattoo does not change the nature of the act: permanent marking of Yahweh's body without His authorization.	Vayikra 19:28
INDIVIDUAL	The Cutting Prohibition — Grief Within Covenant Boundaries	The prohibition on cutting for the dead does not prohibit grief. It prohibits the specific grief expression that mimics pagan mourning practice and self-mutilates the body Yahweh created. Yahweh provides covenant frameworks for grief that honor both the loss and the covenant.	Devarim 14:1; Vayikra 19:28
INDIVIDUAL	Brit Milah — The One Authorized Mark	Circumcision is authorized by Yahweh, commanded by Yahweh, for Yahweh's covenant purpose. It is the distinction between Yahweh marking His own property and human beings marking what belongs to Yahweh without authorization.	Bereishit 17:9-14; Vayikra 19:28
INDIVIDUAL	Sincere Repentance for Those Already Tattooed	For those who already carry tattoos: the covenant mercy of Yahweh through sincere repentance is fully available. The mark may remain on the body. The	Yechezkel 18:21-23; Hoshea 2:14-20

		covenant relationship is fully restored through genuine return. Yahweh does not discard the person because of what is permanently inscribed on the body.	
INDIVIDUAL	Health Wisdom — Protect the Body Yahweh Created	The documented health risks of tattooing — Staph infections, Hepatitis B/C transmission from unsterile equipment, allergic reactions to metal-based inks, MRI complications — confirm the covenant wisdom of Vayikra 19:28 from the direction of medical science. Yahweh prohibited tattoos before medicine understood why.	Vayikra 19:28; Shemot 15:26
COMMUNITY	Covenant Assembly Teaching — The Full Framework	The covenant assembly teaches Vayikra 19:28 as Written Torah — clearly, with the full covenant framework of body ownership, the miqdash principle, and the medical confirmation. The teaching does not shame those who already have tattoos. It provides the covenant framework for those making decisions going forward.	Vayikra 19:28; Covenant Design Doc.
COMMUNITY	No Shame for Those Already Tattooed	The covenant assembly creates no culture of shame for covenant members who carried tattoos before coming to covenant understanding. The covenant mercy of Yahweh through sincere	Yechezkel 18:21-23; Bereishit 1:27

		repentance is extended without condemnation. The assembly walks with the person in covenant faithfulness from where they are.	
COMMUNITY	Care for Those Who Practiced Ritual Cutting	Some persons in the covenant community may carry the marks of self-harm or ritual cutting — whether from grief practices or from the self-harm that accompanies mental and emotional anguish. The assembly provides covenant care — not condemnation — while upholding the Torah's framework for body holiness.	Vayikra 19:28; Devarim 14:1
COMMUNITY	Covenant Grief — Teaching Alternative Expressions	The assembly must teach covenant frameworks for grief as the positive alternative to the cutting prohibition — weeping, lament, shiva, communal presence, prayer, and the covenant community's active support of the bereaved.	Bereishit 23:2; Tehillim (Psalms) 22; 88
NATION	National Health Policy — What the Medical Evidence Confirms	The documented health risks of tattooing — infection, bloodborne pathogen transmission, MRI complications, allergic reactions — confirm the Torah's framework at the national public health level. Nations whose public health agencies warn of these risks are confirming the covenant wisdom of Vayikra 19:28.	Vayikra 19:28; tattoo research data

NATION	National Law and Tattooing of Minors	The permanent alteration of a minor's body through tattooing raises the same covenant principle as transgender surgery (Lesson 13): children who cannot provide full informed consent to permanent, irreversible body alteration deserve protection. National law that prohibits tattooing of minors reflects the Torah's covenant protection framework for the body.	Vayikra 19:28; Bereishit 18:19
NATION	The Tattoo Industry and Cultural Normalization	The \$1.6 billion tattoo industry in the United States has normalized permanent body marking as personal expression. Nations where this normalization is most advanced also reflect the cultural premise of individual body ownership — the covenant premise the Torah directly contradicts. National covenant accountability applies to the cultural frameworks nations promote.	Devarim 14:2; Vayikra 19:28
WORLD	Universal Body Holiness Principle	The human body as Yahweh's creation is a universal covenant principle — not limited to the covenant community of Yisra'el. Every human body is formed by Yahweh (Bereishit 2:7), declared very good by Yahweh (Bereishit 1:31), and bears His image (Bereishit 1:27). The	Bereishit 1:27,31; 2:7

