

Prohibition of Blood

Introduction

This topic has not yet undergone editorial review

Multiple Mentions

The prohibition of blood is repeated multiple times in Torah: in Vayikra 3:17 and Vayikra 7:26-27 in the context of the *Korban Shelamim* and laws of fat, in Vayikra 17 and Devarim 12 when speaking of the obligation to sacrifice in the Mikdash and the laws of meat eaten for pleasure (בשר תאוה),¹ and in Devarim 15:23 in connection with the laws of blemished firstborns.² Two other verses, as well, might allude to the ban, though these are less explicit and open to interpretation. In Bereshit 9:4, Hashem commands Noach, "לא תאכלו על הדם" and in Vayikra 19:26, the nation is commanded, "אף בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו".³

This seven-fold repetition of the prohibition suggests that Torah views the consumption of blood as a very severe offense. What, though, is problematic about the deed? Why is blood off limits to man?

Multiple Explanations

Vayikra 17 contains the most elaborate discussion of the issue, including a multi-faceted explanation for the prohibition:

(י) ואיש איש מבית ישראל ומן הגר הגר בתוכם אשר יאכל כל דם ונתתי פני בנפש האכלת את הדם והקרתי אתה מקרב עמה. (יא) כי נפש הבשר בדם הוא ואני נתתי לכם על המזבח לכפר על נפשתיכם כי הדם הוא בנפש יכפר. (יב) על כן אמרתי לבני ישראל כל נפש מכם לא תאכל דם והגר הגר בתוכם לא יאכל דם.

These verses make three points about blood, implying that each plays some role in the reason for the prohibition: it is home to the animal's soul ("נפש הבשר בדם הוא"), it is sprinkled on the altar ("ואני נתתי לכם על"), and it atones ("כי הדם הוא בנפש יכפר").

- What is the relationship between these factors? Are these distinct reasons for the prohibition of blood, or do the various points complement and explain each other? If the latter, which is the primary concern that leads to the ban?
- What is the import of the fact that "נפש הבשר בדם הוא", and why should this forbid its consumption?⁴
- Why is it that blood specifically was chosen both to be dedicated to Hashem and to atone, and how might this relate to the reason for the prohibition? Moreover, if the prohibition stems from the role played by blood in the sacrificial service, why is the ban not limited to the blood of animals fit for sacrifice?⁵

The Larger Context

How might the differing contexts of the various directives regarding blood shed light on the prohibition?

- Bereshit 9:4 –The command to Noach is sandwiched between the directive that he may eat meat and the prohibition against murder. Does this imply that the prohibition is a direct outgrowth of the

permissibility to eat meat?⁶ Moreover, does the placement suggest that the consumption of blood is viewed as being somewhat comparable to the act of murder?

- Vayikra 3:17 and Vayikra 7:26 – Does the juxtaposition of the prohibition of blood and fat in these chapters suggest that the two share a common reasoning?
- Vayikra 17⁷ – The first half of Vayikra 17 discusses the Wilderness period prohibition to slaughter meat for food if not part of the sacrificial service (בשר תאוה)⁸ and the prohibition to sacrifice to Hashem outside of the Mikdash (שחטי חוץ). The verses explain that this was instituted so that the people not sacrifice to demons, and transgressors are compared to those who spill blood. How might these laws and reasoning bear on the prohibition to eat blood?
- Vayikra 19:26 – Finally, the prohibition, "לא תאכלו על הדם" in Vayikra 19 is followed by a warning against divination. Might this suggest that the ban regarding blood, too, is connected to magical practices?

Sprinkling, Covering or Spilling?

The Torah mandates three distinct practices of what should be done with the prohibited blood of slaughtered animals. Blood of sacrificial animals is sprinkled on the altar, blood of non-domesticated animals, not fit to be sacrificed, is covered, and, finally, the blood of domesticated animals slaughtered for food is simply spilled on the ground. What accounts for the difference in law? Why is it only non-domesticated animals whose blood is covered? What is the goal of this practice regardless?⁹

¹ See the discussion in the bullet below that not all agree that Vayikra 17 refers to בשר תאוה.

² Hashem warns that though a blemished first born might be eaten, its blood may not be consumed.

³ As mentioned, not all understand these verses to refer to the prohibition to eat blood. Bavli Sanhedrin 59a (and many in its wake) assume that the verse in Bereshit refers, instead, to eating the limb of a live animal, and many read the verse in Vayikra 19 literally to refer to eating a meal on or around blood, but not to eating the blood itself.

⁴ In connecting blood to the soul, is Torah suggesting that blood represents the animal's vitality or its inner nature? If the former, does this imply that eating blood is akin to murder? If so, though, why is it that blood is prohibited but slaughtering an animal is permitted?

