

Kashrut – the Jewish way of eating according to the precepts of the Torah



Kashrut

In gratitude to Rabbi Dayan mr. drs. R. Evers, *Shlita*, for his contribution in his work “The Philosophic Backgrounds of the Jewish Precepts”, which decisively and wisely helped in forming this essay.
“*Kashrut* is a constant reminder of our identity” (p. 101-108)

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1. *Kosher* eating as a philosophy of life

1.1 Introduction

The following can be stated as a general introduction to *Kashrut* (the Jewish dietary laws):

- a. The Jewish dietary laws have a spiritual, religious and social meaning.
- b. The Jewish dietary laws are also of hygienic significance.
- c. The Jewish dietary laws instil self-discipline that strengthens and maintains Jewish identity.

For a Jewish human being who lives in a non-Jewish or in a non-religious Jewish environment, maintaining *Kashrut* entails some self-sacrifice and means imposing restrictions on oneself. Certain foods are simply not permitted.

The word *Kosher* (fit) occurs in *Tenach* (the Hebrew Bible) in the story of Ester (*Megillat Ester*/Ester 8:5) and means suitable or admissible.

Kosher or permitted food colours Jewish life and gives it a unique sphere and dimension. The laws of *Kashrut* also guarantee a profound respect for animal life. (*Tenach* is the source of our earliest known animal rights, among others in the laws of *Kashrut*.) The religious meaning of the Hebrew word *Kosher* is: prepared correctly according to *Halakhah* (Jewish law).

Kosher food is ritually permitted food. The principles of *kosher* food are mentioned in *Torah* in *Vayikra*/Leviticus 11 and *Devarim*/Deuteronomy 14. The details have been handed down to us in the Rabbinic tradition by means of the *Talmud* and the *Shulchan Aruch* (the authoritative Rabbinic Jewish Code of Law).

Kosher food can be subdivided into 3 categories:

1. Food which is *kosher* in its natural form, without any addition or processing or change. Examples are grains, fruit, vegetables, tea, coffee, permitted fish, permitted eggs.
2. Food that becomes completely *kosher* by the performance of certain actions (for example *Shechita* (Jewish ritual slaughter)). Examples are permitted meat and permitted poultry meat.
3. Food which is not *kosher* for well-founded reasons. Examples are the meat of pigs, of birds of prey, of insects, of animals with shells and crustaceans and all products derived from these.

1.2 Daily remembrance

Jewish ritual slaughter and koshering

Before meat from permitted mammals and birds may be eaten, it has to be halakhically ritually slaughtered, by a cut through the throat with an extremely sharp blade. The biggest part of the trachea (windpipe) and oesophagus

(gullet) have to be cut with one single cut. The Hebrew term for this ritual slaughter is *Shechita*.

After *Shechita* the animals are searched for damaged or diseased organs. Subsequently the fatty parts prohibited for consumption are cut out and the meat is koshered by salting it and by soaking it in lukewarm water to remove the blood. Salt was already known in Antiquity as a means to absorb the blood. The consumption of blood is absolutely forbidden in Judaism, and this prohibition is repeated several times in *Tenach*. It is also one of the seven Noachide laws which are incumbent on all of humanity.

Basic principles of the Jewish way of slaughtering are speed and the avoidance of cruelty. However, there is more: the dietary laws symbolise sanctification of consumption by humans and consecration of life.



Portret van rabbijn Yitzchak Eliezer Yakav, de rituele slachter van het Israëliische rabbinaat. Foto Kobi Gideon /Flash:90

Rabbi Yitzchak Eliezer Yakav , "Sjochet" of the Israëli Rabbinat

Who is the *Shochet* (ritual slaughterer)?

The *Shochet* is no ordinary slaughterer as known from the slaughterhouses. He is a thoroughly religious and halakhically learned man (the third man in the Jewish religious hierarchy, besides the Rabbi and the *Dayan* (judge, who is authorised to judge religious matters, for example a Jewish divorce). The *Shochet* must be an example in piety and religiousness and he must be very skilful and calm. His religious reputation and credibility are very important, because the whole Jewish community relies on his responsibility and expertise.

Daily remembrance of our duties towards G´D

Eating *kosher* food dominates daily life and reminds us at every meal of our duties towards G´D

The Torah itself does not give us a reason why especially of the mammals ruminants that chew the cud and with split hooves may be eaten and why *kosher* fishes must have fins and scales.

Food plays a bigger part in our lives than we often imagine. It is striking that the first prohibition of the *Torah* for Adam and *Chava*/Eve was a prohibition to eat (*Bereshit*/Genesis 2:16-17): "Of all the trees in the garden you may surely eat, but of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad you shall not eat." Adam and *Chava*/Eve transgressed this prohibition, with the well-known negative consequences for their offspring. The Jewish religious person is confronted every day and every hour with the question whether something is *kosher* or not. From a religious perspective, a religious Jewish person is on a higher level than Adam and Eve, because there is a constant challenge whether something is *kosher* or not.

It is interesting to point out the philological connection between the Hebrew words for bread (*Lechem*) and war (*Milchamah*). Consuming in a correct way is a physical and spiritual battle for survival.



Kashrut-certificate issued by the Chief Rabbinate for a vegetable and fruit-store that all mitzvot concerning agriculture are satisfactory kept in this store.

1.3 Sanctification

In the middle of the third book of the *Torah* a theme central to Judaism is discussed:

“For I am *HaShem* your G´d; you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for holy am I” (*Vayikra/Leviticus 11:44*).

The word holy is mentioned three times in one sentence!

This verse states one of the most difficult tasks of the *Torah*. The Jewish People are expected to follow in G´d’s ways. In society these days where the opposite is often propagated - follow the direction of your heart – the Jewish person becomes involved in a challenging situation.

Our faith in the correctness of the - to us not always comprehensible - laws of *Kashrut*, sometimes referred to as *Chukim* by our Sages (laws without any rational explanation) is strengthened by a small hint and indication in the *Torah*.

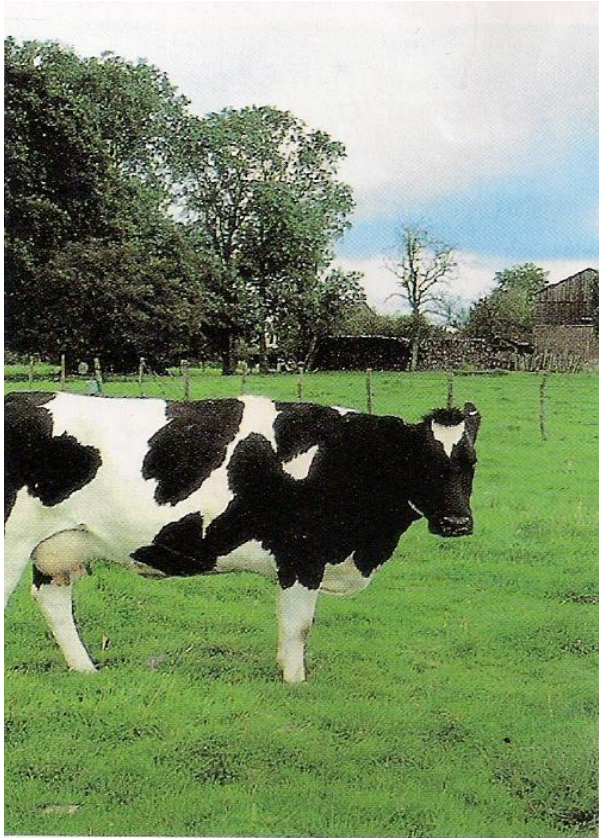
In the opening verses of *Vayikra/Leviticus* chapter 11 on the laws of *Kashrut*, the *Torah* gives an enumeration in a list of a few animals that have only one of the clean characteristics: chewing the cud or split hooves. The fact that here an exhaustive enumeration of animals with only one *kosher* feature is given, caused one of the most famous *Mishna* Sages, Rabbi Akiva, to exclaim about 2000 years ago: “Was Moshe then a hunter, an expert on fauna, that he was able to give a complete list of animal species?”

