

## Why must we not eat blood?

### Do not eat blood

Seven times in the Torah:

1-But flesh with its life, which is its blood, you shall not eat. [Gen 9:4]

2-It shall be an everlasting statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that you eat neither fat nor blood. [Lev. 3:17]

3-And you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether from bird or beast. Whoever eats blood, his soul shall be cut off from his people. [Lev. 7:26-7 (Tzav)]

4-And if anybody of the House of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, eats any kind of blood; I will set my face against that soul who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.

*Ki nefesh ha-bassar ba-dam* -- כִּי-נֶפֶשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם

For the life of the flesh is in the blood...

Therefore I said to the people of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

And if anybody of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, hunts and catches a beast or bird that may be eaten; he shall pour out its blood, and cover it with dust.

For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for its life. Therefore, I said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any kind of flesh; for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off. [Lev. 17:10-14]

5-You shall not eat any thing with the blood. [Lev. 19:26]

6-Only you shall not eat the blood. You shall pour it upon the earth like water. [Deut. 12:16]

7-Only be strong and do not eat the blood. For the blood is the life; and you may not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it upon the earth as water. You shall not eat it; that it may go well with you,

and with your children after you, when you shall do that which is right in the sight of the Lord. [Deut 12:23–25]

## Questions

-Why can we eat animals, but not their blood? Why not just prohibit eating meat?

-It says “no blood”, but it is impossible to remove every molecule of blood.

-Why is this so important that it is repeated so many times?

-How did the “blood libel” arise, of all possible false charges? (Charge that Jews kill Christian children and use their blood to bake matzah for Pessah. Thousands of Jews have been murdered because of this lie.)

-Torah is clear that blood consumption is forbidden and matzah is just unleavened bread.

-Why not accuse us of killing Christian children to eat their noses?

-Is it because antisemites love to accuse us of not following our own religious rules?

## Practice

Rambam's Negative Commandment 184: Do not eat blood.

Rambam's Positive Commandment 147: Cover the blood of a slaughtered animal or bird. [Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shechitah 14:1]

How much blood?

-An olive's worth [Keritot 5:1 – 14a]

-Punishment is shunning (*Karet*)

One who intentionally eats an olive's worth of blood is cut off from his people [*karet*]. One who eats it accidentally brings a sin-offering.

[Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ma'achalot Assurot 6:1]

How to remove blood?

1-Slaughter animal properly.

Note: Laws of shechita not given in Torah. Yet Torah writes that the slaughter shall be "as I have instructed you". [Deut. 12:21] Rabbis point to this as one proof that Oral Law exists.

2-Pour away blood. Remove large arteries and veins, bruised meat and coagulated blood.

3-Within 3 days, soak meat for 30 minutes. (Too late if done after 3 days.)

4-Cover it with salt to drain remaining blood.

Remaining red liquid inside meat is not halachically considered blood.

Eggs: Check. If blood is found, throw out.

Liver (contains much blood): Broil it.

Human blood: Not prohibited biblically, but prohibited rabbinically, because looks like animal blood (*mar'it ayin*).

-If you bleed inside your mouth, no problem if you swallow blood.

-If you cut yourself and bleed into food, remove part where blood landed, if you can see it.

Drinking blood is also forbidden, not just eating it. [Yoma Y 8:3]

You may eat the blood of fish and locusts. [Sifra 7:143]

"In any of your dwellings" – Can't say: "I won't eat blood at home, but only outside home."

However, one may derive benefit from blood

Mishnah: Sacrificial blood was collected and sold to gardeners as fertilizer. [Yoma 5:6 – 58b]

## Notes

-Prohibition not found elsewhere in ancient Near East.

-Prohibition given early in Genesis, so applies to all, not only to Israel:

But flesh with its life, which is its blood, you shall not eat. [Gen 9:4]

-Necessary because Jews and others ate blood and liked it, as it says:

Only *be strong* and do not eat the blood. [Deut 12:23]

-Blood not appetizing today, so commandment did its work (same as for idolatry!)

## Why?

### 1-Blood is life:

Plain *pshat*: "Blood is the life [literally: the soul -- *nefesh*]", so eating blood is tantamount to eating life, so must not do it.

-The only dietary law in Torah given with its reason.

-But by spilling and covering the blood, do we save or even respect “life”? Isn’t it irreverent? Why not preserve it, or bury it in a dignified, ceremonial manner?

## **2-Health reasons:**

Rambam: Blood is difficult to digest, bad food:

Blood ... is indigestible, and injurious as food. [Maimonides, Guide 3:48]

Not sure if this is true. Certainly, blood is very nutritive, although one cannot survive on it alone. It is regularly eaten by many people in world today (blood sausage, blood soup, etc.)