⁵ Why is the blood of non-domesticated animals, blemished firstborns, and animals slaughtered for food also banned?

⁶ This, in part, depends on whether or not one assumes that Noach was the first to be permitted to eat meat or if this was already allowed to Adam. See Permission to Eat Meat for various positions.

⁷ The context of the prohibition in Devarim 12 is similar. It, too, speaks of the need to sacrifice only "in the place which Hashem will choose" and of the laws of eating meat for pleasure. In contrast to Vayikra 17, however, it allows slaughter of meat for pleasure even without a sacrifice, but only after the nation arrives in Israel.

⁸ Not all understand the chapter in this manner. See Rashi on Vayikra 17:3, "במוקדשין הכתוב מדבר" and R. Akiva in Sifre Devarim 12:20 and Bavli Chulin 16b-17a. According to these opinions, the chapter does not speak of בשר תאוה (meat slaughtered for food outside the sacrificial service) at all (which might never have been prohibited), and refers only to animals being offered as a sacrifice.

⁹ If this is a preventative measure to ensure that blood is not consumed, should not such a measure be equally necessary for domesticated animals?

Prohibition of Blood

Exegetical Approaches

This topic has not yet undergone editorial review

Overview

Various reasons have been offered for the prohibition of blood. Many sources focus on the fact that blood represents the animal's life force and how its consumption both demonstrates and invites cruelty. Eating the source of an animal's very vitality reflects a disregard for the sanctity of life and portrays callousness. Ramban adds that consuming an animal's blood is further dangerous to the individual himself, as the human soul will imbibe the negative characteristics of the animal soul.

Others focus not on how eating blood impacts man's behavior and nature, but its role in the worship of Hashem. Ibn Ezra claims that blood is off limits to man because it is dedicated to the altar and forms Hashem's portion of the sacrifice. R. D"Z Hoffmann, instead, points to the role played by blood in attaining atonement, pointing out that it would be inappropriate to consume that which aids one in achieving forgiveness. Finally, Rambam asserts that the prohibition is one of many aimed at distancing man from idolatrous practices. As idolators would consume blood in an effort to divine the future, we are prohibited from doing so.

Blood is the Soul

Blood is prohibited from consumption because blood is symbolic of the animal's soul and life force. This position subdivides regarding why this is problematic:

Sacredness of Life

Refraining from eating blood, representative of an animal's vitality and soul, reminds one of the sanctity of all life. Eating it both demonstrates and invites cruelty.

SOURCES: Jubilees, Josephus, Ramban #2,¹ Sefer HaChinukh,² Abarbanel #3,³ Keli Yekar, Shadal,⁴ R. D"Z Hoffmann #2,⁵ R. Kook

"כי הדם הוא הנפש" – These sources point to this phrase as the basis for the prohibition.⁶ They offer a variety of explanations as to the import of the fact that "blood is the soul":

- **Similar to murder** – Jubilees, drawing off the juxtaposition of the prohibitions regarding blood and murder in Bereshit 9:4-6, repeatedly links the two prohibitions,⁷ implying that the former is forbidden because it, too, is similar to taking a life. Eating of an animal's blood/soul is like destroying its very vitality.⁸
- **Similar to eating of a living being** – Abarbanel likens the prohibition to that of "אבר מן החי", suggesting that eating flesh and blood is like eating of an animal while it is still alive. Shadal similarly suggests that the prohibition is aimed at preventing man from eating blood when it is still hot and flowing from the animal, "an act of immense cruelty".⁹

"וְאֵי נִתְּתִיו לָכֶם עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֵׁיכֶם" – According to this approach, these words do not comprise the reason for the prohibition, but rather serve to complement it. The principle of the sanctity of life mandates that one not only refrain from eating blood, but also that one try to elevate any blood that has been spilled. As such, the blood of sacrificed animals is sprinkled on the altar and used for atonement.¹⁰

Covering blood – When it is not possible to sanctify the blood, as when a non-domesticated animal not fit to be sacrificed is killed, Hashem commands that the blood be covered instead. It is possible that this, too, is related to recognition of the sanctity of the animal's life and the cruelty inherent in taking it.

