



# WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

WRITING DEPARTMENT

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Dear Brother Jensen:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of February 16, 1998. You ask about the propriety of a Christian accepting blood fractions for medical purposes. You say you have been discussing this matter with various medical doctors and have found it difficult to answer some of their questions.

We note you have considered what the Society has published on this subject, especially comments under "Questions From Readers" in the June 1, 1990, issue of *The Watchtower*. As indicated, the Society has left it to the individual Christian to decide whether he or she can accept blood fractions such as proteins found in the bloodstream, believing this to be in a gray area and thus not the same as accepting a life-sustaining transfusion of whole blood or a major component for the same purpose.

Some take the strict position that since a serum injection or another medical substance is made from something that formerly was in the bloodstream, even though a minor fraction, it would not be right to accept it in fighting against disease or to heal a wound. And if a Christian's conscience will not allow him to accept a serum, we would encourage him to respect the dictates of his conscience. However, as you know, when we say "fraction," it is not meant that a few drops or even a drop of whole blood is involved. Rather, whole blood is broken down into its various parts and certain proteins or other minute substances are taken from the breakdown product, called immunoglobulins (a very minor fraction) in which antibodies are known to reside, and these are isolated for use in fighting against disease.

It might be argued that if blood was properly disposed of, it would not be possible to make serum injections, thus removing any reason for a question to come up on this matter. But as to disposing of blood (apart from its use in sacrifice), instructions in the Bible pertain to the slaughtering of animals for food. It is mentioned that the blood of the animal should be poured out on the ground as water and covered over. (Leviticus 17:13; Deuteronomy 12:15, 16, 24) Why was this done? Would it not be done in order to show that the one slaughtering the animal did not wish to eat the blood? It was, in effect, given back to Jehovah by pouring it out on the ground and covering it over. But if blood is taken from a body and, before it is disposed of, is broken down by a medical procedure and in the process a small fraction is extracted, not to eat or to nourish the body, but to immunize against a disease,

could it be said that there is a clear violation of God's law not to eat blood?

Jehovah is reasonable concerning his laws and their application. For instance, the Mosaic Law clearly stipulated that no Israelite was to "do any work" on the Sabbath. (Exodus 20:10) Yet, Jesus recognized that there was a difference between "workers who harvested [others'] fields" and "plucking and eating the heads of grain" in such fields. (James 5:4; Luke 6:1-5) Certainly, to harvest a whole field or a major portion of it would clearly violate the law of not working on the Sabbath. However, plucking and eating some of the heads of grain that made up a very minor fraction of the field was not prohibited by the Law. Such plucking was not to be considered "work" that was prohibited.

So, too, the blood derivative is only a small fraction of blood, as mentioned above. Such can be distinguished from the major components of the blood, such as the red cells. For instance, if a person is told to discard a bushel of potatoes and not to eat them, would this command be violated if the potatoes were cooked and in the process the starch from the potatoes was isolated and used for medical purposes? First of all, could the ingesting of the isolated starch for medical reasons be said to be eating potatoes? Taking a transfusion of blood is clearly contrary to God's law. But what about accepting a small injection, not of whole blood or even a primary component of blood, but of a breakdown product, whether it be salt taken from blood, sugar taken from blood, iron, calcium, a hormone, or another fractionalized part?

You also ask why one can be disfellowshipped for taking a blood transfusion but not for taking blood fractions. While both may affect the life of an individual, the expression "life-sustaining" in connection with blood transfusions is synonymous with the idea of taking in food for nourishment. In this regard both whole blood and major components of it carry nutrients, oxygen, and other nourishment to the body. It is this aspect of taking in blood, that is, to provide nourishment, that links blood transfusions with the Biblical prohibition. Note that "Questions From Readers" of the July 1, 1975, issue of *The Watchtower* stated: "The Bible specifically forbids the taking of blood to nourish the body.—Gen 9:4; Lev. 17:1-14; Acts 15:28, 29." The motive or reason for taking a serum is significantly different. It is not to feed the body, as would be the case if there was an eating of whole blood (or a major component thereof) by mouth or by having it transfused intravenously. Rather, the antibodies that have been separated out are administered for the purpose of immunizing the body against a certain disease. While blood fractions in certain situations can be lifesaving, they do not operate to feed and nourish the body and in this way sustain life but, rather, utilize other mechanisms.

We trust the above comments will be helpful to you in reasoning on this matter from the Scriptures. We take this occasion to send our warm love and Christian greetings.

With you in Jehovah's service,

*Watchtower B.V. Society*  
OF NEW YORK, INC.