With this rhetorical question Rabbi Akiva wanted to demonstrate that it contained proof for the Divinity of the *Torah*, which G´d had given to the Jewish People. This detailed list of prohibited animal species was drawn up at a time when many continents still had not been discovered. We, some 2000 years after Rabbi Akiva, can only confirm the observations of this great Sage. In principle no animal was ever added to those listed in the *Torah*.

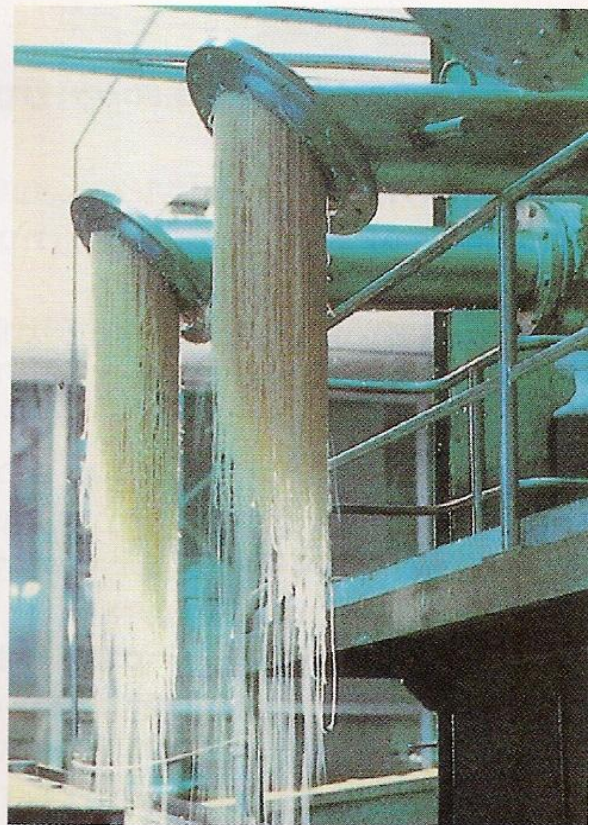
1.4 Hygienic motives

The question a religiously minded person asks him-/herself is: why did G´d want to keep us away from unclean (non *kosher*) animals? During the past centuries various great Authorities, Commentators, Exegetes and halachic Experts have pondered this question to come up with a rational answer.

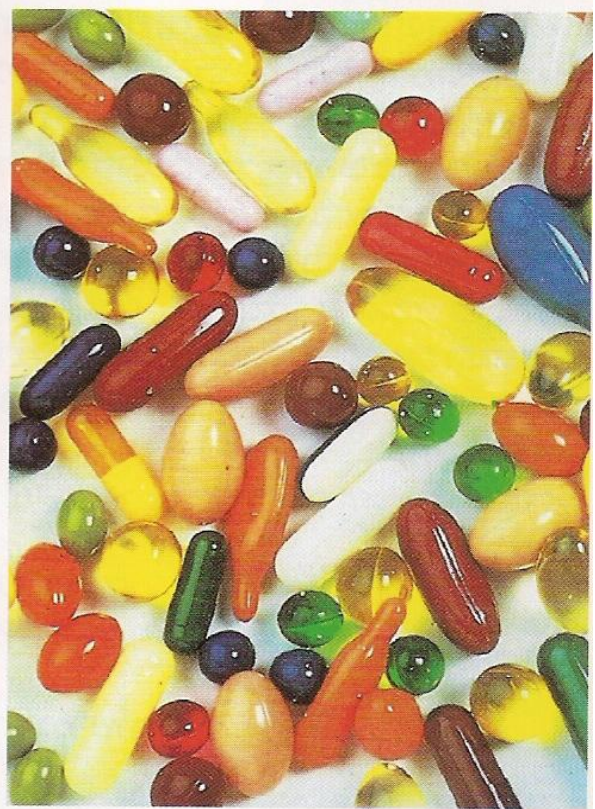
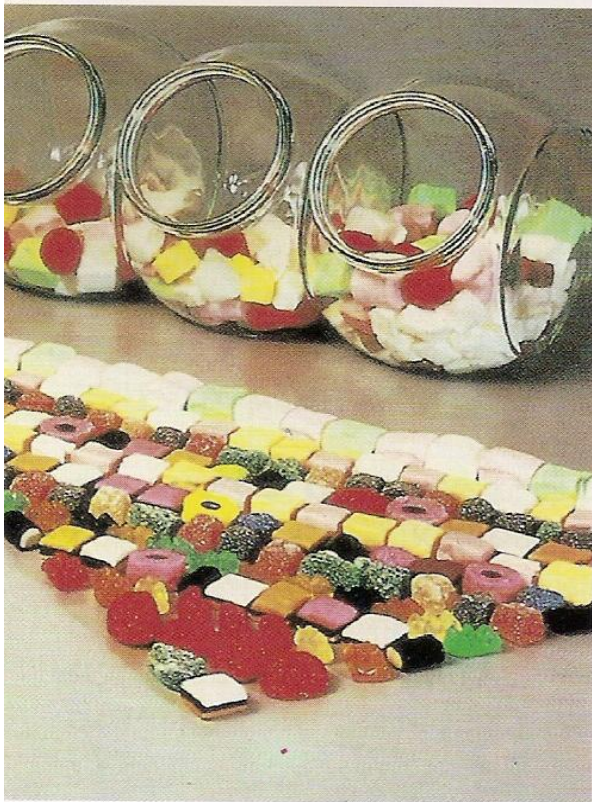
- Nachmanides (1194-1270 C.E.), the famous Jewish Exegete, considers the prohibited animals to be harmful to our physical wellbeing.
- Maimonides (1135-1204 C.E.), in his medical works, also points out that the Jewish People have been spared various ills and diseases, which are prevalent among those who eat pig meat. In addition, fatty pig meat is very detrimental in the warm desert climate. It is a commonly acknowledged fact that the hygiene which Jewish law requires, bore fruit



חומר הגלם לג'לטין



ג'לטין בסוף שלב העיבוד



Industrial fabrication of gelatine, which is in itself non-Kosher, because it comes from treife bones of an animal. Here in our illustration we see the industrial fabrication of Kosher gelatine, that is from Kosher slaughtered animals.

- in the Middle Ages. Washing hands before eating and after visiting the bathroom is a basic religious Jewish rule for hygiene and it saved many lives during the period of the so called black death.
- Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508 C.E.) however opposes: “G´d preserve us (so he states sharply and emphatically) from a rational explanation in the sphere of public health. Such an interpretation would reduce the *Torah* to a medical handbook. Additionally, (he continues) we see that many people consume forbidden animal species without this damaging their health. Besides this, there are many dangerous animals and plants, which are not prohibited anywhere in the *Torah*.”
- „Was du isst, dass bist du!“ This is a Yiddish saying, which I heard personally from the former Chief Rabbi of Great- Britain, Sir Immanuel Jakobovits z.l. (20th century C.E.).

