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Kashrut: The Original Soul Food

We sit down to eat multiple times a day. Kashrut teaches us that each time we do so can be an opportunity to affirm our deepest values. In this class, we'll focus on eating mindfully and making each bite sacred.

.....]



What are some food choices that you currently make, which reflect your identity (religion, culture, geographic origins, health, family traditions, ethics, etc.)?:

For over three thousand years, Judaism has taught that how we eat and what we feed ourselves are sacred and communal matters — sanctifying us, educating us, nourishing our identity, and fortifying our morality. We need that sustenance no less than our ancestors did. Our meals can feed our spirit, too, through the same simple guidelines that have shaped Jewish eating and Jewish living since the beginning of our People.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

It's a Mitzvah: Step by Step to Jewish Living (1995)

Why Keep Kosher?

Study and rate the four rationales, on a scale of 1 -4, based on which you find most compelling. Compare and discuss your ratings with a hevruta partner.

Reverence for Life

The permission to eat meat is to be seen as a compromise, a divine concession to human weakness and human need. The Torah, as it were, says: “I would prefer that you abstain from eating meat altogether, for to eat meat the life of an animal must be taken, and that is a fearful act. But since you are imperfect, and since your desires cannot be stopped, they must at least be controlled. You may eat meat, but with a restriction — that you have reverence for the life that you take.”

Rabbi Samuel Dresner

*The Jewish Dietary Laws:
Their Meaning for Our Time (1959)*

Jewish Distinctiveness

Kashrut has served as a means of Jewish identification and distinctiveness. [In that way] kashrut has contributed to the perpetuation of the Jewish People and the retention of its way of life. The urgency for strengthening whatever factors in Jewish life make for survival is even greater now than in the past. The observance of kashrut commends itself as a means to this end, precisely because it can be practiced by any Jew. It is particularly effective in lending a Jewish atmosphere to the home, which, in the Diaspora, is our last ditch defense against the inroads of assimilation.

Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan

Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers (1956)

Mindful Consumption

The Biblical call to holiness is reflected in Judaism’s attempt to elevate the satisfaction of all basic urges — for food, drink, sex — in which we differ not from any beast, onto a level worthy of man. Kashrut is a good example of how Judaism raises even the most mundane acts, the most routine activities, into a religious experience. What narrower minds look upon as a picayune concern with trifling kitchen matters is really an example of how Judaism elevates the mere physical satisfaction of one’s appetite into a spiritual act by its emphasis on the ever-present God and our duty to serve God at all times.

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin

*To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance
in Contemporary Life (1972)*

Physical Health

To eat any of the various kinds of food that the Torah prohibits for us is unwholesome. The major reason why the Torah abhors [pork] is because it is very dirty and feeds on dirty things. This is as the Rabbis teach, “The mouth of a swine is like walking excrement” (Brakhot 25a).

Maimonides (1135-1204)

Guide for the Perplexed

From the Torah

Do not eat any abomination.

These are the land animals you may eat: The ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. You may eat any animal that has a split hoof and that chews the cud. However, of those that chew the cud or that have a split hoof you may not eat: The camel, the rabbit, or the hyrax. Although they chew the cud, they do not have a split hoof; they are impure for you. The pig is also impure; although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses.

Of all the creatures living in the water, you may eat any that has fins and scales. But anything that does not have fins and scales, you may not eat; for you, it is impure.

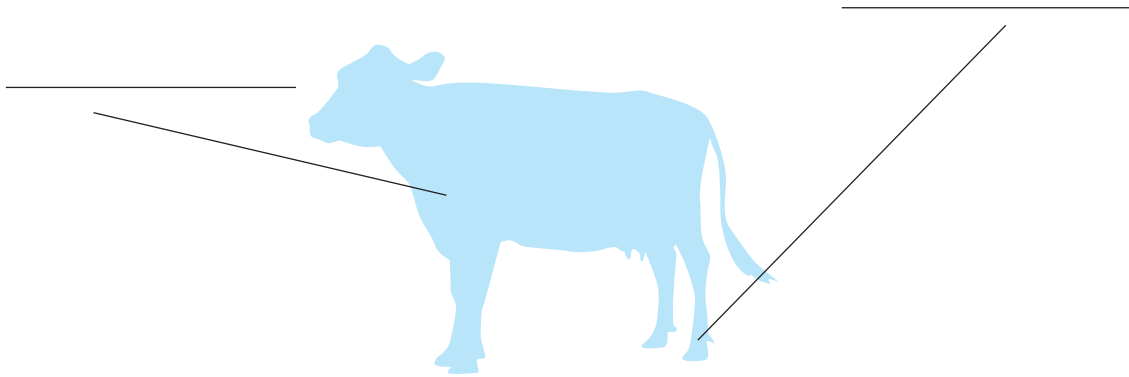
You may eat any pure bird. But these you may not eat: The eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, the kite, any kind of falcon, any kind of raven, the horned owl, the screech owl, the seagull, any kind of hawk, the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, the cormorant, the ostrich, the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe, and the bat. All flying insects are impure for you; do not eat them. But any winged creature that is clean, you may eat.

Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to the foreigner residing in any of your towns, and they may eat it, or you may sell it to any other foreigner. But you are a people holy to the Adonai your God.

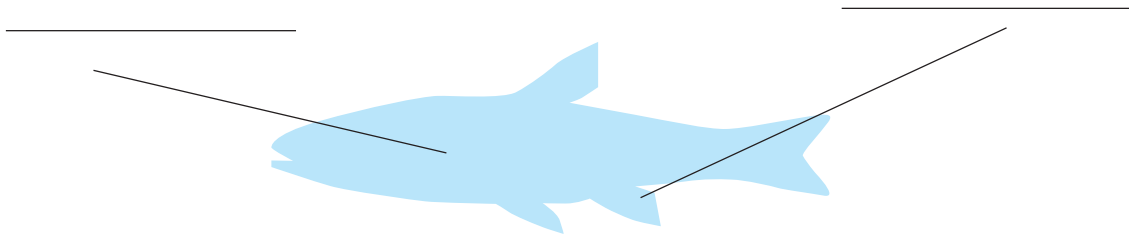
Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk.

[Deuteronomy 14:3-21](#)

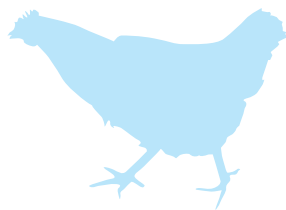
In order to potentially be kosher, a mammal must have these two features:



In order to potentially be kosher, a fish must have these two features:



How can you tell if a bird is potentially kosher?:



Separating Meat and Dairy

“Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk.”

Exodus 23:19 & 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21

Philo of Alexandria: “A person who boils the flesh of lambs or kids in their mother’s milk shows himself cruel and brutal of character, without compassion.”

Maimonides: “As for the prohibition on eating meat boiled in milk, it is in my opinion not improbable that idolatry had something to do with it. Perhaps such food was eaten at one of the pagan ceremonies.”

Professor Jacob Milgrom: “The common denominator in these prohibitions is the fusion and confusion of life and death. The mother’s milk, the life-sustaining food, should never become associated with death.”



Which of the opinions above makes the most sense to you?

Do you have your own theory about why Jews separate meat and dairy?

Fleishig (Basari)

Food that is made from meat (either mammal OR poultry), which the Jewish dietary laws teach should be kept separate from foods containing dairy.

Milchig (Chalavi)

Foods containing dairy ingredients, which the Jewish dietary laws teach should be kept separate from foods containing meat.

Pareve

A food that is neither meat nor dairy, and can thus be eaten with either. Pareve foods include fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, eggs, and fish.

The traditional waiting period between eating dairy and meat is: _____

The traditional waiting period between eating meat and dairy is: _____

In order to keep from mixing meat and dairy, it is traditional to separate cooking and serving dishes. How you kasher dishes depends on the material they are made from:

Metal:

Ceramic:

Glass:

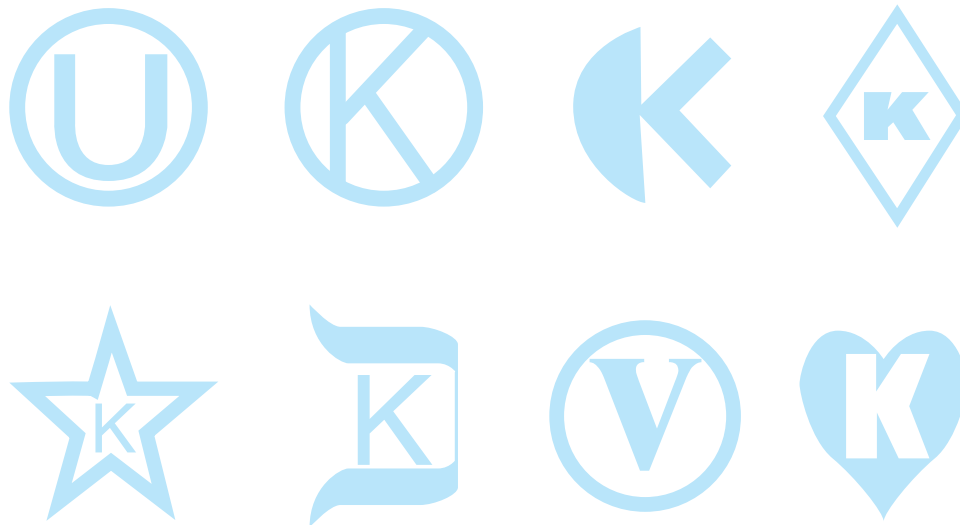
Hunting for Hekshers

(Kashrut Certifications)

