

Eating Kosher

The Jewish Dietary Laws

By Rabbi Pinchas Taylor

Part 1: What is Kosher?

What kinds of foods are kosher? What are the reasons for keeping kosher? A brief introduction to the dietary laws of the Torah.

I. Introduction to Kosher Food

A. What is Kosher food?

1. Prohibitions from certain animals, mixing meat and dairy, and the way in which the permitted animal is killed.
 - a) Animals must have split hooves and chew cud
 - b) fish must have both fins and scales
 - c) one cannot cook, eat, or benefit from meat and milk
 - d) Ritual slaughter: trachea and esophagus (the carotid artery and jugular veins are also severed in this operation)

B. Why are we told to keep Kosher?

1. Three types of mitzvos: mishpatim, eidus, chukim
 - a) No reason is given for “why” the kosher laws, therefore any rational explanation is simply an exercise in human imagination
 2. Everything physical is the embodiment of a spiritual principle
 3. World setup: In every situation given chance to connect with G-d, or go our own way. Since we eat, there must be things we're allowed and things not.
 4. Nothing to do with health
 - a) Would not explain why animal must be slaughtered properly, fins and scales, or why milk from non-kosher animal
 - c) Unproven that all animals declared not kosher are harmful to health.
 - d) If healthier, would have been commanded to non-Jews as well
5. Even though beyond reason, there are some positive outcomes and benefits.
 - a) Self-control
 - b) Compassion
 - c) Trait inheritance symbolism

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Part 2: The Science of Kashrut

Many of the dietary laws from the Torah reveal a knowledge of science that could not yet have been known in Biblical times.

I. Split hooves and chews its cud.

Aids animal by allowing it to eat quickly and chew later while resting.

A. Camel, shafan, arnevet: only animals that chew cud, but no split hooves. (Chullin 59a)

B. Pig is only animal that has split hooves, but not chew cud.

1. If you find new animal in desert that has split hooves, you can eat it, as long as you can recognize a pig.

2. Australia, the Americas, Antarctica, and the vast majority of the other continents had not yet been discovered, let alone explored, when the Torah was given.

II. Fins and Scales

A. If not totally sure, should never divulged as could be disproved later in time

B. Mishna (Nidda 6:9) All fish with scales—have fins, but some with fins—no scales.

1. Halacha, if one finds a fish with scales one can eat it and assume fins either haven't grown yet, or fell off.

2. Never been a fish discovered that has scales and no fins!!

III. Honey

A. Mishna: "Comes from not kosher is not kosher, comes from kosher is kosher."

1. Milk of camel, eggs of a vulture.

2. Honey is considered pure.

a) Honey consists of nectar, which bees gather, store and transport to honeycombs.

In bee, nectar broken down and transformed into honey by enzymes in the bee.

b) Never digested by bee. Not a product of the bee itself, like milk.

c) Understanding of protein synthesis and details of honey making not available

IV. Shechita

A. There have been times when deemed inhumane (England 1980s)

B. Meant to be as little pain for animal

1. Shochet uses completely smooth blade.
2. One rapid movement -- testimony of surgeons in emergency medical surgery, inadvertently cut, did not even realize until after blood started flowing
3. Kosher animals physiologically different flow of blood to head than non-kosher
 - a) non-kosher: vertebral arteries go into Rete Mirabile ("Circle of Willis" in humans circle of arteries that supply blood to the brain.
4. Bechoros, Rambam , Forbidden Foods 3:3 It would seem shechita wouldn't stop blood to brain because knife doesn't go that far... Amazingly in Kosher animals those arteries instead merge with carotid artery which is totally severed in shechita, stops blood flow, dies instantly.
5. Furthermore, study in 1961 showed non-kosher animals resist slaughterhouse, they can sense approaching death. Kosher animals no signs of fear.
 - a) Story of R. Yehuda Hanasi (Bava Metzia 85a)

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Part 3: Meaningful Eating

How do we turn eating into a spiritual experience? A mystical view on food.

- First law to Adam and Eve was a dietary law
- Eating is a base function in a human being.
- If one can and needs to control base instincts, they can and must control all else.
- 3 realms of reality: holy, neutral, and unholy
- Two things are accomplished through eating:
 - 1) Human gains strength—body and soul are kept together
 - 2) Food elevated. Mineral, vegetable, or animal elevated becoming flesh and blood of human
- Furthermore, when human uses strength gained from food to serve G-d, it ascends
- Whole point in life is to uplift the mundane to holy
- Assur means “bound” -- Cannot be elevated.