

KOSHER TRADITIONS ARE...

-humane. According to the eternal principles of the Law of Moses, an animal must not be slaughtered before its eighth day of life. Only after having lived through a full seven-day cycle of nature is it eligible for slaughter. Nonetheless; in practice, animals are rarely slaughtered this early in life. A mother may also not be slaughtered with any of her offspring on the same day. Otherwise, it is generally permissible to slaughter an animal for food as well as for other reasonable human purposes, such as for clothing or medicine, and certainly for the writing of a Torah scroll or other holy parchments which can only be written on animal skin. The methods of Jewish ritual slaughter insure that an animal feel absolutely no pain. The usefulness and nourishment which an animal can provide to man will likewise benefit its spirit in the eternal realm.

-G-d given. One should feel no sense of guilt or remorse for partaking of meat if this gives one pleasure or necessary nourishment as permission for man to partake of meat was granted long ago at the covenant with Noah. However, one must likewise always affirm the Noachide law to never inflict unnecessary pain upon living creatures.

-relevant. One should additionally strive to uphold the kosher principles in their entirety. These comprise a truly comprehensive spiritual code for all who sincerely seek higher spirituality. The Jewish nation can achieve true realization of G-d when living in tune with the subtle, often unseen laws of nature--a more comprehensive embodiment of the Noachide Moral Doctrine expected of all peoples.

ONCE, THE CHASSIDIC REBBE, RABBI NACHMAN OF BRESLOV was participating in the festive meal of Shavuot. He was studying at the table, then he would take a short break when the next course was served. The repeated itself several times. He later commented; "They were having an argument with me over my wanting to finish the meal with study. There are simple people who eat to have strength to learn. There are also those who study in order to understand how to eat. I wanted simplicity--to finish the meal with study! But they took me for one with greater ambition and kept giving me more food so that I end the meal by eating. This is a much higher devotion!"

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Insights Series

KOSHER INSIGHTS



MYSTICAL NATURE OF THE TORAH

The Law of Moses speaks from a mystical perspective--this is particularly apparent when It addresses ritualistic issues such as the traditions of kosher eating. Just as unseen forces act within mundane areas of nature, so do these govern the spiritual realms of life.

Partaking of meat, as well as otherwise making use of animal by-products were always understood to be compromising gestures. In fact, the Torah describes Noah, mankind's tenth generation, as the first permitted to eat flesh. This right was given him through a covenant, which by definition is established for all generations. This pact allows man to partake from the animal kingdom without guilt, so long as the animal is killed mercifully beforehand. The eternal principle is formally one against ever tearing a limb from a living animal, and reflects the trait of mercy.

This higher comprehension by Noah of the legitimacy of mans' often frustrated state, as regards our ability to truly rule over and subdue the world as G-d enjoined us to, has earned man the right to enjoy the meat of animals as an additional aspect of the vegetable kingdom originally ordained to Adam the first in Paradise.

Noah's revelation was that man, the very reflection of the Creator, must be able to partake even of the animal kingdom for his food as he felt the need to do so. Though understandable, this perspective was avoided entirely by his own and earlier generations as the evil rationale of mere self-indulgence. In fact, the Torah tells us that it was only in the aftermath of the cataclysmic flood--attributed to mans' frustrated degenerate behavior, that Noah prayed that the Al-mighty finally accept this reasoning. The perspective was challenging even to Noah, as this was one reason he soon after became drunk.

However, now that the purpose of man to 'subdue the world' became understood in its most basic manner, the need to affirm the sanctity of life had to also become a hallowed, conscious institution. Man, in respecting his sincere need for meat, risked losing his innate sense of mercy. Adam the First did not eat carnivorously, and therefore was not forced to struggle as arduously with feelings of mercilessness. Upon the Divine Word being revealed to Noah though, the eternal Law became understood as assertively demanding compassion--as assertively prohibiting the separation ever of a limb from a living animal. This is so basic a principle that it remained in the realm of unspoken instinct previous to Noah--both to Adam the First in Paradise, as well as to the interim

generations.

Throughout history, this common law has nonetheless been wantonly violated, sometimes even with the logical but foolish rationale of prolonging an animal's life--by G-d forbid, only taking a limb or so from it at a time. The Noachide tradition, which is the foundation of the Torah, attests positively that animal life sacrificed for sincere and goodly human needs when necessary, is a better fate for an animal, than even its continued incarnation on earth.

