

Food for Thought

Hazon

## Chapter 3

# Kashrut



Kashrut – the act of keeping kosher – is one of the first things that people think of when they think of “Jews and food.” It is something that has distinguished the Jewish people for three millenia, in every place that we’ve lived. And it is one of the aspects of being Jewish where we feel the pull between tradition and (post)-modernity most strongly. Whether you keep kosher or not, kashrut is one of the richest and most challenging aspects of being Jewish.

In this section, we look at where the laws of kashrut originate in the Torah, and how they developed over time. And we examine how they have influenced not just what we eat, but how we eat, and with whom...

Do you keep kosher? If so, why? And in what ways, and what does it mean to you? Has your observance or understanding changed over time? Here are eight widely different answers to these questions to prompt you to think further about the choices you make and the reasons for them.

**Jon:** “When my wife entered a joint degree program at JTS and Columbia for a Master’s in Jewish Studies and Social Work, she developed an urge to keep kosher from her study and understanding of Judaism. **I agreed to keep kosher in our house for social reasons**, meaning to enable people to come over and eat with us as we have a large number of families at our synagogue who are kosher and we were getting invited to their houses to eat but they would not come to ours! I eventually became totally kosher (meaning also out of the house) because my then 4-year-old son Noah asked me: “Daddy, why are you eating a lobster?” I could not continue to live my “double” life.”

**Avi:** “While I have always kept kosher, I feel that I really only have been doing it as a conscious act since I began studying for the Rabbinat. Before then I did it because it was what I had always done. At this point in my life, I try to be conscious about how kashrut affects my life and how kashrut is a manifestation of my connection with the world around me and my place in the environment. Rather than creating a kashrut that fits with my conception of how I should eat, I take kashrut as my framework and see how it teaches me the ethics behind what I should eat. For example, **I don’t eat milk with meat because it teaches me to consider the hierarchy of life** and that despite the fact that I am at the upper end of the food chain, it is not right to take something that nourishes and use it to cook that which it nourishes. I could have begun this approach to food had I not kept kosher my whole life, but knowing all the rules and instinctively assuming that I have to plan ahead for most occasions because kosher food is not available everywhere has certainly helped me to be conscious of all food.”

**Sabrina:** “While I don’t keep kosher in the traditional sense, I do make a conscious effort to eat clean food that I consider kosher. For me, **kosher means food free from chemicals and genetically-modified organisms**. Ideally, it is food that is grown close to where I live, on a farm that promotes biodiversity and seed saving. Eating ‘kosher’ is my form of daily activism. I believe strongly in the power of the individual to vote with their dollar, and food is a way to do this every day.”

**Amy:** I observe the laws of kashrut as part of my practice of Judaism and living according to HaShem’s laws. As a Jew living in a gentile society where I am often faced with non-Jewish practices and influences, **my observance of kashrut helps me keep in my mind my firm religious beliefs**. When I choose not to eat in a non-kosher restaurant, I am reminded that Jews should remain separate from the gentiles in particular settings to preserve our sacredness. However, with the high accessibility and variety of kosher food items available (at least in New York), kashrut alone is not enough to maintain these sentiments. When I don’t have to go very far out of my way to eat kosher food, as Jews had to do years ago, it is even harder for the practice of kashrut to reconnect me to my personal commitment to Judaism and to our beliefs—but it’s an even more rewarding one. “

**Darya:** “I now find kashrut meaningful. As someone who doesn’t find “because God said so” to be a compelling rationale, I freely acknowledge that the specifics of kashrut are fairly random - but perhaps that is what makes them such a good reminder. Every time I scan a menu for vegetarian options, or wait three hours after dinner to try a piece of chocolate, I have the opportunity to think: **I am doing this to tie myself to generations of people who did this.** And I do it out of respect for them, and for their writings and teachings and thoughts and actions. If my lunch reminds me, daily, of the vastness of Judaism, and of the many, many things that I hope to learn and practice and explore within it, that is a good enough reason for me.”

**Leah:** Although I still eat unhechshered cheese, it is starting to feel less “authentically kosher” OR “authentically vegetarian,” to me because of the animal rennet. Not authentically vegetarian for obvious reasons, but not authentically kosher because kashrut is, to some degree, about the act of intentionally limiting or setting boundaries around what one eats or does not eat, regardless of cravings. And at this point **the only reason I still eat unhechshered cheese is because I love it too damn much not to.** Right now my belly wins out over my values on that one...I’m not sure where I’ll shift to in the future.”

**Zac:** “I keep kosher because I believe it to be God’s will. Although I appreciate the aspect of restraint that becomes manifest through kashrut, I don’t consider it to be the point of keeping kosher.”

**Tapani:** “When I became a Jew, my rabbi asked about keeping kosher. I explained that in my native, Finnish, cuisine, everything (including meat) is cooked with or in milk. Many of my favorite dishes involve meat and milk. It is very hard to turn your back on your native background. Also, I’m an architect. In my business clients want to feel comfortable with me—and that often involves going out to eat together. I believe that for a modern person the wisdom is in the interpretation of texts more than how we dress or eat.”

### Food for Thought:

- If you keep kosher, why do you keep kosher? To the extent to which you keep kosher, what does it mean to you to keep kosher?
- How has your relationship to kashrut changed over the years?
- Which of the statements on these two pages do you agree with? Find problematic? Aspire to?
- How many different positive consequences can you think of that derive from keeping kosher? Do you think there are any negative consequences of keeping kosher, and if so, what?

## 3.2 Kashrut: where does it come from?

Kashrut is built upon three separate sets of laws: permitted (*tahor*) and prohibited (*tamei*) species (which are listed in Deuteronomy 14 and Leviticus 11); the separation of milk & meat, which comes from the biblical injunction *lo tevashel gedi bechalev imo* – don't cook a kid (baby goat) in its mother's milk; and kosher slaughter, the rules of which are set out in the Talmud, Masekhet Chulin. The next few sections look at these three aspects of kashrut.

