

KASHRUT FOR 2007 – A BASIC GUIDE....

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PLEASE SAVE FOR REFERENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

... Reprinted from A Guide To Jewish Religious Practice by Rabbi Isaac Klein, z"l

"The dietary laws loom large in Jewish life. They are referred to many times in the Torah apart from the full chapter devoted to them in Leviticus and part of a chapter in Deuteronomy. They are elaborated in the Talmud. In the post-talmudic literature, they are discussed in every code.

Efforts have been made to give a rationale for the dietary laws. The most persistent - hailing back to Maimonides - is that they were originally hygienic measures. Thus, Maimonides says: "I maintain that the food forbidden by the law is unwholesome." (Guide 3:48). Today, this explanation is often given by those who wish to discard the dietary laws on the grounds that we can achieve the same health measures by other means.

The inadequacy of the medical rationale was pointed out by Isaac Abarbanel: "God forbid that I should believe that the reason for forbidden foods is medicinal! For were it so, the Book of God's Law would be in the same class as any of the minor brief medical books... Furthermore, our own eyes see that people who eat pork and insects and such...are well and alive and healthy at this very day... Moreover; there are more dangerous animals...which are not mentioned at all in the list of prohibited ones. And there are many poisonous herbs known to physicians which the Torah does not mention at all. All of which points to the conclusion that the Law of God did not come to heal bodies and seek their material welfare but to seek the health of the soul and cure its illness."

The sources, the Torah in particular, never mention health reasons. Rather, it is usually suggested that the laws have some connection with holiness. Thus we read in Leviticus: "I am the Lord your God, sanctify yourself, and be holy; for I am holy... For I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God; you shall therefore, be holy, for I am holy". This is repeated in Deuteronomy: "for you are a holy people unto the Lord thy God."

The Torah regards the dietary laws as a discipline in holiness, a spiritual discipline imposed on a biological activity. The tension between physical appetites and the endeavors of the spirit was traditionally explained as the struggle between the "yetzer hatov," the good inclination, and the "yetzer harah," the evil inclination - the two forces that contend with each other for mastery of the soul.

To transpose this into a modern key, it is the struggle between our higher self and our lower self, between the animal in us and the urge to strive upwards.

All our appetites remain in the realm of the physical. Religion strives to lift them out of the merely physical into the realm of the spirit. Religion thus raises the biological act into the dimension of the holy. Hence the connection in the Torah between the dietary laws and holiness."

The mitzvah of kashrut, in short, helps us to hallow the act of eating.

II. KASHRUT AND JEWISH LAW

The dietary laws have always been central to the observance of Judaism. On a very obvious level, everyone must eat, several times a day. And, yet, the laws were always recognized as more than blind ritual observance - they were a symbol of one's love for God and acceptance of the power of the mitzvot. From the three major areas specified in the Torah (certain animals prohibited/permitted, not eating the blood, not boiling a calf in its mother's milk) the laws have developed over the centuries, as a result of interpretation and application by the rabbis of every generation.

The question is faced by every generation; how shall we follow these laws in our day? A primary belief of our Conservative Judaism is that Jewish law is evolving, and that each generation has its own questions and problems which it must face in the area of kashrut. This process of application and interpretation continues today. One major area of decision making by the Committee on Jewish Law & Standards is that of kashrut, especially the analysis of new products and the revision of old rules, as will be seen below.

The animating philosophy of this booklet is to maximize one's ability to feel that he or she is able to follow the laws of kashrut and thus feel part of the halachic system. This has to be a positive feeling to every Jew, and maximizing it the goal of any rabbi.

Many things are not permissible according to specific laws in the Torah. When a law comes directly from the Torah, it is called *medoraita*. Other laws dealing with specific situations have been enacted by the rabbis of different generations. This is termed *mederabbanan*. Still other rules are protective "fences," items technically allowable but forbidden because of a feeling they would quickly lead to, become interwoven with, or confused with, something forbidden.

Yet, over the centuries, conditions or reasons for prohibitions change, and a basic Conservative feeling is that if the facts of a situation change, the law should be reevaluated. Laws that are *medoraita* are very rarely changed or annulled (but it has been done). However, laws that are *mederabbanan*, especially if the laws were erected as "fences", can be changed by later generations of rabbis. Certainly the shape of the fence can change. Rabbinic tradition teaches "better a fence ten cubits high that remains standing than one one hundred cubits high that will topple over."