MEAT AND DAIRY

Although it is written in the Talmud that one should not say that the prohibitions regarding eating meat and dairy products together are laws of compassion--what is meant is that one must not believe that these are solely the laws of pity. The Torah's words always encompass much more than their simple interpretation suggests.

The reason one might tend to feel otherwise is that dairy products represent nurturance of life. In land mammals, the most highly developed of all life, and those closest to man, a mother gives of her own blood and life force in creating milk to nurture her offspring. Meat products on the other hand, represent the economy of life; the conception of the animal kingdom as just another industry for mans' perusal.

In order to maintain any real sincerity in our belief in higher principles, we must separate these two perspectives. Though most of us always reach in our hearts for a less dominating way of life; attempting to forever nurture the higher ideals of 'live and let live'; we are all merely human in our power to embrace this reality, as Noah's confrontation with the Almighty set out to finally assert.

When compromising the life of an animal then, it is certainly a sacrilege to prepare the meat with milk or other dairy--the very symbol of the quest for life itself. This most exalted maternal force within nature must be understood and respected even if it is done so merely philosophically (as should gentiles). The Jewish way though, is to live in as holy a manner as possible, and therefore to also sanctify one's day to day existence by heeding these concepts in a truly religious light and manner.

The related principles of not partaking of or preparing fowl along with dairy; of not partaking of dairy immediately after eating meat or fowl, and those regarding the use of separate meat and dairy utensils, are all extensions of this premise,

and also given and accepted as law. So too are the other related laws regarding this biblical prohibition, for all Jews--whether those born as Jews, or those who have properly joined our community.

KOSHER SPECIES

Scripture describes the distinguishable signs of animal purity or kashrus in varying ways for each of the various classes of animal life; and these ideally therefore define their edibility as well.

Alternately, all plant life is considered of a pure essence, even despite malicious tastes or similar banalities, as these all live directly from the ground, and therefore never part from their source in ultimate spirituality. All are technically kosher--if not truly unconsumable.

An animal's signs of kashrus though are its true reflection of intrinsic purity--these being, essentially; a clear comprehension of reality and an innate modesty. These traits are expressed of course by the animal's anatomical features.

Jewish tradition also asserts that we should have a direct tradition of kashrus from our ancestors and community of any specific species, before we can partake of any understandably permissible animal. The giraffe for example, is a kosher animal, yet no known Jewish community has a direct tradition for partaking of it.

KOSHER LAND ANIMALS

The two features attesting to the kashrus of kosher land animals; (including their milk, rennet, gelatin, and other by-products) are explicitly given by the Torah. These must have fully split hooves and also must re-digest their food in a second stomach.

An animal's feet reveal its relationship with the Creator; for as it relates to the earth, so does this parallel its relationship with the more sublime realms. The presence of a hoof--a bony, insulating material, reveals that the animal innately understands it is a distinct entity existing independently of the earth. Unlike the horse, which has a solid hoof, and which flies away with itself, as expressed by Greek mythology; an animal with split hooves does not become so with the recognition of its independence. The full split affirms rather, that the kosher animal innately lives on the earth with an inter-dependent spirit. This animal yearns to heighten its relationship with forces beyond itself.

An area of normal, sensitive skin is exposed at the single break of insulating hoof. Thus can it better feel the chill or warmth of the earth beneath, or the moisture or dryness, the soft and the hard. This sublime sign represents a perpetual desire to continuously acknowledge and further an awareness of its ultimate source in the Creator.

Just as we all live in anticipation of our next meal, as well as with the hopes for greater wealth and the like; so also do the animals. However, it is only through a continuing contemplation with what it has recently taken in, that an animal can also reveal its innate sense of modesty and appreciation as it goes on in pursuit of its new desires and needs. The presence of a second stomach in a land animal is thus a true reflection of the all encompassing ways of humility--a ruminant allows the animal a place to chew over its cud, and to continue a parallel appreciation of life's greater sublime.

KOSHER FOWL

The Torah doesn't directly mention the names of the kosher birds, but instead tells us which are not kosher. A direct tradition of inference through the sages, dating back to the time of Moses, reveals the signs and details of kosher fowl. Essentially, the Talmud informs us; it is a lack of the primarily aggressive and violent manner of birds of prey which distinguish the permissible from the enumerated others.