### Basic Definitions

כָּשֵׁר	<i>ka-s<u>her</u></i>	fit, adapted, proper <i>The word "kosher" in English can be used to describe food, i.e., "Is this food kosher?" and to refer to dishes, i.e., "I have to kasher my kitchen for Passover"</i>
כְּשָׁרוּת	<i>ka<u>sh</u>-ru<u>t</u></i>	fitness, worthiness, legitimacy; "kosher-ness"
קָדוֹשׁ	<i>ka-<u>dosh</u></i>	separated, sacred, holy <i>Note the other variations of this word: kiddush (blessing over wine); kiddushin (marriage); kaddish (prayer said by mourners and the reader in a prayer service)</i>
טָמֵא	<i>ta-<u>may</u></i>	ritually unclean, impure; not permitted for use in the sanctuary
טָהוֹר	<i>ta-<u>hor</u></i>	ritually pure, permissible
טְרֵיפָה	<i>te-ray-<u>fa</u></i>	an animal torn by a beast of prey; an animal afflicted with a (fatal) disease, the discovery of which, after slaughtering, makes it forbidden to eat. <i>Today "treyf" is used to signify any non-kosher food.</i>

### Food for Thought:

- What reason is given for the dietary laws in the passage from Deuteronomy on the next page?
- Jewish tradition creates holiness through separation. What do you make of this connection?

## Forbidden species

<sup>2</sup> For you are a people consecrated (*"kadosh"*) to the Lord your God: the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be God's treasured people.

<sup>3</sup> You shall not eat anything abhorrent.

<sup>4</sup> These are the animals that you may eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat; <sup>5</sup> the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, the mountain sheep, <sup>6</sup> and any other animal that has true hoofs which are cleft in two and brings up the cud; such you may eat. <sup>7</sup>

But the following, which do bring up the cud or have true hoofs which are cleft through, you may not eat: the camel, the hare, and the daman, for although they bring up the cud, they have no true hoofs, they are *tamay* for you; <sup>8</sup> also the swine, for although it has true hoofs, it does not bring up the cud, is *tamay* for you. You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses.

<sup>9</sup> These you may eat of all that live in water: you may eat anything that has fins and scales. <sup>10</sup> But you may not eat anything that has no fins and scales: it is unclean for you.

<sup>11</sup> You may eat any *tavor* bird. <sup>12</sup> The following you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; <sup>13</sup> the kite, the falcon, and the buzzard of any variety; <sup>14</sup> every variety of raven; <sup>15</sup> the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, and the hawk of any variety; <sup>16</sup> the little owl, the great owl, and the white owl; <sup>17</sup> the pelican, the bustard, and the cormorant; <sup>18</sup> the stork, any variety of heron, the hoopoe, and the bat.

<sup>19</sup> All winged swarming things are *tamay* for you: they may not be eaten.

<sup>20</sup> You may eat only *tavor* winged creatures.

<sup>21</sup> You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated (*"kadosh"*) to the Lord your God.

You shall not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk.

– Deuteronomy 14:2-21

כי עם קדוש אתה ליהוה אלהיך; ובך בחר יהוה להיות לו לעם סגולה מכל העמים, אשר על פני האדמה.

לא תאכל כל תועבה. זאת בהמה אשר תאכלו: שור שה כשבים ושה עזים. איל וצבי, ויחמור; ואקו ודישן ותאו וזמר. וכל בהמה מפרסת פרסה, ושסעת שסע שתי פרסות, מעלת גרה, בבהמה אתה תאכלו. אך את זה לא תאכלו ממעלי הגרה וממפריסי הפרסה השסועה:

את הגמל ואת הארנבת ואת השפן, כי מעלה גרה המה, ופרסה לא הפריסו טמאים הם לכם. ואת החזיר כי מפריס פרסה הוא, ולא גרה טמא הוא לכם; מבשרם לא תאכלו, ובנבלתם לא תגעו.

את זה תאכלו מכל אשר במים: כל אשר לו סנפיר וקשקשת תאכלו. וכל אשר אין לו סנפיר וקשקשת לא תאכלו, טמא הוא לכם.

כל צפור טהרה תאכלו. וזה אשר לא תאכלו מהם: הנשר והפרס, והעזניה. והראיה, ואת האיה, והדיה, למינה. ואת כל ערב, למינו. ואת בת היענה, ואת התחמס ואת השחף; ואת הנץ למינהו. את הכוס ואת הינשוף והתנשמת. והקאת ואת הרחמה ואת השלד. והחסידה והאנפה למינה; והדוכיפת והעטלף.

וכל שרץ העוף טמא הוא לכם: לא יאכלו. כל עוף טהור תאכלו.

לא תאכלו כל נבלה לגר אשר בשעריך ותתננה ואכלה, או מכר לזכרי כי עם קדוש אתה, ליהוה אלהיך;

לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו.

What reason is given for mammals which are permitted or forbidden?

How are the criteria for fish different from those for land animals?

All of the birds on this list are omnivores or carnivores. Do you think this is a reason for not eating them? What other reasons can you think of?

What do you think about this verse? What is the reason given for all of these laws?

### 3.3 Separating milk and meat

There's a famous joke:

- God: Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. (Exodus 23:19)  
Moses: You mean we should not mix meat and milk?  
God: Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. (Exodus 34:26)  
Moses: Ah. You mean we should wait three hours between meat and milk!  
God: Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. (Deuteronomy 14:21)  
Moses: Got it, God. You mean we should have two complete sets of dishes.  
God: Whatever, Moses. Have it your way.