		prohibition on permanent defacement of that body applies universally.	
WORLD	The Pagan Context Confirms the Principle	The cutting and tattooing practices that the Torah prohibits were widespread across the ancient world — Egypt, Canaan, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia. Their universal condemnation by the Torah establishes these as world-level covenant violations, not merely Israelite cultural customs.	Devarim 14:1; Vayikra 19:28; 1 Melakhim 18:28
WORLD	Three-Tradition World Witness	Judaism, Christianity (in its traditional expressions), and Islam all uphold prohibitions on tattooing that parallel Vayikra 19:28. The three-tradition convergence is a world-level witness to the universal covenant force of this law.	Vayikra 19:28; Islam — Hadith

## SECTION VII — THREE-RELIGION AUDIT

All three traditions — at their best — uphold the prohibitions of Vayikra 19:28 without notable departure on the core question. This lesson notes where each tradition grounds the prohibition and where departures have occurred.

### Judaism

**Upholds Torah:** The prohibition on tattoos is fully maintained in halakhic law on the basis of Vayikra 19:28 directly. There is no halakhic dispute among traditional authorities on the basic prohibition. The body is treated as belonging to Yahweh, and permanent marking of it without authorization is prohibited.

**The burial question — a rabbinic addition:** The widespread popular belief that tattooed Jews cannot receive Jewish burial is a **rabbinic addition** that goes beyond the Written Torah's text. The Written Torah does not prohibit burial of tattooed persons. This is a rabbinic fence-around-the-Torah that Miqdash Bethel neither endorses nor requires. The Written Torah's prohibition is on getting the tattoo — not on burial of those who have one.

**The cutting prohibition:** The prohibition on ritual cutting for the dead is equally maintained in halakhic law. Traditional Jewish mourning practice (shiva, kaddish, kria — the tearing of the garment) provides the covenant framework for grief that replaces the prohibited cutting. This is one of the clearest examples of the Torah providing covenant-positive alternatives to prohibited pagan practices.

**Consistent with Torah:** On both the tattoo and cutting prohibitions, traditional Judaism upholds the Written Torah's standard. The authority is the Torah text directly — no departure from the Written Torah standard on these prohibitions.

### Christianity

**Traditional position upholds Torah:** Traditional Catholic, Orthodox, and many conservative Protestant expressions prohibit or strongly discourage tattooing on the basis of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The reasoning parallels the Torah's — the body belongs to Yahweh, not to the person, and is not to be permanently marked without His authorization.

**The wrong authority:** Christianity grounds the prohibition in Paul's letters rather than in Vayikra 19:28 directly. For Miqdash Bethel, the Torah text governs. The conclusion that the body should not be permanently marked aligns with Torah — the authority behind that conclusion must be recognized as the Written Tanakh, not the New Testament. Paul is not adding authority to **Yahweh's** commandment; he is providing a later confirmation of what the Torah already stated directly.

**Departs from Torah:** The antinomian framework in many modern Protestant traditions treats Vayikra 19:28 as part of the "Old Testament ceremonial law" that no longer

applies. This produces the widespread acceptance of tattooing among self-identified Christians today — including among those who claim to uphold biblical authority. The Written Torah has not changed. The antinomian interpretation has obscured it.

**The pastoral reality:** Many covenant communities — both Jewish and Christian — have extensive numbers of tattooed members, particularly among those who came to covenant faith after acquiring tattoos. The covenant community's response must reflect the full framework: the prohibition is clear and must be taught; the mercy of **Yahweh** through sincere repentance is fully available to those who acquired tattoos before covenant understanding; and no culture of shame or judgment is appropriate for those in whom the mark is already permanent.

## Islam

**Upholds Torah — Strong Convergence:** Classical Islamic jurisprudence prohibits tattoos on the basis of hadith — the Prophet is reported to have cursed the one who makes tattoos and the one who has them made (Bukhari 5937, Muslim 2125). The prohibition is unanimously upheld across all four major schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali).

**The Quranic basis:** Islam grounds the tattoo prohibition in An-Nisa 4:119 — the same Quranic verse cited in Lesson 13 on transgender surgery: *"I will command them and they will alter Yahweh's creation."* Islamic jurisprudence treats tattooing as an alteration of Yahweh's creation — the same covenant framework as the Written Torah's prohibition. The convergence between the Torah's designation and the Quranic basis is direct.