A claw that is not formed mainly to grasp prey, but rather to balance; and therefore one that inherits the hallax--an extra toe behind, is one such feature of a kosher bird. How it places its toes when standing upon a rope is a test of this feature. Standing with two toes behind and two in front when standing on a rope is a sign of purity, while placing one behind and three in front is not. Does it catch and eat its food in the air (not kosher), or alternately, by the aid of a surface? Also, the presence of a crop--a crown suggesting trust and exaltedness; as well as an easily peeled gizzard (secondary stomach) are all kosher qualities. Does it dwell with non-kosher species--a disqualifying factor? Additionally, kosher fowl eggs are doubly-elliptical (neither broad nor narrow on both ends). This suggests the species' understanding of the distinctness of the spiritual and of the material realms. Their albumen (white) also surrounds the yolk. This shows a higher understanding by the species, that the feminine element--the albumen, representative of the physical realm; is essentially reflective of the spiritual world beyond.

SICK OR DIE THEMSELVES NOT KOSHER

To be fit for a Jewish table, an otherwise kosher animal must not have shown signs of certain illnesses or have died of itself. These laws have obvious health implications, but are primarily esoterically-based principles. Well-being is analogous of kashrus, as the kosher signs are symbolic of the most basic path of spirituality and therefore the very ways of health and general well-being. These must therefore always exist together!

To partake of an animal that was in a sickly state, or alternately, one which had already left the realm of life as we know it without being slaughtered; though of a kosher species, is an outright contradiction of the virility which the ways of purity represent.

KOSHER FISH

A kosher fish must have both a fin and scales to be fit for the Jewish table. The fin is the expression of independence for a fish. It allows the fish the best method to direct itself through its watery environment, just as the rudder does on a boat.

Water is not just the very source of life for a fish, but the basis of its comprehension of the Creator. To be kosher, a fish must therefore express a sense of inter-dependence with the water, by exhibiting scales when mature. Scales allow a fish closer intimacy with the water through a thinner skin membrane and a greater bodily surface area. This way it can most effectively seek to comprehend and relate to the very life and spirit existing beyond itself.

KOSHER INSECTS

Certain breeds of grasshoppers and other locusts are kosher, though only members mostly, of the Yemenite Jewish community have maintained a direct tradition for partaking of these.

No creatures which crawl upon the ground are kosher. The trait of crawling must be understood as utterly abhorrent, as it represents an obsession with materialism and self-growth.

However, because of their doubly-jointed knees, these particular locusts do not crawl but instead hop upon the ground. Also, kosher locusts must have six legs which represent an innate awareness of the six outward directions of space. Their wings must also cover their bodies, a sign primarily of humility.

RITUAL SLAUGHTER

Fish and locusts must be killed before preparation as food, as discussed earlier, but do not require ritual slaughter as do land animals and fowl. Shechita (traditional Jewish animal slaughter) is a method dating back to Moses, though it is only hinted to in the Torah. Its details were only authorized to be written in Talmudic times. Talmudic teachings enjoy the weight of the Torah itself, and comprise numerous and untold biblical traditions not previously committed to writing.

The procedure is essentially the same for all animals, and shechita is the most humane of any method of incurring death. Nerves to the animal's brain are severed instantaneously, as are the majority of the trachea and esophagus (food and wind pipes). These are cut open with the very first back and forth motions of the slaughtering knife, which must be entirely smooth. Cutting the majority of both inlets of the throat area at the very same time also causes the animal to immediately cease from its separate existence. This action must be instantaneous. If a prolonged instant occurred before the first two motions were complete, the animal would be declared not kosher for consumption. The back and forth motion of the chalaf (the perfectly thin, smooth slaughtering knife) and the decree that only the majority of both openings of life (of the throat area) be cut first, but not all, define that the hand which brings death be recognized as being of the same rhythm, as that which also brings life.

KOSHER STYLE

A kosher diet is also one which places the greatest emphasis on health. Many of the portions of animals which were (and will be) used for sacrifices in the Holy Temple were fat portions. Many of the fats of ordinary animals are also sanctified from us (as are the sciatic vein and other sections, due mostly to their lofty nature). We can learn from this that it is usually best if fatty foods not be overly consumed. Very sweet foods too, should best be eaten in moderation. On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, we have our bread with honey, and we hope and pray then especially, for a sweet and healthy year. The rest of the year though, we dip our bread in salt, signifying that we reach to subdue through our eating, aspects of life that are more challenging, (i.e., bitter, more than what is overly easy or sweet).