This joke makes more sense when you understand that this precise phrase is repeated three times in the Torah. The rabbinic tradition understood this three-fold repetition to have profound significance (see the Shulchan Aruch source, below).

#### Prohibition of mixing meat and milk (Torah)

*This phrase appears in the Torah three times: Exodus 23:19; Exodus 34:26; and Deut. 14:21. Since no reason is given, (and since commentators, ever since, have wondered why this is a prohibition)—what do you think the reasons for this could be?*

You shall not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk.

לֹא תִבְשֵׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ.

#### Philo of Alexandria (4<sup>th</sup> century)

*What do you think of Philo's explanation?*

He has forbidden any lamb or kid or other like kind of livestock to be snatched away from its mother before it was weaned... If anyone thinks it good to boil flesh in milk let him do so without cruelty and keeping clear of impiety... The person who boils the flesh of lambs or kids or any other young animal in their mother's milk, shows himself cruelly brutal in character and gelded of compassion.

— *On the Virtues*, 143–44

#### Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century)

*What do you think of Maimonides' explanation?*

As for the prohibition against eating meat [boiled] in milk, it is in my opinion not improbable that—in addition to this being undoubtedly very gross food and very filling—idolatry had something to do with it. Perhaps such food was eaten at one of the ceremonies of their cult or at one of their festivals.

— *Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:48

#### Shulchan Aruch (16<sup>th</sup> century)

*What do you make of the Shulchan Aruch's reasons for the triple repetition of this verse?*

It is written in the Torah: "You shall not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk" three times (Ex. 23:19, 34:26; Deut. 14:21). Once for the prohibition of cooking (the two together), once for the prohibition of eating, and once for the prohibition of deriving pleasure (from the cooked mixture).

פְּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה: "לֹא תִבְשֵׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ" (שְׁמוֹת כג, יט; לֵד, כג; דְּבָרִים יד, כא) ג' פְּעָמִים; אֶחָד לְאִסּוּר בְּשׁוּל, וְאֶחָד לְאִסּוּר אֲכִילָה, וְאֶחָד לְאִסּוּר הִנָּאָה.

Even meat from wild animals and poultry are forbidden to be placed on a table on which cheese is eaten, so that [people] will not come to eat them together.

A person who has eaten meat, even meat from wild animals or poultry, should not eat cheese for six hours afterwards. And even if you have waited, if there is meat between your teeth, you must remove it.

A person who has eaten milk products is permitted to eat meat afterwards immediately, but one should examine one's hands to ensure there are no traces of the milk products stuck to them.

– *Yoreh Deah, Basar B'Chalav* 87:1, 88:1, 89:1 and 89:2

### Jean Soler (1950s)

[What the kid law means is:] You shall not put a mother and her son in the same pot any more than in the same bed.

– *The Semiotics of Food in the Bible*

### Jacob Milgrom (1990s)

The common denominator of all these prohibitions is the fusion and confusion of life and death simultaneously. The life-giving process of the mother bird hatching or feeding her young (Deut 22:6-7) should not be the occasion of their joint death. The sacrifice of the newborn may be inevitable, but not for the first week while it is constantly at its mother's breast and never should both the mother and its young be slain at the same time (Leviticus 22:27-8). By the same token, the mother's milk, the life-sustaining food for her kid, should never become associated with its death.

– *Leviticus 1-16 (Anchor Bible, vol. 3)*

### Food for Thought:

- Towards which of the commentators are you most sympathetic? If you do separate meat and milk, do you have or need a reason? If you do not, do you find any of these reasons (or any other reason) compelling?
- What is the value of following the rules of a system even if you have no rational basis for them? Are there any drawbacks or negative consequences of doing so?

אֶפִּילוֹ בֶּשֶׂר חַיָּה וְעוֹף, אֲסוּר לְהַעֲלוֹתוֹ עַל  
שֻׁלְחַן שְׂאוֹכֵל עָלָיו גִּבְיָנָה, שֶׁלֹּא יָבֹא  
לֵאכֹלם יַחַד.

אֲכַל בֶּשֶׂר, אֶפִּילוֹ שֶׁל חַיָּה וְעוֹף, לֹא יֵאָכֵל  
גִּבְיָנָה אַחֲרָיו עַד שִׁישָׁהּ שָׁשׁ שָׁעוֹת.  
וְאֶפִּילוֹ אִם שָׁהָה בְּשַׁעוֹר, אִם יֵשׁ בֶּשֶׂר בֵּין  
הַשְּׁנַיִם, צָרִיף לְהַסִּירוֹ.

אֲכַל גִּבְיָנָה, מוֹתֵר לֵאכֹל אַחֲרָיו בֶּשֶׂר מִיָּד,  
וּבְלִבְדֵּי שְׁנַעֲיִין יָדָיו שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה שׁוֹם דָּבָר  
מִהַגִּבְיָנָה נִדְבֵּק בָּהֶם.

The wild animals in this text are non-domesticated kosher animals, such as wild deer. The text uses the language of 'even meat from wild animals and poultry' because the Torah commandment of separating meat and milk only applies to meat from domesticated mammals. The rabbis extended the prohibition to include poultry and wild animals.

What do you think of Soler's explanation?

What do you think of Milgrom's explanation?

#### Reference Texts:

If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.  
– Deuteronomy 22:6-7

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to the Lord. However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.  
– Leviticus 22:27-28

### 3.4 Kosher slaughter

The third main element of kashrut is kosher slaughter. Most of us have no direct experience of the slaughter of an animal: the shift from schechting one's own meat to buying pre-kashered, cut and packaged meat has happened in the space of less than 100 years. Riza néni's story on the next page could describe the experience of most of our great-grandparents. What happens, though, to us and to kashrut when most of us have no connection to the process by which a living animal becomes meat? Put another way, is our experience of "meat" different if we have the direct awareness of it coming from a once-living animal?

