



IT'S A BLOODY SHAME! JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND **BLOOD** TRANSFUSIONS

As many people know, Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide typically refuse blood transfusions, although some (those who are fortunate enough to know about the "new" policy) will accept certain blood "fractions." In other words, they will accept fractions of blood, just not *whole* blood.

Dying in their minds is preferable to violating the Watchtower's interpretation of the scriptures regarding this matter. Disobeying can result in disfellowshipping/ excommunication and shunning by beloved Jehovah Witness family members.

Is it courageous to let a family member die by refusing them a blood transfusion? When I was a Jehovah Witness child, one of my biggest fears was that I'd someday be in an accident and my father would have to summon the courage to challenge my Jehovah Witness mother and the elders to allow me to have a blood transfusion in order to save my life. My dad wasn't a full-fledged Jehovah's Witness (i.e., baptized), so I always secretly hoped he would come to my rescue, but I wasn't confident he could.

Two years after I left the religion and moved to Colorado, I confronted him on my first visit back to Pennsylvania. What follows is an excerpt from my book, *Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult*, www.outofthecocoon.net This account portrays the silent torment that faces many Jehovah's Witness children even today.

*We sat quietly in his truck for a few moments, absorbing the deafening silence that permeated the space between us. Before I left, I had one burning question to ask. You see, Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in blood transfusions and many have let family members die as a result of that belief. (They once also felt the same way about vaccinations but then quietly changed their policy.) I wanted to know what he would have done had I ever needed a blood transfusion during my childhood. All along, my dad yielded to mother's religious beliefs. Would he have saved my life if push came to shove? Would he have gone to bat for me when confronted by the Elders? Would he have faced the consequences from the rest of our family in order to save his daughter? I desperately needed to hear that someone in my family valued **me** more than that man-made religion. With sorrow in his eyes, he assured me that he would have stood his ground, but his hesitancy to respond gave me nauseating pause. Sadly, I wasn't convinced.*

We kissed good-bye and I boarded the plane, choking back the tears.

As an adult, I now understand that the sorrow in my father's eyes was there because he realized that he'd be powerless to save his own daughter's life when pitted against the mighty Watchtower conglomerate and their hospital liaison committee (appointed members who arrive at the hospital and stay by the patient's bedside until they can ensure that the sick or injured party (or a relative) signs a release refusing a whole blood transfusion).

How sad (and tragic) indeed!

Sample History of Watchtower's Blood Position

"Questions from Readers": "In view of the seriousness of taking blood into the human system by a transfusion, would violation of the Holy Scriptures in this regard subject the dedicated, baptized receiver of blood transfusion to being **disfellowshipped** from the Christian congregation?" "The inspired Holy Scriptures answer **yes**." (*The Watchtower*, January 15, 1961, p. 63)



"Witnesses believe that blood removed from the body should be disposed of, so **they do not accept autotransfusion of predeposited blood**. Techniques for intraoperative collection or hemodilution that involve blood storage are objectionable to them." (*How Can Blood Save Your Life?* 1990, p. 27)

MORE below...



THINGS TO PONDER REGARDING THE WATCHTOWER'S ADHERENCE TO "DO NOT EAT BLOOD"

There are blood cells left after meat is bled and cooked. So why aren't all Jehovah's Witnesses vegetarians?

Mothers' nursing milk has some whole blood cells and yet Jehovah's Witness women will breast-feed their infants.

Identical twins share blood via the placenta. (Since Jehovah's Witnesses believe that life begins at conception, then twins "eat"—by Watchtower definition—their sibling's blood after they have become "humans.")

Technically, then, nearly all Jehovah's Witnesses have "eaten" blood in one form or another during their lifetime. I personally have witnessed many Jehovah's Witnesses eat an undercooked steak where the blood flows out of it when cut.

Would dying show God that you respect the sanctity of life? When God offered up the 10 Commandments to Moses, one of the 10 commandments was "Thou Shall Not Kill." However, none of the 10 said, "Do not take a blood transfusion."