Heksher

A printed certification that a particular food is kosher. The most common heksher in the United States is issued by the Orthodox Union and looks like a letter “U” within a circle. Hekshers will often also indicate if a food is *fleshig*, *milchig*, or *pareve*, and whether or not it may be eaten on Passover.

These are some commonly found hekshers:



The following foods do not generally require a heksher:

Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, fresh (kosher) fish, eggs, milk, juice, coffee, tea, sugar, flour, and spices. Additionally, some observant Jews will eat other foods without a printed heksher, but will carefully read labels to ensure the food contains no non-kosher ingredients.

Why I Became a Shochet

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick

For almost a decade now, I have only eaten meat on Shabbat, holidays, and special occasions. And when I do eat meat, I want it to be raised sustainably and locally (to minimize my ecological footprint), slaughtered ethically (to minimize animal cruelty), and certified kosher.

Unfortunately, industrialized farming practices make it nearly impossible to meet these high standards, so I decided to take matters into my own hands by learning the holy trade of *shechitah* (kosher slaughter). After an intensive, year-long training process, I became certified as a *shochet* (slaughterer) by the Israeli Rabbinat.

People often ask me if I consider *shechitah* to be ethical and humane, and I honestly believe that it can be — when done right. *Shechitah*, in its purest form, can be an emotional act. It is one of the only forms of slaughter that actually requires a person to place their hands on an animal before taking its life. This means that, in the proper setting, a *shochet* can look an animal in the eyes and express gratitude before offering a blessing and taking the life. How different that is from the mindless, brutal routine of the typical slaughterhouse!

The next question I am often asked is whether or not *shechitah* is painless for the animal. Have you ever cut yourself with a kitchen knife and not realized until you looked down? Well, a *shochet's* knife is far sharper and smoother than any knife in your kitchen. In fact, it can take a *shochet* up to six months just to learn how to sharpen and inspect a knife to the highest possible standards, so that each cut can be as clean and painless as possible. Typically, it takes just a few seconds for the brain's blood supply to be cut off and for an animal to not feel pain.

Shechitah can be ethical and humane when done right. Unfortunately, many factors may prevent this from always being the case. When we insist on eating meat more than once or twice a week, we give rise to an industrial farming system. And industrial farming gives rise to industrial slaughter, which prevents *shechitah* from being the profound and respectful experience it can be.

I realize most people don't care to think about what happens to their meat prior to it being shrink-wrapped onto a styrofoam tray. But if we all commit ourselves to learning more about the meat we eat, eating less of it, and insisting that it meets the highest standards, then we might actually help *shechitah* reach its potential of being the most ethical and humane form of slaughter.



Rabbi Gabriel Botnick is the Assistant Rabbi at Temple Aliyah in Woodland Hills, California. He is also certified as a Mohel to perform Brit Milah and is the only non-Orthodox Shochet in America certified by the Israeli Rabbinat to perform kosher slaughter. Rabbi Botnick is also

the founder of Tekumah, the first and only Jewish organization dedicated to teaching the holy trades to any Jew interested in learning.

Blessings

“Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden to enjoy anything from this world without first saying a blessing. Anyone who derives benefit from the world without taking the time to offer a blessing is considered to have stolen sacred property.”

Talmud

Brakhot 35a



Bread

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
hamotzi lehem min ha'arets.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמּוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Grains (non-bread products)

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei minei mezonot.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who creates varieties of foods.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי מִזוֹנוֹת

Wine & Grape Products

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who creates the fruit of the vine.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Vegetables

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam, borei p'ri ha'adamah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who creates the fruit of the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Fruit that Grows on Trees

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei p'ri ha'eitz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who creates the fruit of the tree.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Miscellaneous Food

(meat, poultry, eggs, fish, dairy products)

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam shehakol ni'hi'yeh bidvaro.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
by whose word all came to be.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ

Eating Ethically

Tzaar Baalei Hayyim

Prevention of unnecessarily causing pain to animals (*tzaar baalei hayyim*) is a basic Jewish value. Among the tradition's warnings on this subject are:

You shall not plow with an ox and a mule harnessed together [since both animals, being of unequal size, will suffer].

