



RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL - BAKA, JERUSALEM

Covering the Blood

In *Parashat Tzav*, we are reintroduced to a prohibition already mentioned in the previous *parashah*, *Parashat Vayikra*: not to consume the blood of an animal. The Torah commanded us “do not consume any blood” (Leviticus 3:17), and now it adds that the prohibition applies to birds and animals alike, and that the transgression is subject to the very severe punishment of *karet*, spiritual excision (Leviticus 7:26-27). And this is not the last we hear of this prohibition in the Torah. Why does the Torah give so much focus to something from which we naturally recoil?

The Rambam posited that there is nothing natural about it. Eating or not eating blood is culturally conditioned. In pagan antiquity, common wisdom had it that consuming animal blood enabled one to commune with spirits and learn the future from them.

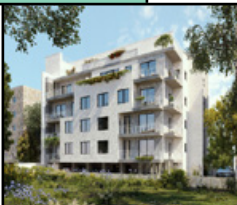


Characteristic of his overall approach to many mitzvot, the Rambam reasoned that this precept was designed to combat that idolatrous practice so prevalent in the biblical era and beyond. “The Torah, which is perfect in the eyes of those who know it, sought to cure mankind of these lasting diseases and forbade the consumption of blood.”¹

The other celebrated Moshe of the era, the Ramban, often took issue with the Rambam’s historicization of the mitzvot. In this case, he believed that the reason for the prohibition can be gleaned from the verses themselves: “Only be strong not to eat the blood, because the blood is the soul” (Deuteronomy 12:23), and “I shall turn My countenance to the person who eats the blood... because the soul of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:10-11). The Torah locates the animal’s soul in the blood. This soul explains why the animal has “the sense to flee from danger, follow pleasure, recognize familiars and love them like dogs love their owners.” All souls ultimately belong to God, and therefore we may not consume it. At most, it can be put to human use by having the blood atone for people on the altar.²

Fantastic Rechavia Sale!

6 rooms on one level,
plus 30m balconies
(succah), parking,
storeroom, exit to
garden, potential to
extend to 190m!
8.5 mil NIS



Hellen Duman Realty

054-462-9963 | www.hellenrealestate.com

1. *Moreh Nevuchim*, III:46.

2. See Ramban on Leviticus 17:11.

This helps explain why we cover the blood of undomesticated animals and birds. The Sages say that after Kayin murdered Hevel in an unpopulated world, it was the birds and wild animals that covered his body with earth, preserving his human dignity through burial. For this they were rewarded with having their own blood covered after slaughter accompanied by a blessing.³ Animals exhibit emotional awareness, and in this case responded to the death of a human being. The covering of the blood is equated with the respect for life and the sanctity of all living beings. When we cover the blood of an animal, we are also expressing tenderness and respect for a life taken away.

Abarbanel followed in the footsteps of the Ramban and added that even when Noach and his sons were permitted to eat animals, they were forbidden from eating *ever min ha-chai*, a limb from a live animal. A limb severed prior to slaughter is forbidden to all human beings—not just Jews—because its consumption expresses heartlessness with respect to the animal. From this, Abarbanel extrapolates that eating blood is a show of contempt for the animal’s life: “And if a person eats the meat and the blood, it would be as though he ate a limb from a live animal, as though he ate a live animal with its soul as if it were alive, which is something very disgraceful.”⁴

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook joined his predecessors and added a further contemplative layer with an eye towards the future. In an ideal world, humanity would be vegetarian, and humanity would live in harmony with animals. But reality is imperfect, so Judaism permits eating meat. Even so,

3. *Genesis Rabbah*, 22:8.

4. Abarbanel on Deuteronomy 12:20.

humanity must remember that this situation is not ideal. In that spirit, Rav Kook thought that we cover the blood to symbolically hide our shame. Our unhealthy desire for meat and our spiritual weakness has led us to extinguish a life to satisfy a primal desire. Deep down, we hope that one day we will possess greater sensitivity and compassion. The intricate laws surrounding kosher slaughter are not only in place to ensure a swift and merciful end; they serve as reminders “that we are not dealing with a free resource that is merely an automaton, but a sensate, living animal.”⁵ They make us conscious of our fallen state, bringing us back to the beginning of time when animals were not permitted for man’s consumption. ■

5. *Chazon ha-Tzimchonut ve-ha-Shalom*, ch. 11.

Rabbi Goldscheider is the author of the newly published book ‘Torah United’ (OU Press), featuring divrei Torah on the weekly parasha from Rav Kook, Rabbi Solovetichik, and the Chassidic Masters.

TRANSFER YOUR OLD FILM/VIDEO's
(All formats) In Quality to Digital
 Preserve Family History from Fading

Michael 052.286.8626
 Photography with feeling
[Facebook.com/L'Dorot Photography](https://www.facebook.com/L'DorotPhotography)

Pesach & year round kitchen kashering

 ☎ 058-4140781
 📞 026431427
 KASHER ME NOW