#### Wetting the blade

*If you slaughtered several animals a week, do you think you could show compassion for each one? What about if you slaughtered several animals an hour?*

After the Ba'al Shem Tov passed, a new shochet took his place. He was well-learned in all the laws and followed them scrupulously. He sharpened his knife, knew just where to hold the neck, how to make the cut.

He noticed, though, that a man would watch him as he slaughtered the chickens, and shake his head in disapproval. After several days, he asked the man what he was doing wrong.

"I wet the blade, I sharpen it, I make the smallest, quickest cut, just as I learned from the Ba'al Shem Tov. What am I doing that's upsetting you?"

The man, who remembered watching the Ba'al Shem Tov prepare for and slaughter animals, shook his head.

"It is true, you wet the blade and sharpen it. But where you use water to sharpen your blade, the Ba'al Shem Tov used his own tears."

— Chasidic folktale

#### The purpose of kashrut is to keep us humane

*What do you think of this argument?*

*The process of killing an animal in the biblical era—raising it, taking it to Jerusalem, slaughtering it oneself as an offering— was very different than today's pre-packaged frozen meat.*

*"If he has a strong desire..."  
see 3.5 and 6.3*

What was the necessity for the entire procedure of ritual slaughter? For the sake of self-discipline. It is far more appropriate for man not to eat meat; only if he has a strong desire for meat does the Torah permit it, and even this only after the trouble and inconvenience necessary to satisfy his desire. Perhaps because of the bother and annoyance of the whole procedure, he will be restrained from such a strong and uncontrollable desire for meat.

— Rabbi Solomon Efraim Lunchitz, *Kli Yakar*

#### If you feel a murderous instinct...

*A shochet is someone who performs kosher slaughter.*

*The rabbis understand this passage to mean that such a person should become a shochet or a mohel, lest they become a murderer. This is a famous line from the Talmud, and a remarkable one. What do you think it means?*

*Is this a comment about how to kill animals or how to relate to humans?*

He who is born under Mars will be a shedder of blood. Rabbi Ashi said: Either a surgeon, a thief, a slaughterer, or a circumciser.

— Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 156a

הָאִי מָאֵן דְּבִמְאָדִּים יְהִי גִבֵּר אֲשִׁיד דְּמָא.  
אָמַר רַבִּי אֲשִׁי: אִי אוֹמְנָא, אִי גִנְבָא, אִי  
טַבָּחָא, אִי מוֹהֵלָא.



## Kosher slaughter in 19th century Hungary

If Riza néni needed meat for lunch or dinner, she took the shopping basket and went to Mr. Schlesinger, the kosher butcher, who had a shop on the corner of Duna Street diagonally across the street from her. Farther down on that side of Main Street, past Vilmos Rév Street, there was another kosher butcher shop, but she rarely went there because Mr. Schlesinger's shop was more convenient for her. Mother liked to accompany Riza néni to the butcher because he usually gave her a slice of roast to munch on. Riza néni knew all the customers at the butcher, and it was another occasion for the women to gossip a little.

If Riza néni decided to have chicken or any other fowl for lunch, in the morning Paula caught the bird, bound its feet, put it in a wicker shopping basket, and gave it to my mother to take it to the shochet, the Jewish ritual slaughterer. The shochet, who was also the assistant cantor, had a little wooden cabin behind the one-story building containing his apartment and that of the *shammas* (synagogue beadle) in the courtyard of the synagogue. My mother knocked on a window of his apartment, the shochet came out, and while they walked to the shack he inquired about the health of my great-grandparents. At the shack he first used his nail to check the sharpness of his blade, which by religious requirement had to be perfectly sharp and free of any nicks to avoid torturing the animal. Then for a second he let the bird loose to see if it could move, because it was forbidden to kill a sick animal. Now, while my mother waited outside the shack, he clasped the wings of the animal, bent its neck back, plucked some of the feathers from the neck, said a brief blessing, and slit the throat of the bird with one quick, decisive movement. It was a virtuoso performance. Then he hung it for a few minutes from one of the hooks on the wall to drain its blood, which was carried by a trough at the foot of the wall to a pit in the courtyard. After my mother had brought the chicken home, Paula took it out to the garbage pit behind my great-grandparent's house, where she cleaned it with amazing speed. When she plucked geese, she carefully kept the down for later use in pillows and quilts.

To kosher the poultry, Paula cleaned out its insides, cut open or removed parts that could contain too much blood, cut up the bird if she planned to cook it in pieces, soaked the pieces for about half an hour. Then she placed them on a big round basket, which was held in a slanted position by two legs at one end, and salted them. After waiting for an hour for the salt to draw out the remaining blood, she shook off the salt, rinsed each piece three times, and briefly soaked them again. Finally, she rinsed off the salt from the basket, placed the meat pieces on it, poured another bucket of water over them, and let them drain on the basket.

— András Koerner, *A taste of the Past: The Daily Life and Cooking of a 19th-Century Hungarian Jewish Homemaker*

## Food for Thought:

- Have you ever shechted an animal or watched one being shechted? How would it feel different to eat meat where you had been involved in the process of killing and preparing it, vs. meat you had not?
- Do you think there is such thing as “humane slaughter”?