This is in keeping with what the *Torah* states:

“.... you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for holy am I; and **you shall not contaminate your souls** through any creeping thing that moves about on the earth.” (*Vayikra/Leviticus* 11:44)

1.5 *Kashrut* as an integral part of the Jewish religious outlook on life

- At its basic level we can see *Kashrut* as a form of self-limitation and discipline. This signifies that we not only learn not to take in everything we desire, but also denotes a self-limitation, which maintains our Jewish national character and strengthens it.
- Observation of *Kashrut* limits the chances of assimilation. From a Jewish standpoint, assimilation means abnegation of the self, a watering down of ones own identity. *Kashrut* is one of the most important means of preservation of the Jewish identity. Avoiding assimilation can of course never be a goal in and of itself, but nevertheless *Kashrut* raises us to holiness in the sense of being special and daring to be special in a non-Jewish environment.
- However, *Kashrut* is more. It wishes to sanctify us and bring spirituality into our daily lives.
- Being holy also means being connected with the *Torah*, the Source of our holiness. The *Torah* does not merely set out to restrain humans or to subjugate him/her when choosing to do right or wrong. *Kashrut* wants to bring us onto a higher plane. By complying with G´d´s rules, a bond is created between the Creator and the Jewish People, His servants. The word *Mitzvah* (religious command or precept) also has a philological meaning of association, connection, comradeship (consider the Hebrew word *Betsaftah*). By following G´d´s ways, a bond comes into being.

This thought becomes more clear by a parable. A professor is busy all day with abstract notions and only tries to penetrate the deepest secrets of nature.

He becomes so absorbed in his work that people who cannot follow his ideas simply do not exist for him. As soon as the professor asks a simple man to do something for him, the illiterate man exists again, as it were. A simple, illiterate man suddenly becomes important, not only in the eyes of the professor, but also in his own perception he experiences a feeling of importance. The content of the request is irrelevant. It is about the mutual relationship that is created between the higher and lower order, between G'd and man.

A *Mitzvah* has exactly this function. It lifts the servant, the People of Israel, and combines the Bidder and servant in a bond of cooperation. The Infinite (G'd) and limited man find each other in the Divine Teaching of the *Torah*!

A non-religious Jew might ask why the *Torah*'s commands are expressed in material terms. Can one not be holy in thought and feeling without all the precise rules of what is and is not *kosher*?

In the *Midrash* collection *Tanchuma* our Sages explained that G'd longed to live even in our lowest world. Creation could have finished with all kinds of higher spiritual beings like angels. G'd however wanted to be recognised by the most ordinary and earthly creatures in their every day, worldly and material surroundings: a candle shines at its brightest in complete darkness.

According to the *Kabbalah* man lifts ordinary material objects to a higher plane if this person eats with the intention of obtaining energy to serve G'd. Material thus acquires spiritual value and man hereby realises an important aim of Creation. When a human eats meat with a deeper intention the complete meat product chain becomes sanctified. The same is applicable to flora. We eat bread to better pray and serve G'd with the energy derived from it. According to the *Kabbalah* an eating human has the function of a priest serving G'd, the table is classified as an altar and the food (vegetable or animal) is elevated to a sacrifice.



Kosher McDonald's in Israel.

1.6 The *Torah* command of the removal of all animal blood

The first humans on earth, Adam and *Chava*/Eve, were vegetarians in the full sense of the word (there are various levels of vegetarianism). This vegetarian phase at the beginning of humankind continued till the Flood in the days of Noah. Because of the moral neglect of the whole of Creation and the misbehaviour of the animal world (the animals mated with other animals than their own species) Noah was given general permission to eat the meat of animals (*Bereshit*/Genesis 9:3).

The *Torah* demands of Noah and his descendents, and thus of all of humanity, that the animal blood is removed before the consumption of meat. (All of humanity are from a Jewish standpoint descendents of Noah, known as Noachides.)

The *Torah* intends to hereby cleanse the meat of the blood that symbolises the animal instinct. Indeed, by the consumption of this blood one could take on something of the animal.

Perhaps the *Torah* intended to prevent a biochemical process that would activate the animal in the human and that G'd feared that man would draw too close to the animal mentality. In this context it is important to remember that many Nazis gastronomically preferred so called blood sausages.

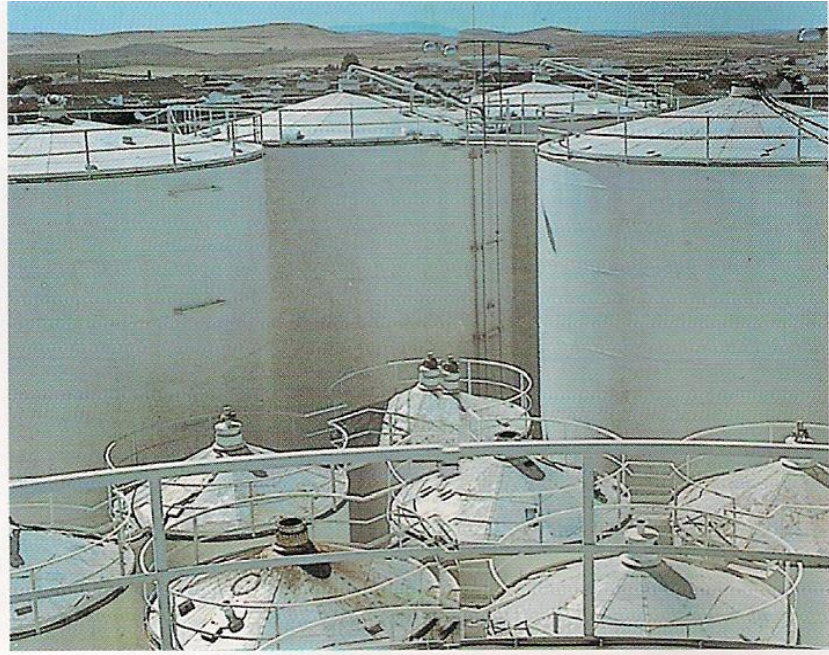
It is also possible that the *Torah* only makes symbolic references here.

Whatever is meant, the *Torah* warns us not to draw closer to animal elements than is strictly necessary. The hideous and unbelievable accusations against Jews in the Middle Ages, that they consumed the blood of a Christian child (the blood libel), is completely incomprehensible if one knows that the Rabbis forbid even the eating of one drop of blood in an egg. Even if you cut in your own finger, you are not allowed to put the finger in your mouth to stop the bleeding, and this concerns consumption of one's own blood! Blood transfusions to save human lives are however permitted by the *Torah*. It is an imperative command and is not considered as enjoyment or eating because it is given through the veins.

