

## Is Halitah Necessary? - A Mekori Perspective

*Question:* Is *halitah* a halakhic requirement? Thank you.

### Introduction

*Halitah* (חליטה), which means “searing” or “blanching,” refers to the submersion of raw meat into either boiling water or vinegar prior to cooking it. The stated purpose of this process is to sear the outer surface of the meat, thereby sealing any remaining blood inside, preventing it from exiting the meat while being cooked in a pot. Since the *halakhab* only prohibits blood that exits the meat, and not that which remains within the meat, *halitah* is presented as an assurance that no forbidden blood will be consumed.

This custom, mentioned only by the Rambam, is virtually unknown in most of the orthodox Jewish world and was generally confined to various communities in Yemen. Yet for many *mekori* Jews, *halitah* is viewed as an indispensable part of kashering meat, without which such meat may not be consumed. Their contention is that the regular process of salting and rinsing does not remove all the blood, therefore it must be sealed inside through searing its surface, unless one plans to roast it over an open fire, in which case no such precaution is necessary.

Despite the vigor with which many defend the unique injunction of the Rambam, no Talmudic source exists which requires *halitah* for all regular cuts of meat. As we shall see, it was only practiced specifically with regard to the liver (*kabed* - כבד), because of its particularly high concentration of blood and its peculiar character as opposed to other portions of meat derived from muscle tissue. However, since the common practice since medieval times has been to only eat liver which has been roasted, *halitah* fell largely into disuse among the majority of world Jewry over the course of the last 700 years.

### The Rambam and Halitah

The central source for *halitah* within the Mishneh Torah is found in Hil. Ma'akhalot Asurot 6:10, which states:

אין הבשר יוצא מידי דמו אלא אם כן ומלחו יפה יפה ומדיחו יפה יפה. כיצד עושה? מדיח  
הבשר תחילה ואחר כך מלחו יפה יפה ומניחו במלחו כדי הילוך מיל ואחר כך מדיחו יפה  
יפה עד שייצאו המים זכים ומשליכו מיד לתוך מים רותחים אבל לא לפושרין כדי שיתלבן  
מיד ולא ייצא דם.

“Meat does not expel the blood contained in it unless it is salted and rinsed very well. How is this done? First, rinse the meat and then afterward salt it very well. It should be allowed to sit in its salt for the time that it takes to walk a *mil*<sup>1</sup> and then afterward rinse it very well until the water runs clear. **Then, plunge it immediately into boiling water, but not into warm water, so that it will become white immediately and not expel any more blood.**”

This passage is a restatement of the Gemara in b.Hullin 113a, makes no reference to *halitah* at all:

אמר שמואל, אין הבשר יוצא מידי דמו אלא אם כן ומלחו יפה ומדיחו יפה יפה. אתמר רב הונא אמר, מולח ומדיח. במתניתא תנא, מדיח ומולח ומדיח. ולא פליגי הא דחלליה בי טבחה הא דלא חלליה בי טבחה.

“Shmuel said, ‘Meat does not expel the blood contained in it unless it is salted and rinsed very well.’ It was stated, ‘Rav Huna said, Salt it and rinse it, but in the Mishnah it says to rinse it, salt it, and then rinse it.’ These are not contradictory statements, in the one it refers to when the butcher pre-rinsed the meat, and the other refers to when the butcher does not rinse it.”

Some have posited that another Gemara - b.Hullin 111a - lay beneath Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:10, due to the fact that it mentions *halitah* explicitly:

כי הא דרב הונא חלטי ליה בחלא ורב נחמן חלטי ליה ברותחין.

“For Rav Huna would sear it in vinegar, and Rav Nahman would sear it in boiling water.”

