



DIVREI MENACHEM

BY MENACHEM PERSOFF

Special Projects Consultant, OU Israel Center
mpersoff@ou.org

Blood: Food for Thought?

Our Parsha proclaims that we shall not consume blood in any of our dwelling places. And if so, that person's soul shall be cut off from its people (Vayikra 7:26). However, we know that sprinkling blood on the altar was a significant part of the fulfillment of bringing sacrifices to Hashem.

So, what is Judaism's attitude towards blood? The Torah (Devarim 12:23) supplies the answer succinctly: "...for the blood is the life – and you may not eat the life with the flesh."

We tend to think of eating blood as barbaric. We conjure up images of Dracula. Or we recall idol worshippers sitting around eating sacrifices to their gods while leaving the blood for the spirits with whom they wished to commune (Rambam: *Guide to the Perplexed*). Notably, having been exposed to such practices during their slavery, Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness was only allowed to partake of meat that was part of peace-offerings brought to the Mishkan.

Rambam remarks that only concerning idol worship and the consumption of blood does Hashem employ such a harsh phrase as, "I shall set my face against that man (Vayikra

20:4-5). Why so? Because in Halachah, blood is pure. No wonder, for example, that when a Jewish woman has a discharge, she becomes ritually impure. The lost blood is symbolic of the lost potential for life.

In contrast to the barbaric ritual, in our biblical tradition, pure blood was a means of purifying other objects by its touch. For instance, Aharon became hallowed by the sprinkling of blood upon his garments. Furthermore, the sprinkling of blood on the altar "made an atonement for your souls" (Vayikra 17:11).

It appears, therefore, that in Judaism, not only does the prohibition against eating blood eradicate the heathen practice, but also the employment of blood in ritual bestows positive spiritual energy. Indeed, for Ramban (cited by Nechama Leibowitz), blood is not the soul, *per se*. "The blood bears the spirit of life. Blood is the instrument of the soul through which it carries out its activities" (David Hoffman). As such, blood is not to be abused.

This worldview was extended by Rav Kook, who frowned upon meat-eaters in general – for even the souls of animals ultimately belong to God. "Food for thought!" ■

Shabbat Shalom

Vechag Kasher VeSame'ach.

Menachem Persoff