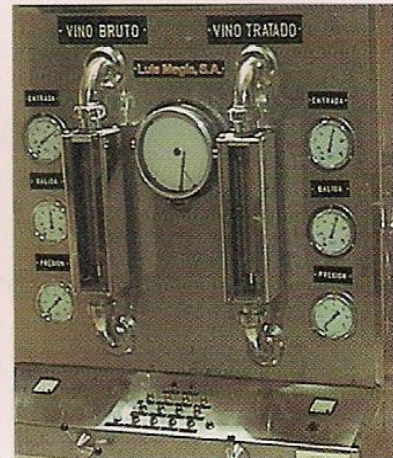
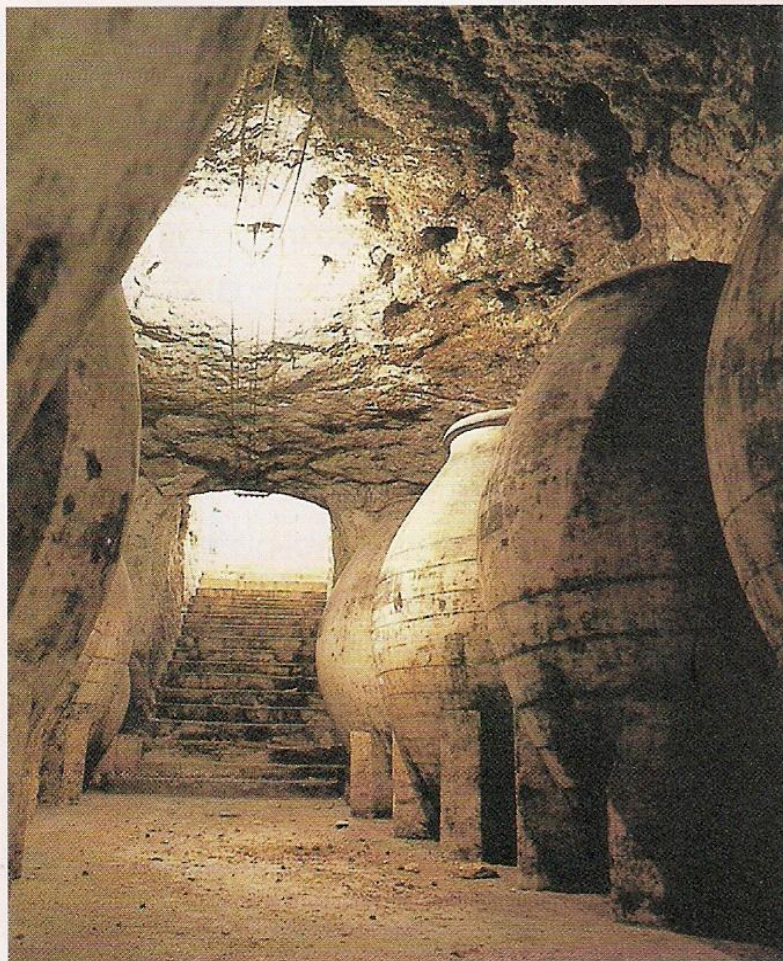
The blood libel in the Middle Ages occurred on account of the religious anti-Semitism of the church, a church which preaches that if one drinks wine during mass, one drinks the blood of Jesus. This is not far removed from accusing Jesus' innocent brothers (the Jews) and defaming them by the accusation of using the blood of a Christian child when baking *Matzoth* (plural for *Matzah*). People were not only so primitive and barbaric to accuse Jews with this disgraceful accusation during the Middle Ages, but also in more recent times. In tsarist Russia a Jewish man, Mendel Belis (1913 C.E.) was accused of the blood libel. He was brought to trial and after a lengthy trial the proceedings ended with the acquittal of Belis and the punishment for defamation of the accuser.



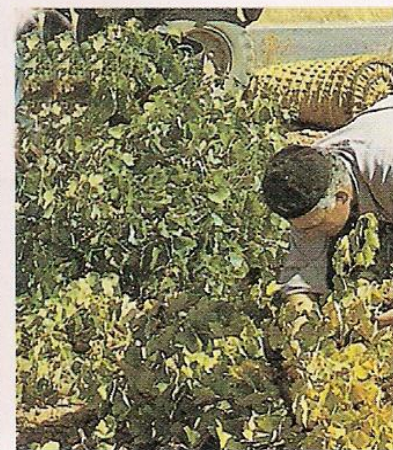
מכבש עץ



חוות מיכלים



בקרת קירור



An industrial modern winery where almost all work is mechanically performed. In such winery only religious Jews 'Shomre Torah uMitzvot' can be employed. And it is 'Kosher l'Pesach' all year around'.

1.7 *Kashrut*: distinguishing marks of animals

All the explanations however do not account for the specific characteristics with which one can recognise *kosher* mammals: split hooves and chewing the cud.

Why do specifically these marks determine *Kashrut*?

The *Torah* uses a metaphor for this and describes figuratively how we can achieve the ideal of holiness.

What does the religious term holiness mean from a Jewish perspective?

- Elevated, in the sense of standing on a higher level than the everyday things.
- Complete, whole in psychological terms: an integrated personality and way of life.

1.8 Integration

Most of us live in two worlds.

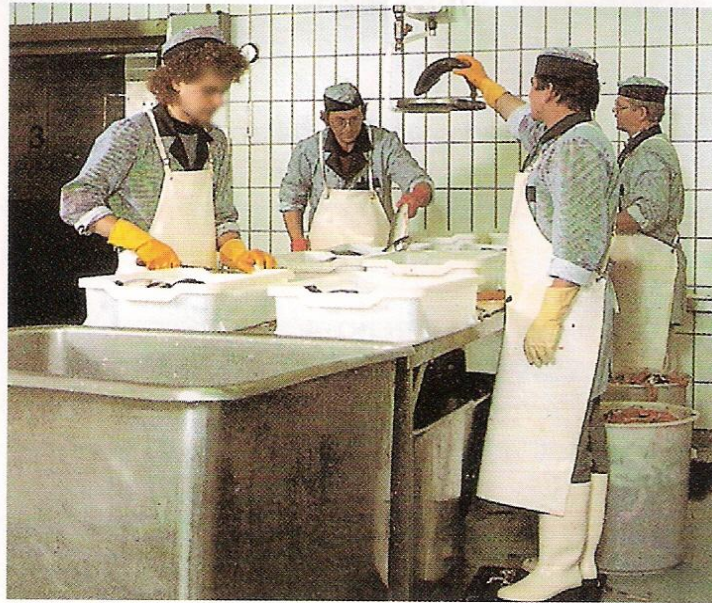
- In everyday life we must occupy ourselves with run of the mill, worldly matters. We work in a company, sell shoes, stocks or houses, do household chores and run a school or debt-collection agency.
- On *Shabbat* and *Yamim Tovim* (Feast Days) we are actively Jewish: we go to synagogue to pray and learn *Torah*. Jews do not only stand with two feet on the ground, but also with one foot in the Jewish and with the other in the non-Jewish world. (This is also applicable to Israel).

Sooner or later this leads to a clash of cultures, a clash between the values and convictions of different perspectives. This destabilises a person and polarises him/her. A double morality can come into being. In the material sphere he/she cannot get enough and remains insatiable, while he/she is satisfied with a minimal Jewish content in life.

In this way one has become a servant of the economic machine which ones own hands have created. The Golem (an artificial human created by man, here a symbol for our automated world of computers and robots made by man) rises up against its master.

In the 21st century we can conclude that an impoverishment of our society has occurred. People are more concerned about efficiency and success than for growth and development of their spiritual lives. People live a lonely and anonymous life in the urban society.

With this commercial attitude people lose their identity and become estranged from themselves, they lead split, non-integrated and dishonourable lives. This is the opposite of holiness in the sense of being complete. Ideals are preached in many religions, but are not aspired to. Professing a religion does not mean that one leads a valuable religious life.



מיון וניקוי הדגים



הכנסה לעישון



בית חרושת צף



שלית רשתות הדיג

An industrial fish-factory, along with the fishing boats where next to the fishing, the fish are prepared and sorted out and stored and prepared in cans or are frozen. In the middle you see a picture where the fish is being smoked. In the top picture you see wholesale-enterprise for fish.