While this statement is certainly an explicit reference to *halitah*, its immediate context points away from it being a proper source for requiring one to perform *halitah* on any and every cut of meat. The “it” being referred to is the meat of the internal organs, most specifically the liver. The discussion in which the above passage is found is quite detailed and lengthy, and spans b.Hullin 110b-111b. It makes repeated direct and specific reference to the liver (כבדא - *kabda*), which, due to its intense bloodiness and the unique quality of its tissue, was considered by *Hazal* to be worthy of extra

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. 2,000 *amot*. A Talmudic “mile” is commonly reckoned as representing 18 clock minutes, but is reckoned by the Rambam himself as 24 clock minutes (Commentary on the Mishnah - *Kitaab Al-Siraj* - Pesahim 3:2).

precautions and further measures before it could be rightly consumed. There is simply no basis for ascribing the above statement to *halitah* with regard to regular cuts of meat. Not only this, but the Rambam already codified this Gemara in 6:7-8, just prior to the *halakhab* above.

As might be expected, the Ra'avad (Rabbi Avraham ben David, 1125-1198) strongly objects to this halakhic instruction of the Rambam in his *basagab* there:

כתב הראב"ד זה לשונו - לא שמענו ולא ראינו מימינו וכל האדמימות שיצא אחר מליחה  
ממנו אינו אלא חמר בשר והמחמיר יותר מכן עליו להביא ראיה - עכ"ל.

“So wrote the Ra'avad: We have not ever heard nor have we ever seen, and all of the redness which exits the meat after its salting is nothing other than the ‘wine of the meat’ and the one who is more stringent about the matter than this, it is upon him to bring proof for such a contention.”

The last statement of the Ra'avad is a reference to the Mishnah in Yadayim 4:3 where the elder Rabbi Yishmael says to a young Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, “כל המחמיר עליו ראיה ללמד” - Anyone who rules strictly must bring a formal proof for his ruling!” This means that a *posek* must provide a cogent legal basis for his rulings, especially when it goes beyond the obvious delineation of the *halakhab*. In our current era, such a “formal proof” would mean finding a firm source within the Talmudic corpus, and in the case of requiring *halitah* for all cuts of meat there simply isn't one to be found. In fact, the Gemara discusses the statements of Shmuel regarding the preparation of raw meat, and carefully parses his meaning, yet never concludes anywhere that regular cuts of meat, once properly rinsed and salted, would have to be seared in either boiling water or vinegar. In fact, such is never mentioned in the context of regular cuts of meat. The overwhelmingly clear context of b.Hullin 111a is a discussion of how to properly prepare liver for consumption, and in the course of that discussion various cases are proposed which illustrate the unique nature of liver in the halakhic view of *Hazal*, as opposed to all other meats.

## The Supposed Secrets of the Sheiltot

Following the lead of the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah of Berlin, 1816-1893), many attempt to substantiate the directive of the Rambam from another passage of Gemara, b.Hullin 93a, which says:

ואמר רבי אבא אמר רב יהודה אמר רב שמואל, חוטין שביד אסורין. אמר רב ספרא, משה! מי אמר רחמנא לא תיכול בשרא? אמר רבא, משה! מי אמר רחמנא אכול דמא? חתכיה ומלחיה אפילו לקדירה נמי שפיר דמי.

“Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rav Yehudah, who said in the name of Rav Shmuel, ‘The veins of the forelimb are forbidden to be consumed.’ Rav Safra said, ‘One who speaks for Mosheh! Did the Scripture say not to eat meat?’ Rava said, ‘One who speaks for Mosheh! Did the Scripture say to eat blood? Therefore, if you cut them and salt them, then it is **even permissible to cook the meat in a pot.**”

Clearly, this excerpt from the Gemara has nothing to do with *halitah*, nor does it even mention it.

Essentially, the Amoraic exchange in the above passage is as follows:

- i. Rav Safra objects to the statement of Rav Shmuel that one may not eat the veins found in an animal’s forelimbs since there is no indication of such a prohibition in the Torah itself. If this is truly the case then Rav Shmuel would essentially be forbidding meat that the Torah permitted, something which is highly problematic and demands a formal proof.
- ii. Rava, however, raises a counter objection to Rav Safra, reminding him that while the Torah doesn’t specifically forbid eating the forelimbs of an animal, it does nevertheless explicitly forbid the consumption of blood, which such veins surely contain.
- iii. Rava then offers a practical halakhic solution: One may consume the veins of the forelimbs so long as they are cut open prior to salting the meat. Doing so, one may be assured that the salting process has sufficiently drawn out the blood in those veins, rendering them fit for consumption along with the meat.
- iv. Cutting and salting alone provides so much assurance of the removal of blood that one may even cook such duly-prepared forelimbs in a pot with other food, without fear that blood will seep out of the meat and into the other foodstuffs, causing them to become forbidden.