*How many of the people you buy your food from inquire after the health of your grandparents?*

*How do you imagine you'd relate—for instance—to roast chicken on a Friday night if you'd had Riza néni's experience in the last 24 hours? (This is not a leading question. We don't mean to assume, for instance, that the answer is, “I wouldn't eat chicken”—though it might be. We mean it as an open question. Would your experience of meat-eating be different or not, and if so, how?)*

For more on eating meat, see 8.6

## Kosher Slaughter in 21st century Connecticut

At the 2007 Hazon Food Conference, participants were able to watch three goats be shechted. The meat was served for Shabbat dinner that evening. One observer wrote:

*“I began to wonder at what point during the process did the beautiful goat transform into “meat?” Was it immediately following the cut? Was it when the goat was hung up on the rafters of the Adamah shed? Was it when it was skinned and butchered, or served on Friday night? I still don't know. What I do know is that at no point during the process did I question whether this animal was being treated with respect. Everyone present and involved clearly had nothing but respect, love, and gratitude for this animal - I know that sounds hokey, but it was true. And this respect carried through until Friday night when the platter of “fresh, pasture-raised, local roasted goat” was carved and served.”*

— Leah Koenig

The sacrificial system was the primary mode of worship in ancient Israel, while the Temple stood. Looking at it more closely provides a snapshot of pre-rabbinic Judaism, shows some of the basis for our current system of kashrut, and helps us frame our questions about meat-eating in a new light.

### Prohibition against blood

*These texts show the original prohibition against consuming blood, which God gives to Noah after the flood (before Noah, no animal flesh was permitted for human consumption), and the extension of this idea in Deuteronomy. The Leviticus passage describes the procedure for the burnt offering, where the blood must be spilled against the altar.*

*What reason is given for not eating the blood? What do you think about this?*

For a description of removing the blood from kosher meat, see 3.4.

<sup>3</sup> Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. <sup>4</sup> You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.

– Genesis 9:3–4

<sup>23</sup> But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh. <sup>24</sup> You must not partake of it; you must pour it out on the ground like water. <sup>25</sup> You must not partake of it, in order that it may go well with you and with your descendants to come, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the Lord.

– Deuteronomy 12:23–25

<sup>10</sup> If his offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. <sup>11</sup> It shall be slaughtered before the Lord on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar.

– Leviticus 1:10–11

כָּל רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאִכְלָהּ:  
בְּיֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל. אֵךְ בִּשְׂרָר  
בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ.

רַק חֹזֶק לְבַלְתִּי אֲכַל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא  
הַנֶּפֶשׁ; וְלֹא תֹאכַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ עִם הַבָּשָׂר. לֹא  
תֹאכְלוּ: עַל הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכוּ בָּמִים. לֹא  
תֹאכְלוּ לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ וּלְבְנֶיךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי  
תַעֲשֶׂה הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה.

וְאִם מִן הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן הַבְּשָׂרִים אוֹ מִן  
הָעוֹרִים לַעֲלֹה זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיבוּ. וְשָׁחַט  
אֹתוֹ עַל יָד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ צִפְנָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה; וְזָרְקוּ  
בְּנֵי אֹהֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת דָּמוֹ עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ  
סָבִיב.

### Outrageous?

*What do you make of the notion that “the life of the animal was its blood”?*

Why wasn't God satisfied with prayer, without animal killing? And weren't there sensitive Israelite souls who were reviled by heaps of burning flesh and rivers of blood on God's altar? I would argue that ancient Israel would have been unruffled by these questions. First, according to the Bible, the life of the animal was its blood (Gen 9:4). Out of respect for that life force, all biblical sources agree that it was forbidden to imbibe blood. While the Israelites were allowed to sacrifice, therefore, they had to return the blood to God, its divine creator, by offering the blood of sacrificial animals on an altar. If they neglected to do so, thereby flouting the sanctity of the animal life, they would be considered murderers. Because the source of the animal's life was its blood, there was no need to harbor guilt for slaughtering an animal for its meat so long as its blood was drained and returned to God via the altar. According to the Priestly source, the prohibition to imbibe blood is incumbent on all humanity; only the flesh of the animal is permitted to human appetite, a concession by God to satisfy humanity's hunger.

For more on sacrifices and justice, see 8.2.

– Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*

## Kinds of Sacrifice

<b>Burnt Offering</b> עֹלָה <i>"olah"</i> Lev. 1:1-17	male cattle, sheep, goats or birds	burnt entirely, except for hide; no part was eaten	brought by an individual to atone for general sins; offering also performed twice daily by priests on behalf of the community
<b>Grain Offering</b> מִנְחָה <i>"mincha"</i> Lev. 2:1-16	choice, inner kernels of wheat	mixed with olive oil and baked into cakes, or roasted into groats; portion was burned, remainder eaten by priests only	alternative <i>olah</i> sacrifice for the poor (who couldn't afford meat)
<b>Offering of Well-Being</b> זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים <i>"zevach shelamim"</i> Lev. 3:1-17	kosher animals	sacred meal shared by priests and donor; only fatty portions of animals burned on the altar	spontaneous offering of thankfulness, a ritual to acknowledge miracles of life and express gratitude
<b>Purification Offering</b> חֲטָאת <i>"hataf"</i> Lev. 4:1-35	bull (community) ram (chieftain) female goat (individual)	fat and organs burned on altar; rest of animal burned on ash heap outside the camp	for unintended ritual offenses by an individual or the community
<b>Reparation Offering</b> אָשָׁם <i>"asham"</i> Lev. 5:14-26	ram, or money equivalent	not eaten	for intentional, unremediable sins (ie., theft or perjury); sinner must also express remorse and restore property plus an additional fine

## Not only in the Temple

<sup>17</sup> You may not partake in your settlements of the tithes of your new grain or wine or oil, or of the firstlings of your herds and flocks, or of any of the votive offerings that you vow, or of your freewill offerings, or of your contributions. <sup>18</sup> These you must consume before the Lord your God in the place that the Lord your God will choose — you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levite in your settlements — happy before the Lord your God in all your undertakings. <sup>19</sup> Be sure not to neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land.

