

NCSY Torah  
on One Foot Series

# KASHRUS

כשרות

**KOSHER  
OR NOT?**

Find out  
inside!



# KEEPING KOSHER

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# WHAT IS KOSHER?

"Kosher" literally means "fit for use." Kosher food is food that is fit to be eaten according to the rules of the Torah. (The body of laws concerning kosher food is called "*kashrus*" – alternately "*kashrut*" or "*kashruth*.".) The laws of *kashrus* are many and varied. A few of the basic ones include:

- Kosher animals must chew their cud and have completely split hooves. This includes cows, goats, sheep and deer, among others. This excludes animals such as pigs (which have split hooves but do not chew their cud), camels (which chew cud but do not have split hooves) and horses (which neither chew cud nor have split hooves).
- Kosher fish must have fins and removable scales. Shellfish and aquatic mammals are not kosher.
- Certain species of locusts are kosher, although it is not currently our practice to eat them. All other insects are non-kosher. Accordingly, many types of produce must be washed and checked for insects.
- Animals must be ritually slaughtered in a particular fashion. The meat must be salted to remove the blood, or roasted. Certain fats and the sciatic nerve must be removed.
- Meat and milk may not be cooked or eaten together, even if they are both kosher individually. (This is why people who keep kosher have separate utensils for meat and dairy.) Unlike non-kosher meat, we may not derive any type of benefit whatsoever from meat-and-milk combinations (such as feeding it to our pets).
- There are other, special types of *kashrus* for special times (such as not eating leavened products on Passover) or places (such as the special laws governing produce grown in Israel).



## REASONS VS. LESSONS

What are the reasons for keeping kosher? G-d doesn't usually tell us His reasons for *mitzvos*. The best reason we have is that He told us to (and He knows what's best!). But we can learn lessons from *mitzvos* such as *kashrus*. (These may or may not be the reasons for such *mitzvos*.)

Kosher birds are not scavengers or birds of prey. Kosher animals are not predators. Kosher fish are not bottom feeders. Those animals have traits that would not be good for us to emulate, physically or spiritually.

Similarly, the reason for *kashrus* is not health, although keeping kosher has caused Jews to reap tremendous health benefits over the years. Kosher animals are checked for disease. The blood, which is a breeding ground for bacteria, is removed. Jews don't eat shellfish (which have spread typhoid and other diseases) or pork (which has caused trichinosis). The ritual washing of the hands before meals protected Jews in Europe from the Black Plague. So, improved health may not be the reason for keeping kosher, but it is a benefit we have traditionally enjoyed.

**YES!**

Giraffe is a kosher animal!  
People think we don't eat giraffe because we don't know

where on the neck to properly slaughter it. Really, anyone who couldn't slaughter a giraffe couldn't hit a barn with a baseball.

The reason we don't eat giraffe is that we live in countries where nobody, kosher or not, eats giraffes!

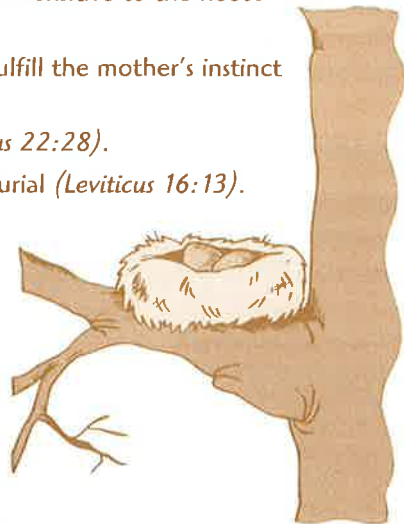


# ANIMAL RIGHTS?

How does keeping kosher jibe with vegetarianism? Judaism does not believe that animals have inherent rights. In fact, man was specifically given permission to eat them (*Genesis 9:3* and *Deuteronomy 12:20*). But man has responsibilities towards animals, which are reflected in the laws of *kashrus*.

There are many laws of *tzar baalei chaim*, not allowing animals to suffer needlessly. These range from not muzzling an animal while it is threshing grain (*Deuteronomy 25:4*) to not using a weaker species to plow with a stronger one (*Deuteronomy 22:10*). *Kashrus* is full of laws to keep us sensitive to the needs of animals, even though we may eat them. Just a few of these include:

- An animal may not be slaughtered for eight days following its birth, to fulfill the mother's instinct to suckle (*Leviticus 22:27*).
- A parent and its young may not be slaughtered in the same day (*Leviticus 22:28*).
- The blood of non-domesticated animals must be covered as a form of burial (*Leviticus 16:13*).
- If you want to take the eggs or chicks from a nest, you must send the mother bird away so she won't have to watch you taking her young (*Deuteronomy 22:6-7*).
- A limb torn from an animal while still alive may not be eaten (*Genesis 9:4*).
- Meat may not be cooked with or eaten with milk, which the mother animal uses to nurture her offspring (*Exodus 23:5, et al*).
- *Shechita*, Jewish ritual slaughter, instantaneously severs the animal's trachea and esophagus, causing as quick and painless a death as possible.



## WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH K?

K, unlike the ®, is not a trademarked symbol. It's just a letter, which anyone can use. It might mean it's kosher, but if it

does, who is saying so? Is it someone reliable? Perhaps the company just believes it to be kosher. K doesn't even necessarily have to mean "kosher!" (Rules vary from state to state.) Perhaps it means the food is a product of Kentucky, or that it's good to feed your koala. Anyone can put a K on anything, so you can't rely on it for *kashrus* unless you specifically know there's reliable supervision behind it. (Contact the manufacturer and ask who's behind it.)



## CUI BONO? (WHO BENEFITS?)

Not only Jews benefit from kosher supervision. Consumers who prefer kosher also include Moslems, Seventh Day Adventists, vegetarians, the lactose intolerant and many others who like to be sure of what they're eating. Contrary to popular misconception, the increased sales generated by kosher certification more than offset the cost of supervision, keeping prices down. This benefits both the company and the non-kosher consumer.

In fact, The New York Times has called the ® a "coveted seal of approval" (February 1, 2005).

## WHAT COULD BE WRONG WITH...?

**Don't see pork or shrimp on the ingredients?**


**That doesn't necessarily mean it's kosher!**


Do you know what it means when a label lists mono and diglycerides, calcium stearate, polysorbate 80 or vegetable shortening? All of those things (and many others) require kosher supervision! Castoreum comes from beavers, civet comes from cats and carmine, a dye, comes from insects. Unless you have a degree in food science, you probably don't really understand a list of ingredients! (Even if all the ingredients in a product are kosher, what about the equipment the food is prepared on? Maybe they use it to make pork rinds on Wednesdays!)








## LOOK FOR THE UNION LABEL

**YOU** may know that NCSY is the youth movement of the Orthodox Union, but do you know what else the OU does? In addition to NCSY, the OU includes Community and Synagogue Services, Yachad/the National Jewish Council for the Disabled, the Institute for Public Affairs and many other noteworthy projects and


programs. But what the OU is most famous for is the , the most widely-recognized kosher certification symbol in the world.

The OU was founded in 1898 and has been providing kosher supervision since 1924. The  logo was created in 1935 at the request of the Heinz corporation so that consumers should easily be able to tell that their vegetarian baked beans were under OU supervision.

Like the organization, the logo  is pronounced "oh, you." Variations include the  for dairy products and the  for Passover items. (The "default" version of the logo is for items that are

*parve* – that is, neither meat nor dairy. Things that contain meat or fish are labeled  and , respectively. Most food items require special supervision for Passover use.)

Today, the OU certifies over 400,000 products manufactured in over 6,000 plants throughout all fifty states and in over 80 countries worldwide.

Unlike most other supervising agencies, the OU is a true communal agency. The OU supports many charitable and community activities (such as NCSY!). So when you look for the  on the label, you're not only guaranteed the highest standards of *kashrus*, you're helping spread Torah and Judaism throughout the world!

If you see a product you'd like to get OU kosher supervision, contact the company that makes it and ask them to call the OU!



## THE HOTLINE!

Have a question about *kashrus*?

Call the OU Kosher Hotline at 212-613-8241 or email [kosherq@ou.org](mailto:kosherq@ou.org)!



## A GLOSSARY OF KOSHER TERMS

**Fleishig:** (adj., Yiddish) Containing meat or prepared using meat utensils.

**Glatt:** (adj., Yiddish) Literally, "smooth." An animal whose lungs contained no questionable adhesions that could pose potential *kashrus* problems.

**Kasher:** (verb, Hebrew) To make kosher, as in "to *kasher* an oven."

**Kosher l'Pesach:** (adj., Hebrew) Kosher for Passover; contains no leaven (also no legumes, for Jews of Ashkenazic descent).

**Milchig:** (adj., Yiddish) Containing dairy or prepared using dairy utensils.

**Parve:** (adj., Yiddish) A food that is neither meat nor dairy (and can therefore be eaten with either). Eggs are *parve*. (Sometimes spelled *pareve*.)

**Treif:** (adj., Hebrew) Literally, "torn." In the Torah, *treif* refers to an animal that is mortally wounded. In common usage, it refers to any non-kosher food.



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SYNAGOGUE YOUTH  
NCSY is the youth movement of the Orthodox Union  
*Building a Jewish Tomorrow<sup>SM</sup>*

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