So far, the Gemara here does not require *halitah* for normal cuts of meat. In fact, *Halazal* seem to preclude any need for *halitah* in that they espouse complete confidence in the process of salting and rinsing (and perhaps cutting veins, as the case may be).

However, in the Sheiltot of Rav Aha'i Gaon (cf. Vayishlakh, *sheilta* #24), the response of Rava to Rav Safra appears with a slightly different *girsā* than in the Gemara (brackets indicate an emendation to the text):

אמר ליה רבא, משה! אמר רחמנא אכול דמא? אלא חתיכה ומלחיה ואדחיה ואפיל[ן]  
לקדירה ושפיר דמי.

“Rava said to him, ‘One who speaks for Mosheh! Does the Scripture say to eat blood? Rather, cut it, then salt it, then rinse it. **Then it is even permissible to cook the meat in a pot.**”

The phrase “then it is even...to cook the meat in a pot” (אפיל[ן] לקדירה) is considered by none other than the Netziv as an oblique reference to the practice of *halitab* for regular cuts of meat.

In his commentary on the Sheiltot, Emek Sheilah, the Netziv maintains that אפיל לקדירה is a specific and intentional wording which refers to the same requirement of *halitab* mentioned by the Rambam in Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:10, reading the word אפיל not as a corrupted form of אפילו (“even”), but as a verbal form meaning “to cast.” The Netziv then directs his readers to another passage from the Sheiltot (Vayikra, *sheilta* #68), which he considers to be even more explicit in this regard:

כי אסיר דם איברים היכא דפריש אבל היכא דלא פריש שרי מיכליה באומצא ולית לן בה  
והא מיזרקי אף על גב דלא פריש אסור דאמר רבא אמר שמואל חוטין שביד אסורין  
והיכא דקא בעי מירמא בישראל בקדירה אסיר עד דמלח ליה דאמר שמואל, אין הבשר  
יוצא מידי דמו אלא אם כן ומלחו יפה ומדיחו יפה יפה.

“For the blood of the extremities is forbidden - in the case where it is separated from the limbs, but in the case where it is not separated it may be eaten - even raw - and it is of no concern to us. And arteries, even though they have not been separated from the limbs, are forbidden, as Rava said in the name of Shmuel, ‘The veins of the forelimbs are forbidden’ - **and in a case where one wants to cast meat into a cooking pot, it is forbidden to do so until one salts it**, as Shmuel said, ‘Meat does not expel the blood contained in it unless it is salted and rinsed very well.’”

Once again, the Netziv explains that the reference to “casting meat into a cooking pot” is in fact a reference to *halitah*. However, with all due respect to *kevodo ha-rav* the Netziv, in both of the above cases such an interpretation is certainly forced and overactively eisegetical. This is so for several reasons:

1. The above sections of the Sheiltot are clearly restatements of passages found in b.Hullin 93a and 113a - neither of which mention *halitah* at all.

2. The entire case being discussed in b.Hullin 93a is the preparation of meat containing veins, so that it may be either cooked or roasted. Using the forelimbs as a prime example, the Gemara concludes that if one cuts the veins, and properly salts them (which includes rinsing), then one can cook them or eat them any way he so desires - and he may even cook them in a pot, which is considered more halakhically problematic than roasting. Thus, stating *אפילו לקדירה* makes complete sense in context since cooking in a pot represents the more problematic form of cooking meat, if it is not properly prepared. Therefore, if such meat may be cooked in a pot, then it by extension may be cooked any other way as well - and may even be eaten raw.

3. Although the Netziv does mention the Halakhot Gedolot in his Emek Sheilah to *sheilta* #68, he fails to mention two important facts: [ i ] The Halakhot Gedolot quotes these two passages of the Sheiltot in their entirety, placing one right after the other, and [ ii ] the *girsah* of the Halakhot Gedolot contains the reading of *אפילו לקדירה* and *not אפיל לקדירה*. Not only this, but *אפיל* is an Aramaic noun which normally refers to a miscarried fetus, not a verb indicating an action of “throwing” or “casting.” Without an *a priori* “need” to find a source for the Rambam’s contention, *אפיל לקדירה* would simply be viewed by most readers as, at most, a textual variant and as, at worst, a corrupted text.