1.9 Covenant between holiness and laws on food

- For a mammal to be *kosher*, a first requirement is that it must have split hooves. Hooves are an indication for our attitude towards the material world. We must stand above the material world and see its relativity. Holiness is far removed from us if also our heads are nearly completely absorbed by the earthly aspects of life.
- The hooves need to be split. We must be selective. We must bring our fellow humans to the *Torah* with the right hand, while rejecting any compromise with Judaism with the left hand. Our experience of Judaism may not be watered down by our contacts with the outside world, where completely different values reign.
- The mammal must chew the cud. We must also chew and re-chew. Before we immerse ourselves in the struggle for life, we need to carefully consider if our Jewish identity will not be endangered by this. If we have an occupation or a business, we need to ask for all the time spent on this, if another way of spending the time would not have been more suitable. Is it a spent on a new fashionable dress or on an hour of studying Torah?
- Besides this, *Shechita* is required. Slaughter removes the animal life force. Often we see ourselves faced with the moral choice: being honest of the pursuit of profit.
- Koshering is the next step. The meat must be soaked in water, salted and rinsed. Only then is it really *kosher*: we must soak our material aspirations in *Torah* learning and intensive prayer. After this, the meat must be salted to remove the blood. We must sublimate even the faintest trace of our warm blooded enthusiasm for the material.
- Even if the meat is *kosher* after all this, it is still not *Kadosh* (holy), because the human who has been able to realise all these lofty thoughts, could start to feel self-satisfied and become arrogant. He/She could possible say: See how pious I am, I am truly a holy person. For this reason Jewish law requires another rinsing of the meat after salting. Not a trace of this sort of religiosity needs to appear on the surface: arrogance and conceit are foreign to the truly pious. This is the viewpoint of Chassidism on the Covenant between holiness and laws on food.

1.10 Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch s.z.l. (1808-1888 C.E.)

The German-Jewish religious philosophy followed a different approach in explaining the specific characteristics of a *kosher* animal. Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch s.z.l., leader of the 19th century German Ashkenasy Modern Orthodoxy, was a great Exegete an philologer, a very original thinker of Judaism, which he influenced with many new impulses, a fighter for *Torah*-faithful Judaism and an uncompromising warrior against the dominant reform Judaism in Germany.

He first examines the spiritual difference between man and animals. One can state that man is, physically speaking, a sophisticated creature. The difference is at the spiritual level. Man is essentially a moral being. Animals cannot think and have no sense of ethics or morals. At an ethical level human beings are unique. Whenever the barrier between man and animal threatens to become blurred, the *Torah* warns us and cautions us to be careful.

Man must see to it that morality and spirituality in thought, speech and action remain dominant. The balance between higher and lower in humans is very delicate. According to Rabbinic Teachings, man houses many aspects by nature. The question is how man can guard that the spiritual retains the lead when life decisions are made.

According to Rabbinic Sources humanity will revert to vegetarianism in the eschatological Messianic Time. Overall the vegetarian lifestyle seems a very ideal state, but at the moment the majority of humans is not yet ready for this. Fauna will again be able to offer its energy to humanity, to serve G'd. The Torah lays down restrictions for this: guard against danger to the soul. The constant remembrance of guarding and refining our humanity and spirituality is the most important task *Kashrut* radiates.

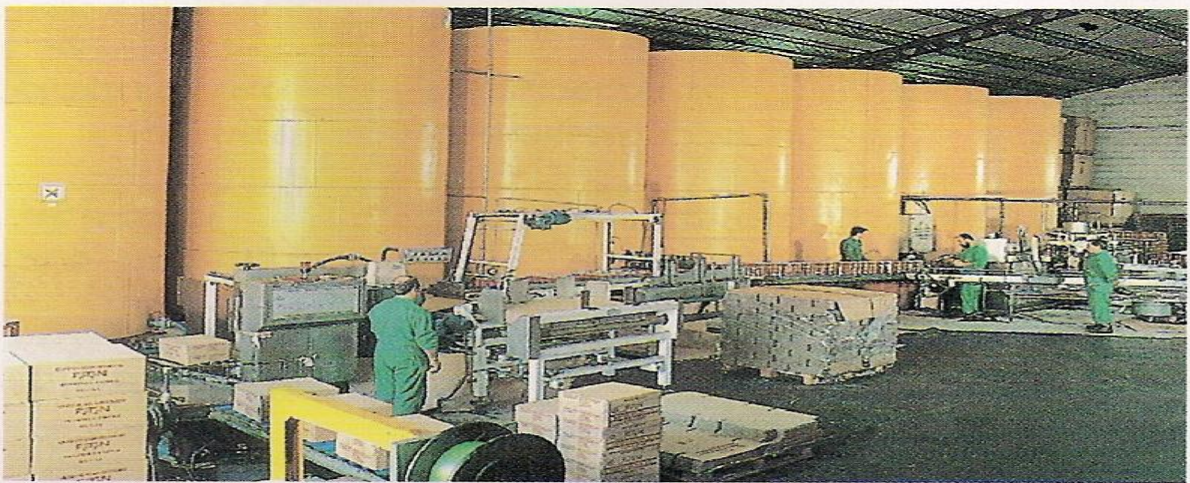
Great Sages, like the Fathers of the practical *Kabbalah*, Rabbi Yitschak Luria, also known as the Ari *HaKadosh*, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Avraham Yitschak HaCohen Kook, the first Ashkenasy Chief Rabbi of Israel were convinced vegetarians. The so called friends of animals of the Party for the Animals in Holland should, before they accuse Jews and Muslims of animal cruelty because of their methods of animal slaughter (*Shechita* or hallal), and before uttering criticism, do some soul searching and as true friends of animals, become strictly vegetarian. May I only remark here that the Nazis grabbed power in Germany in 1933 and later occupied nearly all of Europe, including the Netherlands, after they were the first to abolish *Shechita* without stunning. I think the Dutch animal friends are in select company. (See my book Halacha Aktuel, volume II, pages 401-406, in German: Vegetarisches Essen und Judentum, and compare my article in the same book about animal rights in Judaism (volume II, page 666-673)).

1.11 *Kashrut* in the *Kabbalah*

The mystical Kabbalistic literature explains that the laws on *Kashrut* are not so much a diet for the soul, but more of a protection of the body and soul of man against all animal elements. What the *Torah* demands of us, Jewish humans, in the *Kashrut* precepts, is that we keep the soul as pure as possible, with a minimum of physical impediments, so that it can radiate its spiritual light onto the material world.



מתקן קבלת זיתים בבית הבד ניפוי ועצירה



מיכלי שמן לפני סינון



ACEITES DEL SUR S/A

Industrial modern Kosher olive oil in Israel. Most of the work is done by machines, but the selecting process of the olives is still done by humans.

In the *Kabbalah* the soul is compared to a diamond cutter, who is dependant on the quality of his instruments. However good a craftsman he/she is, there need only be one small flaw in the instruments and his/her products will no longer have the top quality they could ideally have had.

According to the popular Rabbinic opinion *kosher* food takes care of the purity of the soul.

Maimonides (1135-1204 C.E.) was once asked why Jewish people in his time had so little feeling for faith. His answer was that this was mainly caused by the disregard for the laws of *Kashrut*. This answer is not scientific, experimental knowledge, but was revealed to us on Mount Sinai.

To reach this high level of ethics and morality in Judaism, G'd gave us the laws on *Kashrut*, which still today are complied with in Torah-faithful Judaism.



**You should not cook a young goat in the milk of his mother
"complete prohibition of cooking, eating and benefiting of milk
together with meat"**

2. Milk and meat

2.1 The basic precept: the *Kashrut* prohibition of milk and meat

One of the most far-reaching precepts of *Kashrut* is the complete separation of milk and meat. Frying meat in butter, eating a hamburger-cheese or a desert with milk after a meal with meat (like an ordinary coffee with milk) are unacceptable combinations to Torah-faithful and traditional Jews. In the design of a *kosher* kitchen, a private one or one in a *kosher* catering establishment or hotel, this *Kashrut* precept has far reaching consequences. Two sets of crockery, two sinks or dishwashers and sometimes (in the luxury *kosher* kitchens) two electrical or gas stoves and two fridges. The last mentioned is of course the domain of the extremely expensive kitchens for privileged people.