Deuteronomy 22:10

A person is forbidden to eat until they have fed their animals.

Talmud, Brakhot 40a

There is no difference between the pain of human beings and the pain of other living things. The love and tenderness of a mother for her young ones exists across species.

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 3:48

Eco-Kashrut

Eco-kashrut is an attempt to “renew the unity of earth and humanity,” according to Arthur Waskow. Eco-kashrut is an attempt to challenge the banality by which we consume and buy and bless and need. It is a call to stay away from *treyf* (literally “torn by a wild beast”), that which is dissonant with the preservation of the earth and we who dwell on the earth. It is a call to struggle with whether vegetarianism is the ideal form of eating, even though being a vegetarian does not absolve us of serious daily choices about what we buy and how much we consume. It is not only about labels and letters saying this food is kosher or not, but about making choices that reflect the unity in all creation, both bird and beast, woman and man.

Rabbi Felicia Sol

“Eco-Kashrut: A Reminder of God's Presence” June 2000

Reflection on Chapter 11



Prepare a “Jewish Eating Plan.” What are some of the choices you can make to incorporate Jewish values into your diet?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Eat: 10 Ways to Dine Like a Jew

■ Abstain from all pig products

Although abstaining from pork has no greater biblical significance than any other unkosher meat, it has become the most visible and well-known symbol of keeping kosher. Start here.

■ Refrain from eating shellfish

Jewish law prohibits the consumption of any fish without fins and scales. Bad news: This includes shrimp, lobster, oysters, and other shellfish. Good news: Lox is made of salmon.

■ Purchase a Jewish cookbook and experiment with recipes

Although we can live on latkes and hamentashen, others enjoy food that is a little more sophisticated. To expand your Jewish cooking repertoire, we recommend: Joan Nathan's *Jewish Holiday Cookbook*, Susie Fishbein's *Kosher by Design*, and Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi's *Jerusalem*.

■ Avoid eating dairy and meat foods together

Like oil and water, there are some things that just don't mix. In order to observe the three-times-repeated commandment to not "boil a kid in its mother's milk," we refrain from having those two types of foods mixed together or served on the same plate.

■ Observe a waiting period between eating meat and dairy

Waiting after eating meat heightens our ethical sensitivity to the fact of our having taken an animal's life for our sustenance and pleasure and reinforces a sense of mindful self control in our eating.

■ Eat only kosher varieties of fish

Look for fins and scales at the fish counter or talk with your the sushi chef about what you're eating and you'll still have tons of delicious options.

■ Eat only kosher meat and poultry at home

Choosing to buy kosher meat means caring about how the animal was raised and slaughtered. Now carried at all Trader Joe's!

■ Eat meat only in kosher restaurants, otherwise eat pescatarian (vegetarian + fish)

Goodbye Big Mac! (You probably should not have been eating it anyway.)

■ Acquire separate dishes for preparing and serving meat and dairy meals at home

Selecting which dish goes with meat or dairy foods is another way of raising our consciousness each time that we eat. If two sets of dishes are a financial burden for you, consider purchasing one set of glass dishes, which may be used halakhically for both.

■ Bake challah on Friday afternoons for Shabbat

Baking Challah is great for all of your senses. It looks great, it tastes fantastic, it will fill your house with an angelic smell, and the beating, pounding, and braiding will give you a pre-Shabbat ritual that will put you into a relaxed state of mind. See recipe in the Shabbat chapter!

Additional Readings

Books

- Samuel Dresner, Seymour Siegel, and David Pollock, *Keeping Kosher: A Diet for the Soul*
A concise, comprehensive, and authoritative overview of all of the laws of keeping kosher.
- Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*
For those who take halakha seriously, this reference volume is highly recommended for your shelf. Klein covers all areas of Jewish law, but does a particularly excellent job of elucidating the often complex laws of kashrut.
- Joan Nathan, *Jewish Holiday Cookbook*
Quite possibly the most comprehensive Jewish cookbook, incorporating Jewish foods from all around the world.
- Susie Fishbein, *Passover by Design*
A great collection of easy, excellent, and hametz-free recipes for facing that greatest of Jewish food challenges: Passover.
- Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi, *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*
Celebrated Israeli and Palestinian chefs team up to create a beautiful cookbook that explores the diverse cuisines and cultures of the Middle East.
- Noah Bernamoff and Rae Bernamoff, *The Mile End Cookbook*
A celebration of classic Ashkenazi deli cuisine, updated and re-imagined for a “foodie” generation.