- In covering the blood, one admits to a degree of discomfort with the killing of animals and a recognition that though the deed is permitted, it should not be flaunted.¹¹
- Rosenmuller (as brought by Shadal) suggests that covering the blood is a sign of respect, meant to ensure that this life source is not eaten even by animals.¹²
- Sefer HaChinukh adds that eating while seeing the spilled soul of the animal in front of one leads the viewer to cruelty.¹³

It is not clear, though, according to any of these explanations, why there is no equivalent obligation to also cover the blood of domesticated animals eaten for pleasure (בשר תאוה).¹⁴

Scope of the prohibition – According to this approach, it is logical that the prohibition extends to all animals. In fact, the Dead Sea Sect¹⁵ and Karaites maintain that even the blood of fish is prohibited.¹⁶

Context of Vayikra 17 – The first part of Chapter 17 mandates that, in the Wilderness Period,¹⁷ slaughtering animals for food was permitted only if the animal was brought as a sacrifice,¹⁸ and that transgression of this directive was considered spilling blood. According to this approach, then, both halves of the chapter revolve around the same theme, the restrictions put on animal slaughter due the sanctity of animal life.¹⁹ Though an animal can be killed for food, wherever possible this must be done in a way that sanctifies the life taken, with the animal being offered as a sacrifice and its blood sprinkled on the altar.²⁰

Prohibition to Noach – Jubilees, Josephus, and Ramban all understand the prohibition to Noach of "אַךְ בִּשְׂרָאֵי הַבְּהֵמָה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ" to refer to eating blood. As soon as Hashem allowed consumption of animals,²¹ He simultaneously added the restriction that though the flesh may be eaten, the blood, symbolic of the soul, may not.²²

Connection to fat – According to this approach, despite the juxtaposition in the verses, the reasons for the prohibitions of fat and blood are distinct.

Repetition and severity of the punishment – Torah's manifold warning against eating blood and the severity of the punishment is understood in light of this position's viewing it as akin to murder.²³

"לִמְעַן יִטֵּב לָךְ" – R. D"Z Hoffmann points to this reward as evidence that the prohibition is connected to prevention of cruelty. He notes that the phrase "לִמְעַן יִטֵּב לָךְ" is found by only three specific commandments,²⁴ the prohibition regarding blood, the directive to honor one's parents, and the obligation to send away a mother bird before taking her chicks. Since the latter two cases involve acts of kindness and giving to another, R. Hoffmann suggests that there must be an element of kindness or preventing of cruelty in the fulfillment of the prohibition regarding blood as well.

"**לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל הַדָּם**" – These sources might view this as a distinct prohibition, related to the ban on eating blood only in that it, too, relates to recognition of blood as representative of life. Bavli Sanhedrin learns from the verse both that one cannot eat of even a properly slaughtered animal until its life has totally departed and that if a court sentences someone to death, the judges may not eat on the day of the execution. Each of these prohibitions, like that of eating blood, relates to the sanctity of life, both human and animal.



Mixing of Animal and Human Nature

Ingesting an animal's blood/soul introduces animal-like characteristics into the human soul.

SOURCES: Ibn Ezra,²⁵ Ramban #3, Sefer Hachinukh,²⁶ Ralbag #3,²⁷ Akeidat Yitzchak, Abarbanel #2,²⁸ Sforno #2,²⁹ Or HaChayyim, R. Hirsch, Netziv³⁰

"**כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ**" – These sources point to this phrase as the basis for the prohibition. Ramban explains that an animal's blood/soul, as opposed to its flesh, can easily mingle with human blood.³¹ Thus, if the blood is consumed, the human soul will imbibe the negative characteristics of the animal soul.

Spiritual or physical danger

- **Spiritual** – Most of these sources speak of the detrimental effects animal blood will have on humans in the spiritual realm, understanding that the blood will affect the human soul itself, introducing ugliness and lowering it to the level of animal.
- **Physical** – Ralbag,³² in contrast, asserts that the blood affects one on a physical level. Ingesting blood is difficult on the digestive system and harmful to the body.³³
- **Both** – Sefer HaChinukh combines these approaches, noting that blood is detrimental to the body, but since the body is the platform for the soul, when the body is harmed, the soul is affected as well.

"**וְאֵיךְ נִתְּתִיו לָכֶם עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל נִפְשֵׁיכֶם**" – According to R. Hirsch, the role played by blood in atonement is not a distinct reason for the prohibition, but integrally related to the need to prevent man from becoming animal-like. He explains that the fact that animal blood stands in for the human soul on the altar could have potentially led one to conclude that the human and animal souls are equal and that the latter is not harmful. To ensure that man recognize that this is not true, Hashem prohibited ingesting blood, announcing that the two are qualitatively different and that animal blood has no place in man.³⁴

Covering versus spilling blood – These sources offer two (opposing) explanations for the difference in law between domesticated and undomesticated animals:

- **Blood more harmful** – Netziv suggests that it is specifically the blood of wild animals which is covered since it is these animals who have the worst traits. Their blood, untamed and wild, deserves to be scorned and hidden from view.³⁵
- **Blood less harmful** – Akeidat Yitzchak, in contrast, suggests that the thinner blood of undomesticated animals might have led people to be less cautious in refraining from eating it, assuming that such blood is less likely to harm. As such, a greater reminder was needed to show that it, too, is prohibited.