2.2 The kid in the milk its mother

The *Torah* repeats the prohibition of boiling the kid in its mother's milk three times: *Shemot/Exodus* 23:19, *Shemot/Exodus* 34:26 and *Devarim/Deuteronomy* 14:21.

According to the Rabbinical interpretation these are three different aspects of the prohibition:

- The prohibition of cooking meat and milk together
- The prohibition of eating meat and milk together
- The prohibition of selling or profiting by (for example by giving as a present) meat and milk, if one has deliberately or unintentionally cooked these together.

This all encompassing prohibition is according to the Rabbis not only limited to the kid, it includes all other kinds of meat. This prohibition is applicable to all *kosher* animals like cattle, sheep, goats and poultry.

The figurative expression of: in the milk of its mother, must also not be taken literally. This also includes the milk of another *kosher* animal – cow, sheep or goat.

2.3 Rabbinic additions to the prohibition

Poultry (chickens, doves etc.) and game (for example a deer) fall outside of this prohibition and can, according to the Written *Torah*, be used for cooking with milk. Rabbis see it as their task and have the authority to make a protection and a fence around the laws of the *Torah*. This means that the Rabbis forbid certain things which strictly speaking are not included in a *Torah* prohibition.

In the case of the prohibition from the *Torah* of cooking and eating meat and milk together, the Sages added several prohibitions.

The prohibition is extended to poultry and game as well, to avoid mistakes.

Fish are also not included in the written prohibition and thus can be cooked in ordinary butter. Most religious Jews however also do not eat fish together with milk or prepared with butter, because this is unhealthy according to the halakhic Jewish Law Code *Shulchan Aruch*. This is the reason for the custom in Jewish households and restaurants to serve fish on separate plates and with separate cutlery.

2.4 Waiting period between a meat dish and a dairy dish

The *Talmud* states that a waiting period must be inserted after the enjoyment of a meat meal before the consumption of a dairy meal. According to some halakhic authorities this means a waiting period of 6 hours before one is allowed to eat dairy products again.

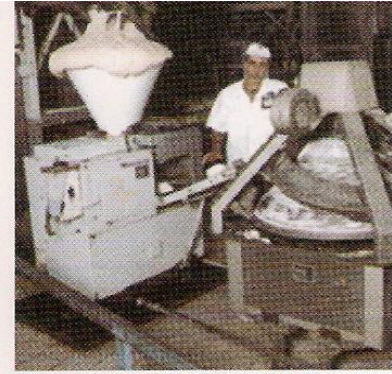
According to Maimonides the thought behind this is that after a meal with meat, rests of the meat remain between the teeth and only after 6 hours these rests lose the characteristics of meat.

The explanation that a long time is needed for the digestion of meat by the stomach, goes in this same direction. This is why a maximum period of 6 hours is prescribed between a meat dish and a dairy dish.

Some however find this somewhat too drastic and insert a waiting period of 1 hour between meat and milk dishes. This is about the time for the quick digestion. This is however done only in the Netherlands, no where else in the world, and also there the stricter waiting period of 3 to 6 hours is adhered to by Orthodox Jewish people.

The custom of 1 hour disappeared under the influence of the *Kabbalah* (mysticism), which also demands a waiting period of 6 hours between meat and dairy dishes. A compromise of kinds between these two extremes emerged in Germany among Ashkenasy Jews, where the custom is to wait for 3 hours.

Additionally, it is prohibited to directly follow the eating of milk, butter, soft cheese and easily digestible dairy products with the eating of meat. The condition is that one eat something in between, rinses the mouth and removes any possible dairy remains, while the hands are inspected for any remains of the cheese. After certain sorts of hard and old cheese like Gouda and Leerdammer, which take a long time to digest, a waiting period of 1, 3 or 6 hours is required, dependent on the custom.



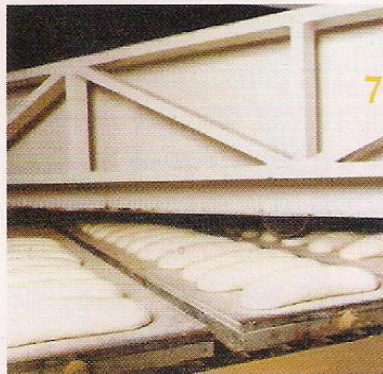
מכונה שקילה למנות, מכונת כידרור



גילגול הבצק



הכנסת חומרי הגלם למערכת



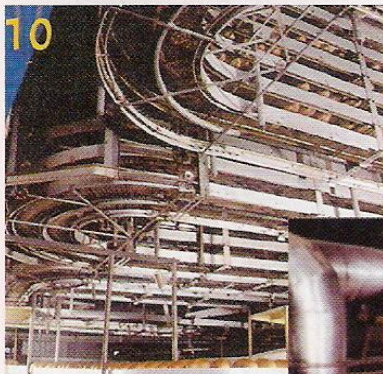
התפחה



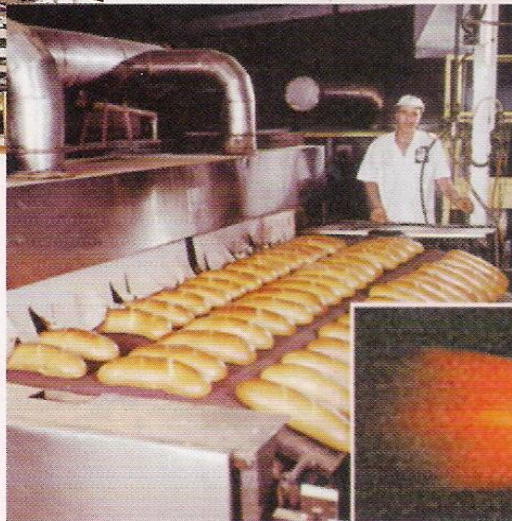
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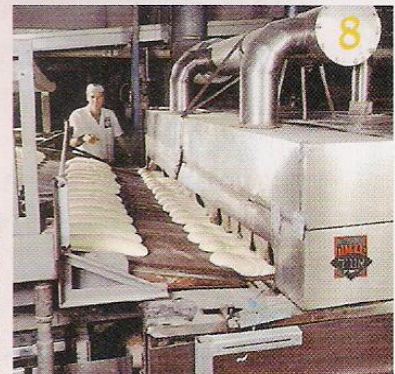
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מסועי קירור ללחם
לפני האריזה