The rabbi of a community is considered *mara d'atra* - the teacher of his or her community. He/she becomes responsible for the decisions made for his/her congregation. Where a decision has been given by the Committee on Jewish Laws & Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, that fact has been so noted. Unless specified otherwise, these decisions apply to both the synagogue itself and the home.

III. THE SPECIFICS OF KASHRUT

A. Meat Products

Kosher meat comes only from animals allowed by the Torah. The animal must be ritually slaughtered by a shochet, or ritual slaughterer, checked for health defects (beyond federal requirements), and properly deveined. The meat has to be kept moist (to allow removal of blood by kashering) by being "watered" every 72 hours. There must be a final soaking, for a half-hour, and salting, for an hour, before home use. This can be done either by the butcher or at the home. Chopped and processed meat has to

be kashered before it is prepared. Liver has to be broiled to produce a 'skin' before any other cooking or use. Other meat may be broiled without soaking and salting but the gravy cannot be used and the utensil cannot be employed for any other cooking.

Some kosher meat is advertised as being "glatt." This word refers to the absence of imperfections or adhesions on the animal's lungs. This concept is a recent stringency unnecessary to be followed.

Kosher animals are defined as those both having a cloven hoof and chewing the cud. This has traditionally meant the cow and the sheep. Some other animals are kosher, but rarely eaten in the United States (goat for example), and still others are theoretically kosher but not domestically raised for meat (deer for example). Kosher birds are domesticated fowl which are not birds of prey. Kosher fish are species that have both fins and scales.

The process of slaughtering, called shehitah, is done in such a way as to cause the animal the least possible pain. Also, since the Torah forbids in several places the eating of blood, this slaughtering method starts the process of removal of blood, then continued by the soaking and salting mentioned above. Shehitah takes into account that we are taking life - albeit in order that we may live. It teaches a reverence for life via all these laws.

At the same time, it is also clear that eating meat is considered by Jewish tradition to be a concession to human weakness. It is in many ways the height of Jewish ethical concern to follow, like Adam and Eve, a vegetarian life-style.

B. Milk Products

Milk products must come from kosher animals. There is no need to use "holov Israel," milk produced and handled only by Jews. This stringency was based on the belief of earlier centuries that non-Jews might adulterate any milk with forbidden products.

All cheeses, both hard and soft, are kosher. The Orthodox brands of cheese are based on the feeling that the rennet used in cheese manufacturing must come from a kosher animal. For several long-established halachic reasons the Committee on Jewish Law & Standards has ruled that this is unnecessary. Again, all cheeses, obviously except ones having some treif (non-kosher) additive, such as salami or bacon bits, are kosher. In a similar process of halachic exegesis, jello, even though based on gelatin of animal origin, is also kosher.

C. Separation Of Meat And Dairy

From the original prohibition in the Torah of not cooking a calf in its mother's milk, there has been a several-fold expansion in this concept of separation over the centuries. Steps of development include from cooking with any milk product, to serving at the same meal in any intermixture, to separate utensils, to waiting a traditional period of time between eating meat and milk products.

As these rules are all rabbinic, they reflect different societies and cultures. Different traditions, for example, specify a 1, 3, 5 or 6-hour waiting period after eating meat before eating dairy. After eating dairy, one need only wash out one's mouth (or wait a short time) and then one can have meat.

This separation applies to utensils as well as foods themselves. Thus, dishes, pots, pans, silverware, utensils become either meat, dairy, or remain parve (neutral), reflecting the substances with which they are used. A second complete set of utensils is traditionally kept for Passover, to avoid a similar

sense of being hametz (used with leavened products).

Many of these rules, however, originated at a time when utensils were made often of wood or clay and were highly absorbent. The halachic criteria is one of absorbency: if an object is non-absorbent, it does not become meat or dairy. It remains parve and can be used for both. Glass, for example, is described as parve in the Talmud. These criteria are of importance in analyzing many products today, for example Pyrex and Corning Ware. If the products are nonabsorbent, different sets are not required, except from a perspective of the "fence" of consistency in the kitchen.