4. The Gemara in b.Hullin 93a is not the only place where the phrase *אפילו לקדירה* is used to refer to the ability to cook meat containing veins in a pot after it has been properly cut and salted. b.Pesahim 74b uses the phrase *אפילו לקדירה* three times, each time appearing after a reference to “cutting... and salting...” In fact, the third case mentioned in b.Pesahim 74b, containing the phrase *אפילו לקדירה*, is nearly identical to the case of the veined forelimbs in b.Hullin 93a: *וכן מיזרקי חתכיה* - *אפילו לקדירה*, is nearly identical to the case of the veined forelimbs in b.Hullin 93a: *וכן מיזרקי חתכיה* - *אפילו לקדירה* שרי - *ומלחיה אפילו לקדירה* שרי - “...and also the [jugular] veins, if one cuts them and salts them, it is even permissible to cook the meat in a pot.” How is it that jugular veins, which contain much more blood, can simply be cut and salted prior to cooking, but that the small veins of the forelimbs supposedly require *halitah*? One must either maintain that every instance of *אפילו לקדירה* in the Gemara is

actually a corruption of אפילו לקדירה (a phrase which really, as noted above, makes no real sense) and should be emended, or they must admit that אפילו לקדירה in the Sheiltot offers nothing of exegetical significance and that the Gemara does not require *halitah* for regular cuts of meat, but only salting (or cutting if it contains veins). It cannot tenably be both, and positing a corrupted text for every instance of אפילו לקדירה is at least highly unlikely and at most nigh to impossible.

5. The entire style throughout the Sheiltot is not to directly cite the Gemara, but to restate it while embedding explanatory glosses. This is obvious to anyone who has ever read it, and therefore it is not reasonable to infer unstated ideas on the basis of a different letter or word, nor is plausible to suggest that the Sheiltot represents a “true” text of the Gemara - it isn’t. Rather, it is more likely that אפילו לקדירה is itself a corrupted text, especially since the Halakhot Gedolot, citing the Sheiltot, has אפילו and not אפילו.

However, even if it could be reasonably maintained that אפילו לקדירה was a veiled reference to *halitah*, as the Netziv suggests, it would really do very little to solve the difficulties with the problematic statement of the Rambam in Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:10. In reality, the Rambam himself dismisses such an altered reading of אפילו לקדירה and upholds - as all other Rishonim do - the implication of the phrase as meaning “it is *even* permissible to cook it in a pot.” While it is apparently assumed by the Netziv that Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:10 contains a codification of b.Hullin 93a, this is not the case. The general conclusion of the discussion that takes place in the Gemara of b.Hullin 92b-93a is actually codified in 7:10, not 6:10, and its formulation is very revealing:

יש בגוף הבהמה חוטין וקרומות שהן אסורין. מהן משום חלב ומהן משום דם וכל חוט או קרום שהוא אסור משום כל דם לא תאכלו צריך לנוטלו ואחר כך ימלוח ויבשל הבשר כמו שאמרנו. ואם חתכו ומלחו אינו צריך לנוטלו ואם לצלי הוא אינו צריך לנוטלו. וכל חוט או קרום שהוא אסור משום כל חלב בין לצלי בין לבישול צריך לנוטלו מן הבהמה.

“There are in the body of an animal veins and membranes which are forbidden. Some of them are forbidden due to forbidden fat portions, and some of them are forbidden on account of blood. Any vein or membrane which is forbidden because of the verse, ‘Do not eat any blood’ (cf. Vayikra 3:17, 7:26) need to be removed, and only afterward is the meat to be salted and then cooked as we have described. But if the vein was cut, and then the meat was salted, there is no need to remove it. If the meat is prepared for roasting it is likewise not necessary to remove it. Any vein or membrane which is forbidden because of the verse, ‘All fat portions’ (cf.