יציאה מהתנור



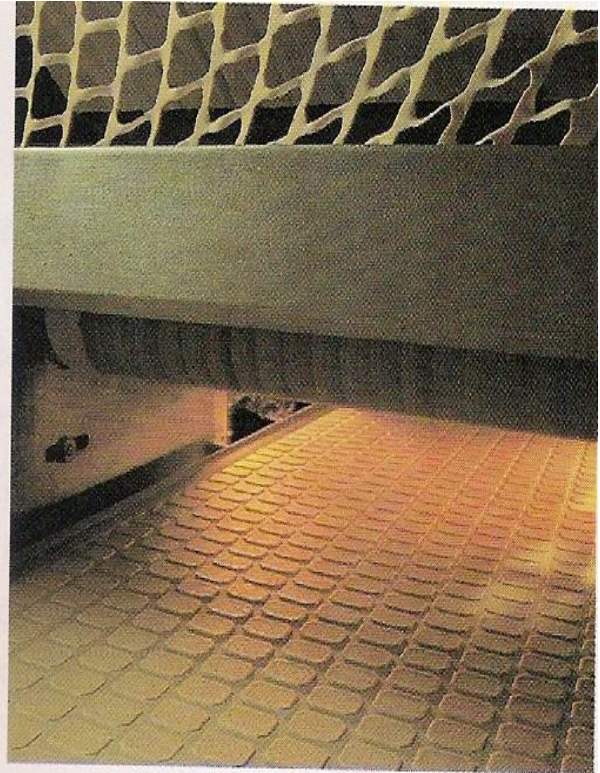
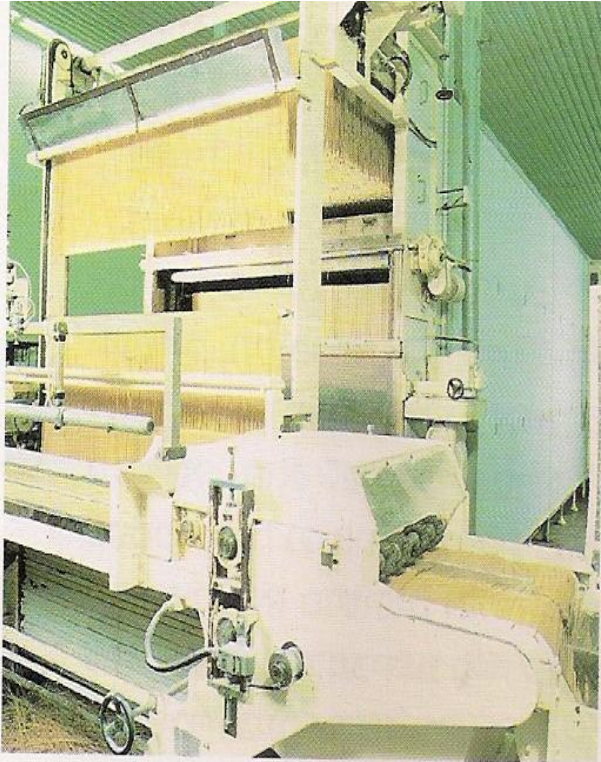
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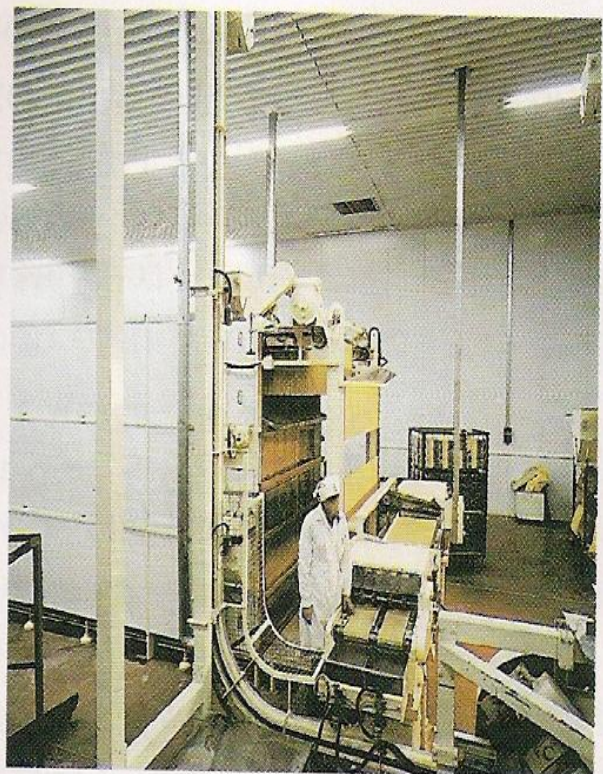
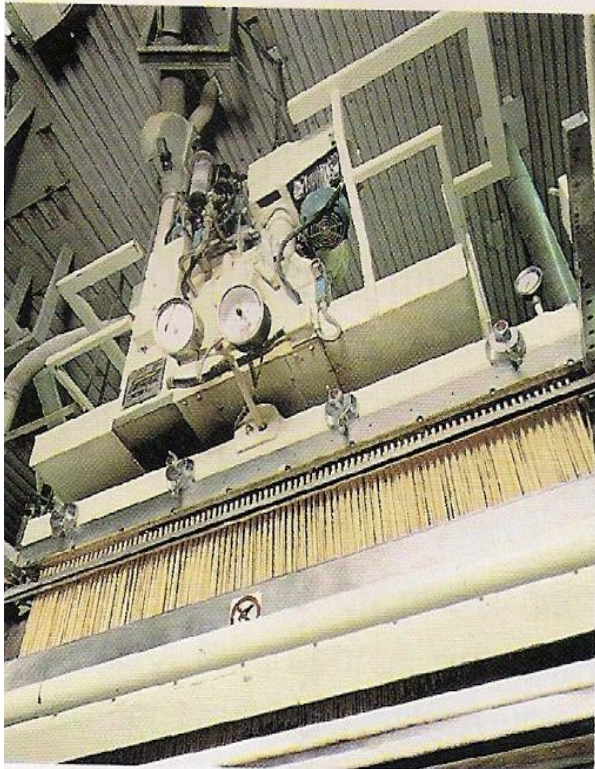
לחם בתנור בעת האפיה

באדיבות מאפית "אנג'ל"

Industrial bakery in Israel where most of the baking process is done by machines. Humans are only needed here as supervisors to ascertain that the bread baked by the machines is of high quality.



ביסקוויט בתוך התנור



מתקני יבוש פסטה חיתוך ואריזה

Industrial modern factory of Kosher pasta in Israel. Here in this illustration you see the final process of drying the pasta; so that it can be packed and distributed to shops for the consumer.

2.5 Double kitchen utensils

The expansion of the prohibitions on mixing milk and meat had a far-reaching influence on the practical arrangement of the kitchen and kitchen utensils. To facilitate the separation the custom developed long ago to purchase two sets of all kitchen utensils. Two sets of crockery, two tablecloths, a double set of plates, pans and double sets of all other kitchen utensils. These separate necessities are clearly optically different, for example a different colour or format, so that errors are more difficult to make.

However, also the kitchen itself, under the influence of automation and the economic efficiency of the 21st century, is furnished so that a separate milk and meat housekeeping can be done optimally. This means that one preferably has a working top with the sink in the middle so that the working top can be divided neatly into a milk and a meat part. Preferably one also wants two sinks or two dishwashers so that used plates and cups can be kept separate. Pans and cutlery are kept in separate cupboards, so that mistakes are out of the question.

Certain household utensils can also be halakhically problematic if one wants to use them for both milk and meat. Consider for example all sorts of ovens, dishwashers, mixers and toasters. To make these appliances suitable for double use, one sometimes has to purchase an extra accessory. Getting advice from a Rabbi is recommended.

The *Kashrut* regulations for *Pesach*, with the strict prohibition of *Chamets* (all leavened or yeasted food of the five sorts of grain: wheat, rye, oats, spelt and barley), are especially stringent and it is a big challenge to prepare a kitchen which is *kosher* for *Pesach*. In practise this means koshering the kitchen completely and meticulously according to the *Pesach* regulations. Additional pots, cutlery, the purchase of extra kitchen utensils etc. exclusively for *Pesach* are required. These kitchen utensils are carefully stored away during the complete remainder of the year and do not come into contact with any *Chamets*, so that they can be used again the following years. The Festival of *Pesach* is from the perspective of *Kashrut* the most expensive Festival of the Jewish year, but also the most beautiful Festival, especially geared to the family. Many families go on holiday during this period in a hotel which is *kosher* for *Pesach*, because of the many preparations and their labour intensity.

2.6 Mistakes and the incorrect use of kitchen utensils

When something goes wrong, this does not always mean that one cannot use an utensil any more or that one has to throw away a dish. It is possible to ritually cleanse many objects.



Jewish woman participating in a T.V. competition of "Master Chef Reality"

A pot used in a wrong way must be koshered by immersing it in a *kosher* pot with boiling water.