Scope of the prohibition – According to this approach, it is expected that the prohibition should relate to all animals, as all might introduce undesired qualities.³⁶

Prohibition to Noach

- According to Ibn Ezra, eating blood was already prohibited to Noach. When Hashem allowed meat to be eaten, He already prohibited its blood, knowing that its consumption is detrimental.
- Sforno, in contrast, assumes that the command to Noach relates only to eating a limb or blood of a live animal. Only the chosen Children of Israel were directed not to eat blood of even dead animals so as to protect their souls from absorbing any animalistic tendencies.

Parallels to fat and other forbidden foods – Sefer HaChinukh compares the prohibition of blood to other forbidden foods such as non-kosher animals or fat, maintaining that all are prohibited since they are harmful to the body or soul. [For elaboration, see Purpose of the Laws of Kashrut.]

"**לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל הַדָּם**" – According to this approach, this prohibition and its context of sorcery is unconnected to that of eating blood.

Repetition and severity of the punishment – The repeated warnings against ingesting blood might stem from the significant harm it can potentially cause the human soul.³⁷



Sanctified to Hashem

Since the blood of animals is thrown on the altar and sanctified to Hashem, it is not fit for human consumption.

SOURCES: Ibn Ezra, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor,³⁸ Ramban #1, Ralbag #2, Abarbanel #1, R. Avraham Saba, Netziv, R. David Zvi Hoffmann #1³⁹

"**וְאֵיךְ נִתְּתִיו לָכֶם עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֵׁיכֶם**" – This verse forms the basis for this approach, but commentators focus on different aspects of it, leading to two related, but somewhat distinct understandings of the prohibition:

- **Apportioned to Hashem** – According to Ibn Ezra, R"Y Bekhor Shor, and Ramban, the crucial point of the verse is that the blood is dedicated to the altar.⁴⁰ Blood is off limits to man because it is Hashem's portion of the sacrifice (חלק גבוה).
- **Role in atonement** – Ralbag, Abarbanel, and R. Hoffmann, instead, focus on the blood's role in atonement.
 - R. Hoffmann explains that if the animal's blood is supposed to represent and substitute for the sinner's soul, being sacrificed in the sinner's stead, it is inappropriate for it to be consumed.⁴¹
 - Ralbag adds that Hashem wanted to ensure that man recognize the atoning powers of blood so that he feel that his sacrifice was effective in achieving penance. As such, Hashem prohibited its consumption, highlighting its unique role.⁴²

"**כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ**" – According to this approach, this phrase comes to explain not why it is prohibited to eat blood, but why blood was chosen to serve as atonement and is sprinkled on the altar. Since blood represents or is the source of the animal's soul, it can represent man's soul and act as its substitute on the altar.

Why is blood of non-sacrificial meat prohibited? As only the blood of domesticated animals being offered as a sacrifice is sanctified to Hashem and used for atonement, this approach must explain why blood of "בשר" (meat eaten for pleasure) and non domesticated animals and birds are also prohibited:

- **Safeguard** – Ramban suggests that this is simply a safeguard to ensure that no one err and eat the blood of animals which can be sacrificed.
- **Distinct prohibition** – R"Y Bekhor Shor and the Netziv,⁴³ though, concede that this reasoning cannot account for the prohibition regarding non-domesticated animals and suggest that they are prohibited for other reasons.⁴⁴

Spilling versus covering blood – These sources explain that since the blood of non-domesticated animals is not sprinkled on the altar, it was necessary to institute a different reminder that it is prohibited to eat of it and thus it is covered. No such reminder is necessary for domesticated animals eaten for pleasure, since those animals are associated with sacrifices and it is known that their blood in general serves to atone on the altar (even if in this particular instance the animal is being eaten).⁴⁵

Prohibition to Noach – If the prohibition of blood is related to the sacrificial service and atonement, one might question why Noach was already commanded, "אך בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו" (Bereshit 9:4), centuries before the service was instituted:

- **Different prohibition** – Most of these sources follow Bavli Sanhedrin 59a and assume that the prohibition to Noach did not refer to eating blood but rather to eating a limb from a live animal (אבר מן החי).
- **Blood sacred even then** – Ibn Ezra and Ramban, in contrast, understand that blood was already prohibited to Noach. If so, perhaps from the very first sacrifices brought by man, blood was already allotted to Hashem and not to man.⁴⁶

Connection to fat – Ibn Ezra, R"Y Bekhor Shor, and Ramban assume that the two prohibitions share a single explanation; both fat and blood are Hashem's portion and therefore prohibited to man.⁴⁷ It is for this reason that the two prohibitions are often mentioned together.