Vayikra 3:17, 7:23) - **whether for roasting or for cooking in a pot** - it is necessary to remove them from the animal beforehand.”

Apparently, the Rambam understood אפילו לקדירה in b.Hullin 93a as a reference to *bishul*, which is a mode of cooking involving a pot or pan, and is usually contrasted with *tzeliyah*, which is roasting over an open fire without cookware. He mentions the presence of veins, the need to cut them and salt them prior to cooking, and he mentions the options of either cooking and roasting. The entire thrust of the phrase אפילו לקדירה is that, according to the Tosafot there (as well as the Rashba, the Ritva, and others), it implies that until that point in the *sugya*, the discussion was about what is halakhically necessary for roasting (צלייה). Although b.Hullin 93a - according to the *girsā* of the Sheiltot - is supposedly the source for performing *halitab* on all cuts of meat, the Rambam codifies the Gemara and understands the reference to a קדירה (“cooking pot”) as an indication of *bishul* - **not** *halitab*. This strongly implies that the Rambam’s own text of Tractate Hullin read אפילו לקדירה - like the Halakhot Gedolot and all of the Rishonim - and **not** אפילו לקדירה like the Netziv and others maintain, once again pointing to the version of the Sheiltot being either a strange variant or simply a corruption.

As for the explicit reference to *halitab* found in b.Hullin 111a with regard to preparing liver, as noted above, the Rambam codifies it in Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:7-8. There is simply no Talmudic basis or source for his statement in 6:10 regarding *halitab* for all cuts of meat - it is simply not there - and it appears to be an extension by the Rambam, taken from the instructions for liver just a few *halakhot* before.

## Conclusion

For these reasons, I cannot endorse *halitab* as a halakhic requirement stemming from the Talmudic corpus of *Hazal* for all meat. Rather, it appears to me to be an expansion of Talmudic law made by the Rambam on the basis of his own reasoning, an occurrence which, although relatively rare in the corpus of the Mishneh Torah, is not altogether absent.

A particularly strong example of this phenomenon is the Rambam’s requirement to wait six hours after eating poultry before consuming dairy in Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 9:27. In making such a ruling, the Rambam departs from the consensus of other Spanish Rishonim, not to mention the text of the Gemara in b.Hullin 104b, which states explicitly:

תנא אגרא חמוה דרבי אבא עוף וגבינה נאכלין באפיקורן הוא תני לה והוא אמר לה בלא נטילת ידים ובלא קינוח הפה.

“Agra, the brother of Rabbi Abba taught, ‘Poultry and cheese are eaten with relative carelessness.’ He taught this and explained it thusly: they are eaten without the need for washing hands or clearing the palate in between one and the other [i.e. within the same meal].”

Whereas the Gemara permits the eating of dairy directly after the consumption of poultry, even without first washing the hands or cleansing the palate, the Rambam expands the law of the Talmud about waiting after red meat to poultry - completely without Talmudic basis for doing so.

Other examples include the well-known “half-dyed” string for *tebbelet* prescribed in Hil. Tzitzit 1:6, apparently based on the literal implications of the wording in Bamidbar 15:38 which features פתיל (“cord”) in the singular. Also, the described method for tying *tzitzit* in 1:7 has no explicit source, and appears to be the Rambam’s own construction based on his own reading of the Mishnah and relevant *baraitot*. As the Ra’avad wrote in his *hasagot* to 1:6-7, “...This method of tying *tzitzit* has neither root nor branch.” In other words, the Rambam’s described method was completely unprecedented. So too is the requirement for *halitab* with regard to all regular cuts of meat. Apparently, the Rambam was personally unconvinced that proper rinsing and salting effectively rids meat of its blood and decided that the *halitab* required for unroasted liver should be applied to all other cuts of meat as well.

The *mekori* requirement for *halitab* is only when one desires to eat liver (כבדא) cooked in a pot and not roasted (cf. Hil. Ma’akhalot Asurot 6:7-8). Beyond the liver, it is enough to rinse and salt meat before cooking it, unless it contains veins in which case it is necessary to cut them open prior to salting.

*Kol tuv,*

Rabbi Yehudah B. Ilan