<sup>20</sup> When the Lord enlarges your territory, as God has promised you, and you say, "I shall eat some meat," for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.

<sup>21</sup> If the place where the Lord has chosen to establish God's name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep that the Lord gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart's content in your settlements

— Deuteronomy 12:7-21

לֹא תֹכֵל לֶאֱכֹל בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂר דִּגְגָךָ וְתִירֶשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ וּבְכֹרֶת בִּקְרֶךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ; וְכָל נִדְרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ וְנִדְבָתֶיךָ וּתְרוֹמַת יָדֶךָ. כִּי אִם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ אֶתָּה וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ; וְשִׂמְחַת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מְשֻׁלַּח יָדְךָ. הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ פֶּן תַּעֲזֹב אֶת הַלְוִי כָּל יְמֶיךָ עַל אֲדָמְתְּךָ.

What do you think contemporary Judaism would look like if this passage were not included in Deuteronomy?

Notice the emphasis on remembering the Levite. The priests had no land of their own; the sacrificial system ensured the Levites would be fed.

כִּי יִרְחֹב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת גְּבֻלְךָ בָּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכָלָה בָּשָׂר כִּי תֵאָוֶה נַפְשְׁךָ לֶאֱכֹל בָּשָׂר בְּכָל אֹת נַפְשְׁךָ תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר. כִּי יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם וּבִחַתָּ מִבִּקְרֶךָ וּמִצֹּאנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָךְ בָּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ בְּכָל אֹת נַפְשְׁךָ.

Do you think "craving" meat is a good enough reason to be allowed to eat it whenever you want?

What does this text imply about human nature?

For more on craving, see 6.3

## Food for Thought:

- How does the biblical understanding of "life-blood" resonate with your own feelings about eating meat? Does it affect your decision to eat kosher meat?
- Although we no longer offer food on an altar to God, in what ways and in what situations does food play a role in our relationship to the Divine?

### 3.6 Kashrut and separation: fraternizing with

One of the consequences of keeping kosher is not merely that kashrut involves food separation but that the act of separating one's food also separates people who keep kosher from those who don't.

This issue is fascinating because it remains a real issue for many people to this day. Some people strictly keep kosher, but go to great lengths to be able to eat with non-Jewish friends or family members. Some don't keep kosher – or are more lenient with the degree to which they keep kosher in certain circumstances – precisely because they're not willing to separate themselves. And some people don't deliberately separate themselves, but find that the act of keeping kosher (for instance, eating only at a kosher dining hall in college) has the practical consequence of separating them from non-Jewish (or Jewish but non-kosher) friends, whether they mean to or not.

In this section we've deliberately brought together some lesser-known – and some would say, inflammatory – texts, mostly from the Middle Ages, which argue explicitly for keeping kosher specifically and deliberately in order to separate Jews from non-Jews. (It's important to point out that in most cases these texts are not considered valid today, or if they are, the definition of "*ovdei kochavim*" [idolators] is explicitly understood not to mean most gentiles today.) But we think they're important to read and to learn because they throw light on Jewish history, and because they raise contemporary questions:

- What are the social consequences of keeping kosher?
- If kashrut does separate Jews from non-Jews, (and especially if you strongly disagree with these texts) what in your view are some positive reasons for, or consequences of, keeping kosher in order to encourage social separation?
- What are the negative reasons or consequences of abiding by these sorts of rules (especially if you agree with them)?

קָדוֹשׁ

*ka-dosh* separated, sacred, holy

*Note the other variations of this word: kiddush (blessing over wine); kiddushin (marriage); kaddish (prayer said by mourners and the reader in a prayer service)*

*How do you read this text?  
(Remember that "holy/kadosh"  
means "sacred" and/or "separate,"  
rather than "better").*

#### Holiness and separation at Havdallah

Blessed are you, God, sovereign of the universe, the one who separates between the holy and the mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of doing/work. Blessed are you, God, sovereign of the universe who distinguishes the holy from the mundane.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל,  
בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ, בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְעַמִּים, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יָמֵי  
הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַמְבַדֵּיל  
בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל.

## Concern for intermarriages

Why has liquor of idolaters [*ovdei kochavim*]; lit., “starworshippers”) been forbidden? Rami bar Hama said in the name of Rabbi Isaac: Because of [concern for inter-]marriages.

– *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 31b*

## The banquet

It has been taught: Rabbi Ishmael says, Israelites who reside outside the land [of Israel] serve idols though in pure innocence. For example, if an idolater gives a banquet for his son and invites all the Jews in his town, then, even though they eat of their own and drink of their own and their own attendant waits on them, Scripture regards them as if they had eaten of the sacrifices to dead idols, as it is said, “they will invite you and you will eat of their sacrifices” (Ex: 34:15).

But does not this apply to only eating [as opposed to merely attending an idolator’s feast]? Said Raba: If that were so, the verse would have only said, “and you will eat of their sacrifices.” Why then say, “and they will invite you?” That extends the prohibition to the time of the participation.

– *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 8:1*

## Eating bread

Although [our Sages] forbade bread [baked by] idolaters [the acronym used is “*akum*”; a contraction of “*ovdei kochavim*”], there are places where leniency is shown regarding this matter and bread baked by an idolator baker is purchased in a place where there is no Jewish baker and it is in a rural area, because this is a pressing situation. There is, by contrast, no one who will rule that leniency may be shown with regard to bread baked by a homeowner. For the primary reason for [our Sages] decree was because of [concern for inter-] marriage. If one will eat the bread of a [idolator] homeowner, [it is likely that] he will feast with him.

– *Maimonides, Ma’achalot Asurot 17:12*

מפני מה אסרו שֶׁכֶּר של עובדי כוכבים?  
רמי בר חמא אמר רבי יצחק:  
משום חתנות.