**The cutting prohibition:** Islamic jurisprudence prohibits self-harm as a mourning practice, aligning with the Torah's prohibition on cutting for the dead. Alternative mourning frameworks are provided — prayer, recitation, and community gathering — paralleling the Torah's covenant alternatives to cutting.

**Consistent with Torah:** On both the tattoo and cutting prohibitions, Islam upholds the covenant framework without notable departure. All four major jurisprudential schools are unanimous. The authority is hadith and Quranic text rather than the Torah directly — but the conclusion aligns with the Written Torah's standard.

## STUDY REVIEW & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions follow the Four-Sphere framework. The bilateral covenant standard — judgment and mercy — applies throughout.

### Individual Level

1. Vayikra 19:28 contains a **hapax legomenon** — the phrase **קְתִיבָהּ קַעֲקֵעַ** appears nowhere else in the entire Torah. What does the Torah's designation of a specific, unique term for tattooing communicate about **Yahweh's** precision in addressing this practice? How does the hapax legomenon designation confirm the prohibition's intentional specificity?
2. Devarim 14:1 states: **"You are the children of Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not cut yourselves."** The covenant identity reason is embedded directly in the prohibition: you shall not do this **because** you are Yahweh's children. What does this structure reveal about the relationship between covenant identity and body holiness? How does **Yahweh's** designation of Yisra'el as His children ground the body-holiness framework?
3. The Covenant Design document establishes the body as **miqdash** — covenant sanctuary — animated by the **nishmat** of **Yahweh** (Bereishit 2:7). How does the miqdash framework change the way a covenant person understands their relationship to their own body? What obligations does the miqdash designation place on the stewardship of the body?
4. The modern argument for tattooing rests on the premise: "My body, my choice." The Torah's covenant framework rests on the premise: "The body belongs to Yahweh." How does the Torah's premise of divine body ownership — grounded in Bereishit 2:7 (Yahweh formed it), Bereishit 1:27 (it bears His image), and Devarim 14:2 (you are His segulah) — directly answer the modern self-ownership argument?
5. Yechezkel 18:21-23 establishes Yahweh's covenant mercy for sincere repentance. For a person who already carries tattoos and comes to covenant understanding, what does sincere repentance look like specifically? Does removal of the tattoo become a covenant obligation? What does genuine covenant faithfulness going forward require?

### Community Level

6. The covenant assembly teaches Vayikra 19:28 clearly as Written Torah. At the same time, many members may already have tattoos from before their covenant understanding. How does the assembly hold both the clear prohibition AND the covenant mercy of **Yahweh** simultaneously — without communicating shame to those who already have tattoos and without softening the prohibition for those making decisions going forward?

7. The cutting prohibition of Vayikra 19:28 and Devarim 14:1 addresses pagan mourning practices. In the modern context, self-harm through cutting is often associated with mental health distress rather than pagan ritual. How should the covenant assembly distinguish between the ritual cutting the Torah prohibits and the self-harm that often accompanies mental health crisis — and what covenant care does the assembly owe to persons experiencing either?
8. The Torah provides positive covenant frameworks for grief — weeping, communal presence, lament, prayer — as alternatives to the prohibited cutting for the dead. Design a covenant community grief response framework for a member whose spouse has died. What specific covenant practices replace the prohibited mourning rituals — and how does the assembly's active presence in grief honor both the Torah's prohibition and the bereaved person's genuine need?

### National Level

9. The research document for this lesson notes that 17-25% of tattooed individuals report regretting their tattoos, that the tattoo removal industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise, and that health risks include Staph, Hepatitis B/C, and MRI complications. How does this data function as an independent national-level medical witness confirming the covenant wisdom of Vayikra 19:28? Apply the Devarim 19:15 Two/Three Witness standard.
10. National law in most Western nations prohibits tattooing of minors. This partial reflection of the Torah's covenant protection framework for the body raises a deeper question: if the Torah's covenant wisdom is that the body belongs to Yahweh and is not the person's to permanently mark — does majority of age change the covenant equation? On what Torah basis does the prohibition apply equally to adults as to children?