Biblical parallels – R"Y Bekhor Shor compares the prohibition regarding blood to several other commandments which similarly stem from the fact that an object is sanctified to Hashem. He points to the prohibitions of making incense and the anointing oil or wearing wool and linen (a mixture reserved for priestly garments)⁴⁸, pointing out that in all these cases "דהוה ליה כמשמש בשרביטו של מלך ואסור", it is as if one is using the scepter of the king and is prohibited.

General view of sacrifices – Ramban's understanding that the prohibition of blood is related to an inherently positive act, its being dedicated to Hashem, is consistent with his approach to sacrifices as a whole which he similarly views as inherently valuable and not instituted only to negate negative practices or beliefs. See Purpose of the Sacrifices for elaboration.

"לא תאכלו על הדם" – These sources suggest that this is a distinct prohibition and says nothing about not eating blood itself. Most, looking to the verse's immediate context of sorcery, relate it to idolatrous divination practices in which blood of an animal was spilled and a meal was eaten in the belief that this would invite

demons who could foretell the future. This, however, has nothing to do with the general prohibition of eating blood.



Distancing from Idolatry

Consuming blood is prohibited since it is related to idolatrous practices.

SOURCES: Rambam, Ralbag #1, Sforno, Shadal #2⁴⁹

Connection between blood and Idolatry – Rambam explains that idolaters would eat blood, believing it to be the nourishment of demons and that by participating with them in a meal, the demons would divine the future for them.

"לא תאכלו על הדם" – This approach suggests that the two prohibitions are intricately related. Rambam explains that those idolaters who found eating blood abhorrent would instead spill it into a vessel, eat around it, and invite the demons to the shared meal. Thus, it is prohibited not only to eat blood, but also to eat "on blood". The ending of the verse, "לא תנהשו ולא תעוננו", supports this reading as it, too, speaks of divination practices.

Context in Vayikra 17 – One of the advantages of this understanding is that it connects the two prohibitions of Vayikra 17, giving a common explanation for both. The first half of the chapter deals with the prohibition of slaughtering and sacrificing outside of the Mikdash, with the reason given being, "ולא יזבחו עוד את זבחיהם" לְשִׁעִירָם, lest the people come to sacrifice to goat-demons. This is parallel to the reason for not eating blood, the subject of the second half of the chapter.

"ונתתי פני בנפש" – Rambam points to the language of the crime's punishment, "ונתתי פני בנפש" (Vayikra 17:10) as further proof of his understanding. The phrase "ונתתי פני בנפש/ באיש" appears only by three prohibitions: blood, necromancy, and worship of the Molekh, implying that the three are related, all being idolatrous in nature.⁵⁰

"ואני נתתיו לכם על המזבח לכפר על נפשתיכם" – This approach suggests that there is nothing intrinsically positive about sprinkling the blood on the altar; this is simply the safeguard to ensure that it not be used for idolatrous purposes. Rambam further suggests that since idolaters viewed the blood as impure, Hashem wanted to disabuse people of this notion (and thus of blood's connection to demons). He, therefore, purified it and gave it a purifying role.⁵¹

Scope of the prohibition – According to this approach, it is logical that the prohibition includes the blood of both sacrificial and non-sacrificial animals as their blood, too, was used for idolatry.

Covering vs. spilling – The blood of non-domesticated animals is not only spilled but also covered to ensure that it is not used to invite demons.⁵² This is more necessary for their blood than for blood of animals eaten for pleasure since the latter were only permitted after arrival in Israel, at which point the lust for blood had mitigated somewhat.⁵³ In addition, demons were believed to reside in the Wilderness and other barren areas, so it was more likely that non-domesticated animals killed in the wild would be used for such purposes than domesticated animals slaughtered in one's yard.

"כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ" – Ramban questions this approach,⁵⁴ pointing out that in explaining the prohibition, the Torah emphasizes the connection between blood and the soul, which this approach ignores. Ritva responds that these words explain why idolaters thought that blood was the food of demons to begin with. It was specifically because of the blood's connection to the soul that they thought that the quasi-spiritual (and basically non-corporeal) demons ate of it.

Prohibition to Noach – One might question this approach from Hashem's prohibition to Noach, "אֶךָ בֶּשֶׂר" (Bereshit 9:4), which appears to prohibit blood even in an era when no idolatry existed.⁵⁵

- This position might respond that this prohibition is related to אבר מן החי rather than to eating blood.
- Ritva, instead, questions the assumption that there was no idolatry in Noach's generation. Even if previous idolaters were wiped out in the flood, Hashem knew that it would not be long before others took their place.