Do Jehovah's Witnesses really abstain from blood? Biopure is 100% cow's blood that has been highly filtered. Polyheme is 100% human blood that has been highly filtered. Both of these are safe for all blood types and free of known risks. They are used to carry oxygen in the body. Both of these are now OK to use, according to the Watchtower Society. Both, however, are *100% blood*. Both have not been properly poured out on the ground. Both coagulate while waiting to be filtered.

Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to store their own blood for later use because the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society said it can't be allowed to coagulate. Therefore, auto-transfusions are in violation of the scriptures according to the Society. It is punishable by disfellowshipping.

Yet, blood used for fractions *has* coagulated before the fractions are taken out. Clearly, Jehovah's Witnesses *do* use blood that *has* coagulated (if they accept blood fractions). Why aren't they following their own guidelines?



Someone had to donate that blood as well. Yet **if a Jehovah's Witness donates blood, he or she could be disfellowshipped and shunned by his or her family**. Why? Because the Jehovah Witness would be enabling others to "sin" and accept whole blood transfusions. **But... if donating blood is such a sinful thing to do, why is it OK for Jehovah's Witnesses to use blood fractions that have been donated by someone else?** Is it really Christian-like to take this precious resource from the world's blood supply and never give anything back to it?



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BLOOD BROTHERS

by Deborah

Although the notion may seem silly or even nonsensical to us sophisticated, forward-thinking, science-minded moderns, there was a time only a few hundred years ago when great thinkers propagated the idea of Aristotelian abiogenesis, more commonly referred to as spontaneous generation. We smile when we consider that people actually believed mice spontaneously appear in grain bins or that maggots spontaneously appear on meat. We tsk at their naiveté.

We now know that nothing comes from nothing. Life comes from life. Living things change, grow, and mutate over time, and as they do, they often develop into unique and separate forms. Babies become adults; wolves become Chihuahuas. This fact of life holds true for ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices as well. If we examine a custom or practice of a people and begin to trace the origins of the custom, we most often find pre-existing beliefs that paved the way for the current practice.

So, what about the Jehovah Witness belief that blood should not be taken into the body? The group would say that the prohibition came directly from God; that they, as a chosen people, were granted the divine wisdom to understand God's will on the matter of blood transfusions. In fact, the Jehovah's Witnesses' refusal to take blood further reflects their desire to be as separate from the rest of mankind as possible, short of having to vacate the planet. The Old-Testament Israelites, too, claimed divine direction in their laws relating to the use and misuse of animal blood, and the Jehovah Witness belief grew out of the former group's belief. Because nations and peoples around the Israelites used blood in an ordinary and customary way, the new directives served to set Israel apart from others, ideologically, if not physically. So many of the current ideas of the Jehovah's Witnesses evolved and grew out of those Israelite traditions to the same end of maintaining separateness from the world community. Also, literally drinking or eating blood is a practice repulsive to the ethno-centric, Western-raised Jehovah's Witnesses, thus lending some sort of "proof" that a God-given prohibition is fitting. However, these seemingly "natural" repulsions do not exist in many of the other cultures of the world where blood is a normal part of the human diet.

The problem with the group's stand on the matter is not the issue of blood itself. The problem continues to be (as is true with other fundamentalist groups) the lack of tolerance for other cultures, ideas, other expressions of faith, other goodness. Ideologies that promote narrow-minded, intolerant thinking are dangerous and hurtful to the proponents and opposers alike. It is this author's hope that humans reach an enlightened, reasonable, tolerant and gracious manner in dealing with people who are, in ways, different from us. When we do, we will know peace.

Some good books to check out:

Ethical Issues and the Religious and Historical Basis for the Objection of Jehovah's Witnesses to Blood Transfusion Therapy by Andre Carbonneau

Blood on the Altar: Confessions of a Jehovah's Witness Minister by David Reed

Out of the Cocoon

