

Parsha Ponders

Re'eh | August 25, 2022 | 28 Av 5782

A bloody habit¹

רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם כי הדם הוא הנפש ולא-תאכל הנפש עם-הבשר

Be very strong not to eat blood, for blood is the life-source. Don't eat the life-source with the flesh²

The Torah is very redundant when precluding the consumption of blood. It cautions several times against eating it. Our Sages provide different reasons for each of these instances. One interesting occurrence is when the Torah says רק חזק, be very careful and steadfast against its consumption. Rashi brings³ a dispute what this is teaching us. One opinion says that the Jews were steeped in blood, so the Torah has to be extra stern in its prohibition. It would seem then that the Jews at the time of the giving of the Torah were accustomed to excessive consumption of blood. This isn't the case anymore⁴. It would seem the Torah was successful at ridding us of a hazardous lifestyle.

Another opinion says that this stronger expression is to teach us a lesson. If, regarding something as easy to follow as not eating blood, for people are naturally disgusted by it, we are adjured to be extra strong in not eating it, all the more so the rest of the Torah, which isn't as easy to keep, we are to be strong to keep it. At first glance, it sounds like this second opinion argues with the first. It's not that the Jews were addicted to consuming blood. It's not normal for people to lust for blood, and indeed the Torah doesn't think this is a hard *mitzvah* to follow. Rather, it's a prototype for all *mitzvos*, which tend to be harder to observe.

However, we can try to resolve these two opinions into one. The Ramban tells us⁵ that when the Torah is concerned for our observance of consuming blood, it's because the Jews who left Egypt were idol worshippers. Part of their service of their idols was offering the blood of their sacrifices. The Jews were very zealous in their idol worship. Perhaps this that Rashi was referring to when he brought the opinion that the Jews were steeped in blood. Not that they constantly consumed it, but they were frequently involved with it, as a part of their idol worship.

We see then that both opinions can agree with each other why the Torah says רק חזק. Of course, the Jews never had any specific desire to consume blood. It's just that since they were so used to being around blood, the Torah had to make sure they didn't forget themselves and consume it. We can learn a lesson from the Torah's prohibition regarding our service of Hashem. A person should be very careful with Hashem's *mitzvos*. People tend to be disgusted by blood, so it's easy to follow the Torah and stay away from it. Nevertheless, we are warned to be very strong in its observance. *Mitzvah* performance, on the other hand, is something that is very pleasant⁶. All the more so then we should be very careful with its observance.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah](#) to [Deuteronomy 12:23](#)

² [Deuteronomy](#) *loc. cit.*

³ *Ad. loc.*, quoting [Sifrei Devarim](#) § 76

⁴ The *Midrash* says that once the Torah was given, the Jews were no longer steeped in blood. See [Emek HaNetziv](#) *ad. loc.*, who explains why then did the Torah have to be so stern regarding its consumption

⁵ [Ramban](#) to v. 22

⁶ [Proverbs](#) 3:17