### World Level

11. The Baal prophets of 1 Melakhim 18:28 cut themselves as a religious devotion practice. Modern ritual cutting — in contexts of paganism, occultism, and certain cultural practices — mirrors exactly what the Torah prohibited 3,500 years ago. How does the endurance of this practice across millennia and cultures confirm the world-level universal covenant force of Vayikra 19:28?
12. Judaism prohibits tattoos on the basis of Vayikra 19:28 directly. Islam prohibits them on the basis of hadith and An-Nisa 4:119. Traditional Christianity prohibits them on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. The convergence of all three traditions on this prohibition — from three different textual authorities — constitutes a Three-Witness world-level confirmation. How does this three-tradition convergence function under the Devarim 19:15 standard?
13. The tattoo research document notes that the tattoo industry has grown over 300% in the past decade driven by social normalization. What does this cultural acceleration of a Torah-prohibited practice reveal about the relationship between

national covenant departure and the pace of covenant violation? How should the covenant community engage with a culture that has normalized what the Torah prohibits — without withdrawing from the world and without capitulating to the normalization?

## SCRIPTURE INDEX — LESSON 14

Reference	Teaching / Witness
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 1:27</b>	Humanity created in the image of Yahweh — the body bears the image of its Creator and is not to be permanently defaced.
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 1:31</b>	"And it was very good." Yahweh's declaration over the creation — including the human body. What Yahweh declared very good is not to be permanently marked or cut without His authorization.
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 2:7</b>	"Yahweh Elohim formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." The body as Yahweh's direct formation, animated by His own nishmat. The foundational covenant ownership statement.
<b>Bereishit (Gen.) 17:9-14</b>	Brit milah — the one authorized covenant mark on the body, given and commanded by Yahweh Himself. The distinction between divine marking of Yahweh's property and unauthorized human marking.
<b>Shemot (Ex.) 15:26</b>	"I am Yahweh who heals you." Yahweh as covenant Healer — the health covenant that the body-holiness laws serve to protect.
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 19:2</b>	"You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your Elohim am holy." The governing principle of the entire holiness chapter — the foundation of Vayikra 19:28.
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 19:28</b>	Laws #253 & #254 — Primary text. The cutting prohibition and the tattoo prohibition. The hapax legomenon ketovet qa'acaq'.
<b>Vayikra (Lev.) 21:5</b>	The cutting prohibition applied specifically to the priestly class — confirming the broader principle applies to all, with heightened standards for the covenant servants.
<b>Bamidbar (Num.) 6:5</b>	The Nazirite vow — another example of a Yahweh-authorized modification of the body (hair) for a specific covenant purpose. Confirms that authorized covenant modifications exist; the tattoo prohibition addresses unauthorized permanent marking.
<b>Devarim (Deut.) 14:1-2</b>	"You are the children of Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not cut yourselves." The covenant identity reason for the cutting prohibition. You are His segulah — His treasured possession.

<b>Devarim (Deut.) 19:15</b>	Two or three witnesses — the standard governing all covenant adjudication and the evaluation of all claims made in this lesson.
<b>1 Melakhim (Kings) 18:28</b>	The Baal prophets cutting themselves in religious devotion — the exact practice Yahweh prohibits His people from performing.
<b>Tehillim (Psalm) 22; 88</b>	The Tanakh's covenant lament psalms — examples of the grief expression Yahweh provides as the alternative to prohibited cutting.
<b>Yechezkel (Ez.) 18:21-23</b>	Yahweh's covenant mercy — the door of sincere repentance is always open, even for those who have violated Vayikra 19:28.
<b>Hoshea (Hosea) 2:14-20</b>	Yahweh's covenant pursuit of restoration — the mercy framework applied to all who genuinely return.
<b>Covenant Design Doc.</b>	Miqdash Bethel Library — "Covenant Design of the Human Body FINAL" — the established Miqdash Bethel position on the body as miqdash, the nishmat framework, and the prohibition on permanent body marking.

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***""Is it My desire that a wicked person shall die? — says the Lord Yahweh. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live.""***

Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 18:23

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### MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT ASSEMBLY

Pearl River, Louisiana | miqdashbethel@gmail.com

**Authority: The Tanakh — The Word of Yahweh Alone**

Lesson 14 of 613 | 613Course\_Lesson14\_Vayikra1928\_TattoosAndCuttings.docx | March 2026