

Parshat Tzav 5779

V'chol dom lo sochlu b'chol moshvoseichem lo'oaf v'labeheimoh. You shall not consume any blood, in any of your dwelling places, whether from fowl or from animals. (*Vayikro 7:26*)

The above *posuk* is the source of this well-known and serious prohibition, (deliberate) contravention being punishable by *koreis* (7:27). This piece will briefly note some *halachic* considerations and explore further its stated reasoning (unique amongst the laws of *kashrus*), that the life-force (literally the soul) of the animal is contained within the blood and that *HaShem* has assigned it to the *mizbeach*, to atone for our souls (through the system of *korbonos*) (17:11).

- Initially, the *shechitah* process itself results in rapid draining of most of the blood, but the remainder must be removed either by broiling or by soaking and salting. Liver may only be *kashered* by the broiling method, because it has so much blood in it and such complex blood vessels.
- We need to be mindful of and check for blood spots in eggs.
- The blood of kosher fish (and locusts, when and where otherwise deemed kosher) is permissible. As for human blood, this is forbidden but on a *drabonon* rather than a *doraiso* level.

According to Rav SR Hirsch, the blood, which is present throughout the body, is the visible messenger of the soul, which is also present throughout and controls the body but cannot be seen. It is fitting, therefore, that the blood as the visible substance representing the soul, should be used in the offerings, symbolising the elevation, devotion and adherence of the soul to *HaShem*.

He further suggests that the purpose of this prohibition seems to be not only to counteract the harmful illusion – which might be encouraged by the symbolism inherent in the offerings – that the animal soul is identical with that of a human being, but also to avert a physical threat to the spiritual character of man. The prohibition of consuming blood and the severe consequences of contravention are emphatically reiterated in *Parshiyos Acharei Mos* (17:10-12) and *Re'eh* (*Devorim* 12:23-25), with expressions that include, “I will direct my face against the soul consuming the blood...”; “Only remain firm not to eat the blood...”; and “Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you...”. Such expressions seem to indicate that the consumption of animal blood could endanger a human being, or at least so corrupt his nature, that it could prevent him from attaining the high moral level required by the *Torah*.

The view of *Rambam* in his *Moreh Nevuchim* is that the prohibition against consuming blood is meant to wean *B'nei Yisroel* from idolatry, which in those days was linked to blood. The language of the first of the expressions stated above is only found elsewhere regarding the practice of idolatry.

Ramban presents several possible rationales for not consuming blood. In his third and main approach, *Ramban* delves into *Sefer Bereishis*, pointing out that originally, *HaShem* only permitted man to eat vegetation and not animals. After the flood, in the merit of *Noach* who had saved the animals from extinction and then offered a sacrifice of them, *HaShem* permitted the eating of meat. He writes “Now, He permitted the body (of animals), which is alive on account of man, to be used for man’s benefit and needs, and He ordained that the soul (within the animals) was to be used for the atonement of man, through being offered before *HaShem* rather than it being eaten. For it is not proper that one living soul (man) should consume another soul (blood of an animal), for (alluding to *Ezekiel* 18:4) ‘all souls belong to *HaShem*; behold the soul of man and the soul of an animal belong to *HaShem*’”.

Ramban then proceeds to elaborate on the idea that the soul of an animal is not so dissimilar to that of man, for which reason it is forbidden to eat the life-force (blood) of an animal. Like human beings, animals have the sense to flee from danger and to seek that which is pleasurable for them; they have the capacity to recognise and to love not only those to whom they are accustomed, such as the love of dogs for their masters, but also others known to their masters. In a final and contrasting approach, *Ramban* suggests that if animal blood is mixed with our blood, there would develop a thickness and coarseness (insensitivity) in the soul of a man who ate it, such that his soul would become similar to that of the animal, since (unlike other foods) blood does not require digestion and thus does not change and hence the soul of the person eating the blood would become joined with the blood of the animal, affecting the person’s very being. For this reason, the *Torah* writes, “for the soul of all flesh (man or animal) is its blood” (17:14) and it is improper to mix the soul that is ultimately cut off (animal) with the eternal soul (man).

In summary, the *Torah* and it’s stated reasoning for not consuming blood, transcends all, whether our souls are similar to or very different from those of animals. However, only man recognises his Creator and proper Jewish observance demands a level of *kedusha*, that can only be achieved by man rising above any animal instincts and instead conducting himself as a *mensch*.