D. Rabbinic Supervision

Rabbinic supervision of foods comes in two levels. There are several copyrighted symbols of kashrut endorsement, reflecting specific and recognized Rabbinic organizations providing supervision. The most well known is the O-U, the symbol of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew congregations. Other symbols are the Ko and VH. The letter "K" is considered legally in the public domain and, thus, any company can put a "K," or any letter, on a package. This means for example, a "K" "could" appear on a can of baked ham. However, I have never heard of a product with a "K" that did not have some level of rabbinical supervision. The consumer simply does not know by whom or by what organization. State regulations may assist the consumer here. In New York State, for example, all products advertised as kosher must be registered with the State Bureau of Agriculture and Markets, along with the name of the supervising rabbi.

Recent federal law mandates a complete listing of ingredients on packages. Sometimes this listing can be confusing, yet, with preparation, a person learns to recognize what he or she is reading. While it is certainly meritorious to purchase items with specific kashrut supervision, an item can be considered kosher if the label does not list any forbidden ingredients. Some maintain that there are items that do not need to be listed; if so they can be considered as trace elements and not determinative of kashrut status.

There are disputes among supervising organizations over such items as glycerin, emulsifiers, dough conditioners, and the like. While it would be an additional measure of concern or stringency to individually contact companies and determine the exact origin and processing history of an ingredient, for a variety of reasons one can accept the products containing these ingredients as being kosher, assuming there is no other problematic ingredient.

E. Wines

All American wine is kosher in the sense of being permitted for drinking. We do not worry that it may have been offered as a libation to a pagan god; the traditional reason for avoiding non-Jewish wines. For ritual purposes, however, it is required that a kosher wine be used. All hard liquor is kosher as well. There may exist liqueurs with specific problematic ingredients, but, generally speaking, all liqueurs are acceptable as well.

IV. RECENT KASHRUT DECISIONS

Below is a listing of several recent decisions by the Committee on Jewish Law & Standards or of individual rabbis who are leaders of the Conservative movement. In most cases the

documentation for these decisions is available from Rabbi Atkins. The rationale for these decisions has been given in the first part of this booklet.

- Cheeses:* All cheeses, except ones containing specifically forbidden foods, are kosher and permitted.
- Gelatin:* Is considered kosher.
- Glycerides:* Are all chemicals which have undergone extensive processing and are thus kosher and parve.
- Sodium Casinate:*(ingredient in "non-dairy" creamer)
Is considered dairy - it has not gone through sufficient changes to be considered a new product.
- Sturgeon & Swordfish:* Are kosher.
- Lumpfish & Monkfish:* Are not kosher fish.
- Vegetable Shortening:* Word "pure" is unnecessary. According to the federal government, any article labeled as vegetable shortening must consist of only vegetable shortening. This has also been confirmed under state regulations.
- Vitamin A:* (And by extension any other vitamin) is considered kosher no matter what its source since it is used for medicinal purposes.

Wine: All (machine wine) made is kosher. However, rabbinically supervised wine should be used for ritual purposes.

Corning ware & Pyrex: Are considered as glass and technically usable for both meat and milk (although this is one area where, because other pots and utensils require two sets, two sets could be kept here also).

Dishwashers: Cannot be used for meat and milk simultaneously. A full wash cycle must be run between the use of each. It is not necessary to have two racks.

Soaps: All soaps are kosher.

V. THE NEXT STEP

A living Judaism is the goal of our synagogue; the laws of kashrut should not be and are not a burden to any individual or family with a desire to observe them.

You are encouraged to talk with Rabbi Atkins on how to start a kosher life-style and "kasher," or make kosher, your kitchen. Also, this guide is only an introduction to the philosophy and practice of kashrut. Copies of the standard reference book co-published by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue; The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time, are available for your reading from the rabbi's office.



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SISTERHOOD TAG SALE JULY 13, 15, 16,17



Donations (clothing, housewares, appliances, furniture, collectibles, baby items, linens, toys, books, shoes, etc.) in very good (per IRS regulations) and workable conditions can be brought in starting **June 4**. Sorry we cannot accept any items prior to that date. Small items can be brought in Monday—Friday 9-3. Bulky items from 10-1. We also need setup volunteers starting on June 11. Please call the office (242-5561) or Myrna Kahan (286-2860) for more information or to help.