General view of sacrifices – Rambam's approach to this prohibition is in line with his understanding of the sacrificial service as a whole. According to him, sacrifices (like the prohibition of blood) have no inherent value and are commanded only as a means to wean the nation from idolatry. See Purpose of the Sacrifices for elaboration.

"רַק חֲזַק לְבַלְתִּי אֶלֶל הַדָּם" – Devarim 12 warns, "רַק חֲזַק לְבַלְתִּי אֶלֶל הַדָּם". According to this approach there is a need to encourage the people to "be strong" and not eat of the blood since there was a real desire for it.⁵⁶

Connection to fat – Rambam assumes that the prohibition of fat is related to health benefits rather than prevention of idolatry. The prohibitions might, nonetheless, be linked in the verses because blood, according to Rambam, is also somewhat unhealthy (even if this is not the main reason for its ban) or simply because both fat and blood are prohibited foods which happen to be sacrificed on the altar.⁵⁷

Biblical parallels – Rambam is consistent in understanding many laws to be aimed at distancing the nation from idolatry. See, for instance, his understanding of sacrifices, the Mishkan, the laws of hybrids, and Orlah.

Repetition and severity of the punishment – The Torah's many warning against eating blood stem from its connection to idolatry, one of the most serious offenses in Torah.

¹ Ramban also speaks of the blood's detrimental effects on human nature and its being allocated to Hashem as reasons for the prohibition.

² He also cites the Ramban regarding how eating of the animal's soul introduces animalistic traits into the human soul.

³ Abarbanel brings many reasons for the prohibition; this is the third possibility he raises in his commentary on Vayikra 17 and Devarim 12.

⁴ He also connects aspects of the prohibition to idolatrous practices.

⁵ See his comments to Devarim 12. In his commentary on Vayikra 3 and 17, R. Hoffmann also suggests that the prohibition relates to the fact that the blood is sanctified to Hashem.

⁶ Variations of the phrase appear four times in Vayikra 17 (twice in verse 11 and twice in verse 14) and once more in Devarim 12:23, supporting the idea that Torah views this as a central component of the prohibition.

⁷ See Jubilees 6:10-18, 7:37, 42-45, 11:3, and 21:23-24.

⁸ R. Hoffmann elaborates, pointing out that originally man was not meant to eat animals at all. Though this was allowed after the flood, at Sinai, killing animals was once again restricted, permitted only if the animal was being sacrificed to Hashem. Even then, though, Hashem allowed only its meat and not its blood for that would be like eating the animal's very vitality and invite cruelty. See Sefer HaChinukh who similarly makes this last point, "יהיה באכילתו קצת קנין במדת אכזריות שיבלע האדם מבעלי חיים כמותו בגוף, אותו הדבר שבהן, שהחיות". "ממש תלוי עליו, ונפשם נקשרת בו".

⁹ Ramban adds a third point, noting the equal status of all souls. He explains that it is not proper for a "soul to eat a soul" for all souls are somewhat equal and belong to Hashem. [Even if the animal and human soul are qualitatively different, the existence of a soul in a living creature gives them some common status. Both animal and human have the knowledge and choice to run away from what is harmful and chase after that which is good and both have an ability to care for / love those who care for them.] As such, though man has dominion over animals, this is true only so far as its flesh is concerned, not its soul.

¹⁰ One could have alternatively claimed that this is simply the means to ensure that one refrain from eating the blood. Keli Yekar explains that the fact that the blood is given on the altar is itself a reminder that the "blood is the soul". The reason that blood can atone for man is specifically because it can represent man's soul. As such, when a person sees blood play an atoning role, he will automatically recall that blood is the soul and that it is therefore off-limits.

¹¹ Cf. R" Y Grossman, דם ורצח בעלי חיים, who points to the concept, prevalent in Tanakh, that spilled blood cries out for revenge. If covered, though, those cries cannot be heard. [See, for example, Bereshit 4:10, Yechezkel 24:7-8 and Iyyov 16:18.] As such, he suggests that here, too, covering the blood serves to prevent the innocent blood from "crying out" and quiets the call for blame.

¹² Cf. Netziv below who reads the act in the exact opposite manner, suggesting that it is a sign of disrespect and scorn.

¹³ Cf. Hoil Moshe.

¹⁴ The difficulty is highlighted by the fact that Jubilees 7:41-43 and the Dead Sea Sect (Temple Scroll 53:1-6) do mandate the covering of this blood, not differentiating between domesticated and non-domesticated animals.