What are the positive consequences of Jewish social separation over time? What are the negative consequences?

תניא, רבי ישמעאל אומר: ישראל  
שבחוזה לארץ עובדי עבודת כוכבים  
בטהרה הן, ביצר? עובד כוכבים שעשה  
משתה לבנו וזמן כל היהודים שבעירו, עף  
על פי שאוכלין משלהן ושותין משלהן  
ושמש שלהן עומד לפניהם, מעלה עליהם  
הכתוב כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר:  
‘וְקָרָא לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ מִזִּבְחֵי (שמות לד).

ואימא: עד דאכלו אמר רבא: אם בן,  
נימא קרא וְאָכַלְתָּ מִזִּבְחֵי, מאי וְקָרָא לָךְ?  
משעת קריאה.

אף על פי שאסרו פת עבוי'ם, יש  
מקומות שמקלין בדבר ולוקחין פת  
מן הנחתום העבוי'ם, במקום שאין  
שם נחתום ישראל; ובשדה, מפני  
שהיא שעת הדחק. אבל פת בעלי  
בתים, אין שם מי שמורה בה להקל,  
שעיקר הגזירה משום חתנות; ואם  
יאכל פת בעלי בתים, יבוא לסעד  
אצלן.

At various times in history, “ovdei kochavim” have been defined to refer to—and then specifically not to refer to—Christians, Muslims and Buddhists. Why do you think this is?

It’s important to note that most traditional Jewish authorities today would define “ovdei kochavim” literally to mean pagans, but not members of any of the worlds other major religions.

## Meals with gentiles

*What is the only instance in which drinking liquor made by non-Jews is forbidden? What are all the exceptions given to this rule? What do you make of the reasoning for them?*

Every type of liquor made by Kutim [certain class of gentiles]—liquor made from dates or figs or barley or wheat or honey—is forbidden because [it might lead to inter-] marriage. And [these beverages] are not forbidden except in the place where they are sold.

But, if one buys the liquor and brings it back to his home and drinks it there, then it is permitted. This is on account that the decree is [established] lest one has a meal with the gentile. And the decree only applies in a case where a Jew makes specific plans to drink [with the gentile] in the way that people gather to drink [i.e. a bar], but if [a Jew] enters the home of a gentile and drinks in a casual manner as a matter of happenstance, this is permitted. And similarly, one who sleeps in a gentile's house, it is considered like one's own house [and therefore one could drink with the gentile].

– *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 114:1*

כָּל שֵׁכָר שֶׁל כּוֹתִים, אֶחָד שֵׁכָר שֶׁל תְּמָרִים אוֹ שֶׁל תְּאֵנִים אוֹ שֶׁל שְׁעוּרִים אוֹ שֶׁל תְּבוּאָה אוֹ שֶׁל דִּבְשׁ, אֲסוּר מִשּׁוּם חֲתֻנּוּת, וְאִינוּ אֲסוּר אֲלָא בַּמָּקוֹם מִכִּירָתוֹ.

אֲבָל אִם הֵבִיא הַשֵּׁכָר לְבֵיתוֹ וְשׁוּתָהּ שָׁם, מִתֵּר, שְׁעָקָר הַגִּזְרָה שָׁמָּה יִסְעֵד אֲצִלּוֹ. וְלֹא אֲסָרוּ אֲלָא כְּשֶׁקוֹבֵעַ עֲצָמוֹ לְשִׁתוֹת בְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁאֵדָם קוֹבֵעַ בְּשִׁתְיָהּ, אֲבָל אִם נִכְנֵס בְּבֵית הָעוֹבֵד כּוֹכְבִים וְשִׁתָּהּ דֶּרֶךְ עֲרָאִי בְּאִקְרָאִי, מִתֵּר. וְכֵן מִי שֶׁלֵּן בְּבֵית הָעוֹבֵד כּוֹכְבִים, חָשׁוּב כְּבֵיתוֹ.

## As seen from the gentile perspective

*After the French Revolution, for the first time in history, Jews were granted citizenship of the nation-state of France. Leading up to this decision were a series of debates regarding the place of the Jew in society. This piece is excerpted from one of these debates.*

*In what ways does this non-Jewish perspective differ from the Jewish ones in the previous texts?*

*How does the last sentence further reinforce the connection between eating together and building relationships?*

Does the Law of Moses make citizenship, and the full integration of the Jew into other peoples, difficult or impossible? I think it does! The purpose of the Law is to maintain the Jews as a people almost completely separate from other peoples, and this purpose is an integral part of all the laws, down to those concerning kosher and non-kosher food, with the result that the Jews have lived as a separate group during 1700 years of dispersion. As long as the Jews continue to observe the Mosaic Laws, as long as they refuse, for example, to eat together with us and to form sincere friendship at the table, they will never become fully integrated in the way that Catholics, Lutherans, Germans, Wends, and French live together in one state. (I am not discussing isolated cases, but rather the Jews as a collective entity.)

– *Johann David Michaels, "Arguments against Dohm" (1782)*

## The purpose of kashrut

I believe that the purpose of kashrut is to make eating a special experience and to serve as a reminder of a Jew's ethical conscience as well as of the other unique teachings of Judaism. To me, distinctiveness and not separation is the Jew's calling. This feeling is possible in the presence of non-observant Jews and of non-Jews. The values of friendship, human solidarity, and socializing are highly esteemed Jewish values; making a living and exchanging professional service (sometimes performed over a meal) also are respected in Jewish culture. One of the great qualities of the Jewish tradition is its ability to balance contradictions—idealism and realism, Jewish particularism and unusual concern for humanity. Similarly, in the act of eating, one can strike that balance between fidelity to one's own principles and shared friendship and respectful contact with others.