## **3-Psychological reasons:**

Eating blood makes us like animals:

If we were to eat [blood], 'the life of all flesh,' it would then attach itself to our own blood and they would become united in our hearts. The result would be a thickening and coarseness of the human soul, so that it would closely approach the nature of the animal soul which resided in what we ate... [Ramban on Lev. 17:11]

You can acquire bad animal traits from their blood:

Eating blood... makes us acquire wicked traits. When a man consumes, from an animal physically similar to him, the very thing on which his life depends and to which his soul is connected [blood], [he acquires his traits]. [Sefer HaChinuch, 148 (13th century Spain); also Ramban on Lev. 17:11]

Some scientific evidence of that exists.

## **4-A fortiori argument:**

Rashi: By choosing the easiest commandment to observe and saying we must “strengthen” ourselves to observe it, how much more so must we strengthen ourselves to observe all other commandments.

[Rashi on Deut. 12:23, attributing it to Shim'on ben Azzai ]

## **5-Idolaters used to drink blood**

...They killed a beast, received the blood in a vessel..., and ate of the flesh of that beast, while sitting around the blood. They imagined that in this manner the spirits would come to partake of the blood, which was their food... then the spirits would appear to them in dreams, inform them of coming events, and be favorable to them. Such ideas people liked and accepted in those days; they were general, and their correctness was not doubted by any one of the common people.

The Law, which is perfect in the eyes of those who know it, and seeks to cure mankind of these lasting diseases, forbade the eating of blood, and emphasized the prohibition exactly in the same terms as it emphasizes idolatry:

I will set my face against that soul who eats blood. [Lev. 17:10]  
The same language is employed in reference to idolatry:  
Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and  
will cut him off, and all who play the harlot after him, to commit  
whoredom with Molech, from among their people. [Lev. 20:5]  
There is, besides idolatry and eating blood, no other sin in reference to  
which these words are used. For the eating of blood leads to a kind of  
idolatry, to the worship of spirits. [Maimonides, Guide 3:46]

## **6-Concession to man:**

Mankind was vegetarian at first:

And God said: Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed which is  
upon the face of all the earth, and every tree that has seed-yielding fruit --  
to you it shall be for food. [Gen.1:29]

then after Flood was allowed to eat meat. Is vegetarianism the ideal?

-God had to compromise to make it easier to accept Torah at the time.  
People wanted meat:

And the people of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us  
meat to eat?.. And Moses said to the Lord... From where should I have  
meat to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying, Give us meat,  
that we may eat. [Numbers 11:4-13]

Even the Sages had a saying:

*En simcha ella be-bassar ve-yayin*

There is no rejoicing except with meat and wine. [based on Pesachim 109a]

Many such compromises were later withdrawn (effectively, although  
not literally) or strongly discouraged by the rabbis, for various reasons:  
Polygamy, slavery, animal sacrifices, death penalty, mandatory  
levirate marriage, sotah, Nazirite vows, astrology, mandatory  
repaying of debts on seventh year, killing Amalekites, etc.

➔ **Will prohibiting meat be next?**

-God gave permission to eat meat temporarily because after the flood,  
all plant life had been destroyed. [Rabbi Isaak Hebenstreit, Graves of Lust (Hebrew),  
(Rzeszow, Poland, 1929), p 6. ]

Permission to eat meat was a temporary concession:

-The Torah teaches a lesson in moral conduct, that man shall not eat meat  
unless he has a special craving for it... [and shall eat it only occasionally  
and sparingly]. [Chullin 84a]

-The latent aspiration of justice for the animal kingdom [will] come out into  
the open, when the time is ripe. [Rav Kook (1865-1935), first Chief Rabbi of pre-  
state Israel, Tallelei Orot (Dewdrops of Light), cited by Leibowitz, Studies in Deuteronomy,  
p 138.]

-Eating meat was a concession conditional on the prohibition of eating blood, an allusion to the fact that in reality all meat should have been prohibited. This partial prohibition was designed to call to mind the previously total one. [Rabbi Moses Cassuto, quoted by Leibowitz, Studies in Bereshit, p 77. ]

**In the days of the Messiah people will again be vegetarians.** [Rabbi Isaac Arama, 15th-century Spain; Rav Kook, 20th-century Israel; Rabbi Alfred Cohen, "Vegetarianism from a Jewish Perspective," Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, Vol. 1, No. II, Fall 1981]

Since ALL blood cannot be removed from meat, does the commandment equate with “don't eat meat”? [Halacha: remaining blood is not blood.]

Kashering meat is hard. Is that a hint to become vegetarian?

Vegetarians live longer: In vegetarian period (Adam to Noah), Adam lived 930 years; his son Seth 912 years; his son Enosh 905 years; his son Enosh 910 years; until Methuselah, 969 years, the longest in Torah.

[They] lived so long [because of] their food or mode of living...

[Maimonides, Guide 2:47]

After the flood, people died younger (Abraham, 175 years).

2013 study shows this effect, but on much smaller scale: 12.5% reduction in mortality rate.

Shabbat shalom.