This might be, in part, what leads Keli Yekar to suggest that the goal of covering the blood of non-domesticated animals is more simply to ensure that it not be eaten. He explains that such a reminder is not necessary for the blood of domesticated animals eaten for pleasure (בשר תאווה) since one understands that such animals are normally fit for sacrificing specifically because "the blood is the soul". As such, even without further signs, one would know to refrain from eating its blood.

¹⁵ See the Damascus Document 12:13 .

¹⁶ This is but one example of the Sectarian tendency towards stringency with regards to the laws of blood. As mentioned in the above bullet, Jubilees and the Temple Scroll also expanded the law of covering blood to include domesticated animals slaughtered for food (בשר תאווה). Jubilees 21:22 further mandates that one who sacrifices must be careful not to stain his body or clothing with the animal's blood. For other examples and possible reasons for this more strict attitude towards blood, see C. Werman, "דין כיסוי דם ואכילתו בהלכה", Tarbiz 63b (1994): 173-183.

¹⁷ Devarim 12 states that when the nation arrives in Israel, and people live at a distance from the Mikdash, non-sacrificial slaughter will be permitted outside the Temple as well. Here, too, the Dead Sea Sect differs from Rabbinic law, minimizing this permission. The Temple Scroll states that only those who live at least a

three day distance from the Mikdash may slaughter outside. This interpretation, too, seems to be motivated by a desire to reduce the killing of animals as much as possible.

¹⁸ This is how R. Yishmael in Bavli Chulin 16b-17a and many commentators in his wake understand the chapter.

¹⁹ This approach would read Vayikra 17:7's statement, "ולא יזבחו עוד את זבחיכם לשעירים", to be a secondary reason for slaughtering in the Mikdash.

²⁰ R. Tamir Granot, "פרשת צו - איסורי הדם בספר ויקרא", suggests that even the final section of the chapter which discusses the impurity incurred by one who eats a non-slaughtered animal (טריפה או נבילה א) also revolves around this theme. He suggests that the act of slaughter permits the consumption of an animal because it causes the blood to leave the animal's body. Such an animal is permitted and does not impart impurity because it contains no remnants of its original vitality. An animal that died of natural causes, in contrast, still has its blood, symbol of its vitality, trapped inside its body, and is therefore both prohibited to eat and a vehicle capable of imparting impurity.

²¹ Ramban, Abarbanel and R. Hoffmann assert that, originally, before the flood, man was not allowed to kill living creatures at all. The prohibition regarding consumption of blood, then, is a direct result of this permit. [See Permission to Eat Meat for various understandings of why (and if) the directive regarding eating meat might have changed.]

²² As mentioned above, this is followed by the injunction against murder, highlighting how Torah views the consumption of blood as similar to taking a life.

²³ See the Damascus Document which claims that one of the reasons that the nation died out in the Wilderness was that they ate blood.

²⁴ It is also mentioned with regards to general fulfillment of the Torah's laws.

²⁵ This is Ibn Ezra's understanding as expressed in his comments to Devarim 12. In his comments to Vayikra 3, in contrast, Ibn Ezra explains that blood is prohibited since it Hashem's portion. It is possible that he differentiates between the reason for the prohibition with regards to domesticated animals (which are fit for sacrificing) and non-domesticated animals (which are not fit for sacrificing). Since the blood of the latter is not allocated to Hashem, there must be a different reason for the prohibition.

²⁶ He assumes that blood is detrimental on both the spiritual and physical level.

²⁷ Ralbag is somewhat exceptional in this category in that he maintains that eating animal blood affects one's physical health rather than a person's spiritual health.

²⁸ Abarbanel brings many reasons for the prohibition; this is the second possibility he raises in his commentary on Vayikra 17 and Devarim 12.

²⁹ He also relates the prohibition to idolatrous practices.

³⁰ Netziv distinguishes between the reason for the prohibition of eating the blood of domesticated and non-domesticated animals and maintains that only the latter is related to the negative effects it will have on man's nature.

³¹ He explains that, being a liquid, it does not require digestion, and so there is no mitigating of the negative qualities held in the blood.

³² See also Rambam who offers this as a secondary reason as to why blood is prohibited.

³³ Abarbanel questions the truth of this assumption, asserting that blood is healthier than the animal's flesh or bones. If the prohibition is focused on health, how is it possible, then, that blood is prohibited while the other parts of the animal are permitted? Elsewhere (in his discussion of the Laws of Kashrut), Abarbanel

questions the approach on more fundamental grounds, claiming that the purpose of Torah is not to teach medicine but rather to instill good character and deeds. As such, it does not make sense that the laws of forbidden foods would have been instituted only for their health advantages. Ralbag might disagree with this basic assumption, claiming that some laws might indeed be utilitarian in nature. [See, for example, his understanding of the laws of Tzara'at.]