— Blu Greenberg, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*

What do you think about Blu's argument?

Do you agree that "one of the great qualities of the Jewish tradition is its ability to balance contradictions"? How do you experience this balance in your own life?

## Blu's instructions for how to keep kosher and still eat in a non-kosher restaurant

This process is not as complicated as it seems:

1. Order a kosher fish, that is, one of the permitted kinds, let us say red snapper.
2. Ask the maitre d' or the chief cook to rinse the fish well and to wrap it tightly in two separate layers of aluminum foil, completely closed, and then bake it. It can be baked with seasonings such as butter, sour cream, lemon juice, salt and pepper, cloves (wonderful with baked fish).
3. It should be served exactly the way it is baked, closed, in its aluminum foil wrapping, just as the kosher flight food packs are served on airplanes.
4. Since it is hot, it cannot be eaten from a non-kosher dish nor with non-kosher cutlery. Therefore, the waiter will bring plastic cutlery and a paper plate—or the fish can be eaten out of its own foil container. Some hotels keep on hand brand-new flatware which they bring out for first-time use in these circumstances. ...

The same procedures can be followed when people who observe kashrut are invited to the homes of people who do not. True, some hosts will feel awkward about serving a guest a fresh salad when others get roast duck, but by extending themselves and by agreeing not to be embarrassed on either side, justice can be done to both kashrut and the need to socialize.

The above suggestions will enable one to eat out with friends or in business situations while meeting the technical requirements of kashrut. Some Jews would object on the principle of *marit ayin*. Others might point out that the dishes used had not been immersed. Still others would argue that the very purpose of kashrut was to discourage excessive socializing with people who don't observe the laws. However, none of these objections are flaws in the basic condition of being kosher.

— Blu Greenberg, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*

Do you follow the same rules of kashrut in public as in someone's home?

Blu is an Orthodox Jew. But inherent in what she writes is the contemporary understanding that "akum" now literally does refer to pagans, but does not include Christians, Moslems and almost all people we might have social interactions with.

## Food for Thought:

- What is your experience of kashrut to separate?
- How has kashrut played a positive role in the survival of the Jewish people? How do you understand Blu Greenberg's subtle but important distinction between 'distinctiveness' and 'separation'?

Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Rabbi Arthur Waskow introduced and popularized the concept of eco-kashrut. It has been important in getting Jewish people to think seriously about a range of issues that relate to ethical consumption. The notion of eco-kashrut helps raise further questions about what is inherent in kashrut itself.

## It's kosher, but is it eco-kosher?

"I invented the word eco-kosher, to say that something is ecologically kosher. I'll give you an example of eco-kosher. The regular kosher way, is about the dishes that mustn't be contaminated, etc. If I pick a cup to have coffee, styrofoam would be the best thing to have. It hasn't been used before and after I drink from it, I'll throw it away and nobody else will use it. From the usual kosher place that's the direction to go... but in comparison to what will happen to the planet by my drinking in a styrofoam, I'd much rather make the other choice... eco-kosher."

– Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

## Some eco-kosher hekhshers

A variety of "eco-kosher hekhshers" have been established recently.

- *Ma'agalei Tzedek* is an Israel-based hekhsher for businesses that are accessible to disabled people and who treat their workers fairly
- *Wholesome Kosher* (WK) certifies healthy & kosher food in the US
- *Earth Kosher* certifies a range of food, clothing and health products
- *Natural Food Certifiers* offers an Apple K Kosher label for kosher food that is also healthy
- The Conservative Movement is in the process of developing standards for a *Hekhsher Tzedek* that would indicate adherence to traditional laws of kashrut as well as a commitment to social responsibility and workers' rights



Apple K Kosher

## Eco-kashrut is based on traditional Jewish values

צַעַר בְּעַלֵּי חַיִּים	<i>Tza-ar ba-a-lei cha-yim</i>	respect for animals / avoidance of suffering
בַּל תִּשְׁחִית	<i>Bal tash-chit</i>	not ruining or needlessly destroying
שְׁמִירַת הַגּוּף	<i>Shemi-rat ha-guf</i>	the protection of one's own body
צְדָקָה	<i>Tze-da-kah</i>	justice / doing that which is right
עוֹשֶׁק	<i>O-shek</i>	not oppressing workers
בְּרָכָה, קְדוּשָׁה	<i>Be-ra-cha, ke-du-sha</i>	consciously affirming a sense of holiness and blessing when we eat



### Kosher is kosher

As a Jew who believes kashrut is part of the discipline of Judaism, kashrut is kashrut. Eco-kashrut is something different. Not that I'm opposed to eco-kashrut, but it's something else.

- Jack Wertheimer, Provost JTS

### Beyond eco-kosher

At this point I think we should consider dropping the phrase eco-kosher. It allows traditional halachic Jews essentially to ignore the underlying issues that eco-kashrut often addresses, on the basis that eco-kashrut is not traditionally halachic. And it causes liberal Jews to establish their own categories, rather than address traditional ones.

But the issues that are often discussed under the rubric of "eco-kashrut" are in fact thoroughly within the domain of traditional halacha. My friend Rabbi Julian Sinclair – an orthodox rabbi of unimpeachably traditional credentials – argues that driving an SUV is against the halacha. He doesn't mean "eco-halacha," he means traditional halacha. Retiring the phrase eco-kashrut doesn't mean failing to address the underlying issues; rather it means engaging them with intellectual integrity in Jewish communities of many sorts, including the Orthodox community.

– Nigel Savage

### Food for Thought:

- What are the advantages of applying biblical or medieval elements of halacha to contemporary issues? What are the challenges?
- Do you think the concept of eco-kashrut is helpful? Why or why not?