

UNIT II KEEPING KOSHER

LEADER'S GUIDE

1. Begin by asking Kadimanicks why they believe that God gave the Jewish people the laws of keeping kosher. (You may also wish to discuss with those Kadimanicks in your group who do observe kashrut why they choose to do so).
2. Read the kashrut verses in the Bible cited in the Kadima sourcebook. Then ask the Kadimanicks how keeping kosher relates to being a holy people. (i.e.-what does "what you eat" have to do with holiness?)
3. Review the possible answers related to the rationale for keeping kosher by having Kadimanicks take turns reading the three answers provided in the sourcebook.
4. Finally, discuss with Kadimanicks other ways that keeping kosher can elevate the act of eating into a holy experience.

UNIT II**KEEPING KOSHER: NOT ONLY WHAT WE EAT BUT HOW WE EAT**

Knowledge about keeping kosher is at best minimal. It is more misunderstood than understood. The most common misconception about keeping kosher is that it is an ancient health measure, and that so-called kosher animals are healthier to eat than non-kosher ones. But is health the primary concern of kashrut? Let us look at the Bible for some possible answers.

Kashruit in the Bible

In Chapter 11 of the book of Leviticus we are told what animals we may eat and those that cannot be eaten. Animals that can be eaten must possess the following three characteristics: a) it must divide the hoof; b) it must be wholly clover-footed; and c) it must chew the cud. Examples of animals in this category are cow, lamb and sheep. With regard to permissible fish, the characteristics include fins and scales. After a lengthy enumeration of animals, birds and fish that are permitted, the Bible concludes with these words: "I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves 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". (Leviticus 11: 44-45).

In Deuteronomy 14:21 we read: "You shall not eat anything that dies of itself...for you are a holy people unto the Lord your God. You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk.

In Exodus 22:30 we read: "And you shall be holy people unto Me: therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn of the breasts of the field.

Each of these passages deals with a different aspect of keeping kosher and yet in all of them the same word is repeated again and again: Kadosh, holy. This then, at least according to the Bible is an important purpose of the kosher laws: not health but being a holy people.

HOW DOES KEEPING KOSHER MAKE US A HOLY PEOPLE?

Let us for a moment define something holy as meaning extraordinarily special, different, unique, and set apart from others. Can you think of how the kosher laws if properly followed can make the act of eating extraordinarily special?

SOME POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1. First of all, Kashrut teaches us that the eating of meat is itself a sort of Divine compromise. Adam, the first man was not permitted to eat meat. He is clearly a vegetarian. Not until the time of Noah is meat permitted to be eaten. With Noah came sin. Noah's generation wanted the flesh of living creatures for food and was prepared to kill to obtain it. And so it was with his descendants. Ideally, people should not eat meat, for to eat meat a life is taken, an animal is put to death. Interestingly, the Bible describes a scene at the end of days when the perfect society will return to its original state:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb
 And the leopard shall lie down with the kid
 And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11:6)

The Rabbis of the Talmud also have written that people should eat meat occasionally and sparingly. This the permission to eat meat must be seen as a divine compromise to human weakness and need.

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2. The Kosher laws show a true reverence for life. In Deuteronomy 12:21 we read: "You shall kill of your herd and your flock which God has given you, as I have commanded you". This verse is the Biblical source for the laws of kosher slaughtering found in the Talmud. Great humaneness is provided with regard to the slaughtering of kosher animals. The knife must be perfectly smooth. The cut, severing the arteries to the head of the animal stops circulation to the head and renders the animal unconscious of all pain.

Secondly, it is not enough that the animal must be killed in the most humane way, but even the symbol of life itself, the blood, must be removed. To spill blood is to bring death. The removal of blood which Kashrut teaches is one of the most powerful means of making us constantly aware of the compromise which the whole act of eating meat in reality is.

Thirdly, because we are permitted to eat meat only as a divine compromise and a concession to human weakness and need, animals which die of themselves ("nevelah") or animals which are killed by another animal ("terefah") are forbidden. Such animals can never be kosher because they were not killed according to Jewish law.

Other examples of Judaism's reverence for life attitude include:

- a. Animals are allowed to rest on the Sabbath. (Exodus 23:12)
- b. Ploughing with a bull and a donkey are forbidden because they were not equal in strength and the weaker would suffer in trying to keep up with the stronger. (Deut 22:10)
- c. If a person finds a nest of birds, he cannot take the mother bird and the young. He first has to send away the mother bird in order to spare her feelings. (Deut 22:10)
- d. When an animal is born, it is not to be taken away from its mother for at least seven days.
- e. Before a person is permitted to sit down at his table to eat he must first feed all of his animals.

Thus, when Jewish people keep kosher their act of eating is made holy by being reminded that the life of an animal is sacred and can only be taken to provide him with food under certain fixed conditions.

HOW WE EAT CAN MAKE US HOLY TOO

Our rabbis tell us that the table upon which we eat is like the altar of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. The whole process of eating is thus changed into a beautiful ceremony. We are commanded to wash our hands before beginning our meal. This is not only to cleanse them, but to remind us of the time when the holy priests washed their hands before offering a sacrifice to God. It is also customary to recite the blessing over bread, called the "ha-motzi" before eating our meal. In this prayer we show our appreciation to God for providing us with food to eat by praising Him as the creator of food. At the end of our meal we say thank you to God for providing us with all of the food for our meal.