³⁴ R. Hirsch notes that blood is not only prohibited to ensure this recognition, but also because it tangibly can affect man's soul, in the manner described above by Ramban.

³⁵ He suggests that this teaches a lesson that all who share such animal characteristics deserve the same.

³⁶ Netziv, though, suggests that Torah is concerned only about consuming the blood of undomesticated animals since it is these who have a wild nature. According to him, the blood of other animals is prohibited for other reasons.

³⁷ According to Ralbag, who speaks only of potential physical harm, it is much less clear why the ban is so severe.

³⁸ He maintains that this only relates to animals which are fit for sacrifices. The blood of such domesticated animals is prohibited for two reasons - its being apportioned to Hashem as atonement and the fact that it is the animal's soul. Non domesticated animals and birds are prohibited only for the second reason.

³⁹ In his comments to Devarim 12 he explain that blood is prohibited also due to the fact that it is an animal's soul.

⁴⁰ The verse's mention of the blood's role in atonement is somewhat secondary, mentioned only to explain why specifically the blood was chosen to be Hashem's portion.

⁴¹ He elaborates that the animal's blood, standing in for the human soul, takes on a somewhat spiritual status. As such, it cannot simply be absorbed by the body, for the physical and spiritual must remain distinct.

⁴² See Purpose of the Sacrifices that Ralbag asserts that people need an active process through which they can feel that their sins are forgiven to enable them to start afresh. Had a person simply confessed his sins or repented in his heart, he would not think that this sufficed to achieve penance, so therefore Hashem provided an active ritual for him to partake in. The sprinkling of blood, and accompanying prohibition of its consumption, is an important part of this process.

⁴³ As many of the other sources here also point to multiple reasons for the prohibition of blood, they might agree.

⁴⁴ R"Y Bekhor Shor suggests that they are forbidden because it is inappropriate to eat the life force of an animal, while Netziv points to the detrimental affects that eating non-domesticated animal blood have on human nature.

⁴⁵ Ramban adds that in the Wilderness period, eating meat for pleasure, not as part of a sacrifice, was prohibited regardless, so the scenario never arose. By the time the nation settled in Israel, there was less of a need for a reminder, as the people were already accustomed to not eating blood.

⁴⁶ Hashem's command comes right after Noach offered his sacrifices, where the text points out that Noach offered only "pure" animals. If so, it is possible that already in his time, there were certain norms regarding sacrificial procedures which might have included allotting the blood to Hashem. It is less likely, though, that there was a concept of blood atonement already in Noach's time. As such, it is those commentators who view the prohibition of blood as being related to atonement who assume that the command to Noach related only to eating a limb from a live animal.

⁴⁷ See Abarbanel Vayikra 3 who suggests that specifically these portions were allotted to Hashem since, being white and red, they aptly represent Hashem's attributes of both mercy and justice. Alternatively, the red blood stands for sin and the white fat for forgiveness.

⁴⁸ See Purpose of the Laws of Hybrids for elaboration.

⁴⁹ This is the first explanation he offers for the command to cover the blood of birds and non-domesticated animals. Though he does not explicitly state that it is also the reason for the initial prohibition of blood, the two would seem to be connected. [He does, however, appear to prefer other reasons for the command.]

⁵⁰ See, though, Giving One's Seed to Molekh, that not all understand this prohibition to relate to idolatry.

⁵¹ See his similar stance regarding the reason for the choice of animals used for sacrifices. Hashem commanded that the nation sacrifice specifically sheep, goats, and cattle since it was these animals who were most revered and worshiped by other nations. Slaughtering these animals as sacrifices served to underscore the impotence of these "gods".

⁵² See above that even those who did not eat the blood themselves would often collect it for demons.

⁵³ Ralbag explains that the desire to eat blood was stronger in the first generation that left Egypt, as they had been accustomed to such practices in Egypt. By the time the nation arrived in Israel and eating meat for pleasure was permitted, there was less of a lust for blood and so less of a need to make a reminder.

⁵⁴ He does not disagree in theory with Rambam, but questions the approach on textual grounds. He writes, "ואלו דברים מיושבים, אבל הכתובים לא יורו כן".

⁵⁵ See Ramban's similar question regarding Rambam's take on sacrifices as a whole. He questions how Ramban can say that the sacrificial service as a whole is a reaction to idolatry if sacrifices were offered already by Kayin and Hevel and Noach, when there was no idolatry to combat.

⁵⁶ See R. Yehuda in the Sifrei and Ramban on Devarim 12:23.

⁵⁷ Ralbag raises two possible reasons for the prohibition of fat, pointing to health benefits and the fact that it is Hashem's portion. As he thinks that these apply to the prohibition of blood as well, according to him it is logical that the two are connected in the verses.