When something goes amiss with a dish and milk and meat are mixed, it is in some cases still permitted to be eaten.

The *Talmud* and the halakhic Code of Law *Shulchan Aruch* adopt the principle that the halakhically relevant presence of a certain substance is decided by its concentration. If a certain substance is mixed with another ingredient in a concentration of 1:60 or less, it is considered as if the substance is not present. One may only use this leniency if the substances have become mixed by accident. These are called the neutralisation laws of *Kashrut*. If for example a few drops of milk fall into two litres of chicken soup, there is no problem. Still, very pious people will not eat this dish any more.

All these questions on mixing require the prior consultation of an acknowledged Rabbi or *Dayan* (Rabbinic expert judge).

2.7 *Kashrut* and health

Maimonides (1135-1204 C.E.), in his philosophical Guide for the Perplexed, gives the following reason for the laws of *Kashrut*.

“These ordinances will train us in the control of our appetites. They train us to both reduce our longing for food, and combat the attitude that the pleasure of eating is the only aim of human existence”.

The reasons for the *Kashrut* limitations in the *Torah* also concern health, according to Maimonides. A dish consisting of both meat and milk is too fatty and difficult to digest.

A combination of milk and meat is thus difficult to digest and perhaps even damaging: according to some scientists when both milk and meat are digested, cancer causing substances are released.

In Rabbinic sources of the past 500 years, other combinations of foodstuffs are also discouraged: eating milk and fish together could be unhealthy, and the combination of fish and meat can cause serious skin disorders.

2.8 The prohibition of milk and meat against a pagan ritual

Maimonides sees another reason for the prohibition of mixing meat and milk in pagan rituals. He supposes that pagan peoples in ancient Canaan and surrounding areas knew a ritual in which a newly born kid was cooked in the milk of its mother. This brutal and heartless custom of the Canaanite peoples is supported by clay tablets found in Ras-Shamra (Syria). These seem to describe a sort of fertility rite during which they cooked in milk of its mother. Because milk was associated with new life, this fluid was accorded great magical powers.

Kosher Goes Public!

By E. Kahan



Chicago, USA Pesach 2005. A restaurant is catering 'Kosher L'Pesach' food at a Seder for dogs.

Is it not American extravagance?

2.9 Fake meat and fake milk as substitutes for meat and milk

The *Talmud* forbids even the semblance of a transgression. Eating a schnitzel made from soy while drinking a glass of milk could thus also be prohibited. This problem was already discussed in the Rabbinic literature of thousands of years ago. Is one for example allowed to drink almond milk during a meal with meat? One must then put some almonds on the table so that the guest cannot get the wrong impression. These days, so many meat and milk substitutes are available, mostly based on soy, that the invitee cannot get the wrong idea. One can thus eat a soy hamburger while drinking real milk, or eat a real beef steak and drink soy milk.

3. The *Kashrut* business as a powerful economic factor in the everyday religious Jewish life

3.1. Introduction

The complicated *Kashrut* laws are the reason for not leaving the production of foodstuffs to lay people. Preference is given to food prepared by an expert in *Kashrut*. A few basic products, like cheese, meat and bread are indeed only allowed to be eaten when they have been prepared in a ritually *kosher* way. However, a few solutions do exist, through which the preparation of foodstuffs can, to a certain degree, be given over to people who are not at home in the laws of *Kashrut*.



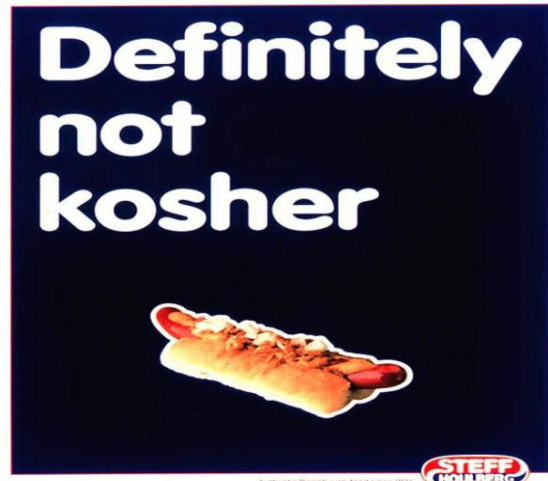
3.2 The *Kashrut* certificate

A *kosher* certificate or *Hechsher* indicates that a certain product is *kosher*. Some products, like cheese, meat, wine and bread may only be prepared ritually by religious Jews. By giving the product a certificate, stamp or seal, the consumer knows that a certain product is *kosher*.

Jewish law requires that certain products, especially meat, are given a stamp or another sign of recognition when they are not within eyesight, for example during transport. This serves to avoid swaps or fraud. This concerns products one cannot recognise on sight as *kosher*.

Besides this, it is customary to supply all products eaten during *Pesach* with a *Kashrut* seal. During this Festival extremely stringent stipulations are in place concerning the consumption of products with flour (*Chamets*), or additions of these to other products.

In the *Talmud* we can find that among others milk, meat, non identifiable fish (like fillet), bread, wine and cheese, were supplied with a seal. The *kosher* certificate thus was already in use during the third century C.E.



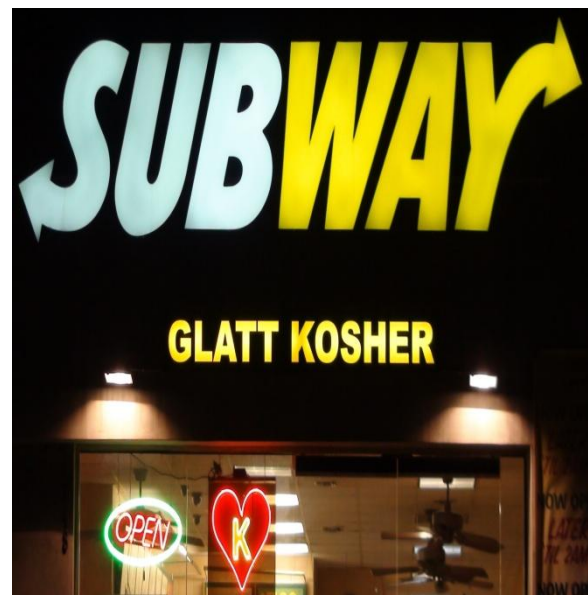
There are indications that already much earlier certain products were given a seal. The *Talmud* describes the miracle of *Hanukkah* – The Festival of Lights – with the container of oil which lasted eight days in stead of one day. The casket with olive oil was issued with a seal of the High Priest, to indicate that the oil was ritually *kosher*. According to the *Talmud* it was already customary

in the second century B.C.E. to issue certain products with seals for religious reasons. (The story of *Hanukkah* occurs in 164 B.C.E.)

A Talmudic Sage had a different and original way of indicating that his fish was *kosher* when he sent it: he used to cut the fish in small triangles.

3.3 *Kashrut* in our modern times of industrial foodstuff production

Because people make less food themselves, ever more industrially processed foodstuffs have to be supplied with a seal or certificate. Food is now nearly only still produced in factories. The production process has thus become much longer and transparent, but also more complicated. Concerning the laws of *Kashrut* this means that much can go wrong and that it is nearly impossible to say anything concerning the *Kashrut* of the ingredients on the basis of the packaging of a product. More often than not the E-numeration of the ingredients is in a language incomprehensible and non-transparent to the lay person (for example the E numbers).



The composition of our food has also undergone fundamental changes. Although in the past certain substances were also added to foodstuffs, these days a whole host of chemical substances is mixed through our food. Colouring agents, preservatives and vitamins are the most well known examples. But what should we think of emulsifiers, acidity regulators, antifoaming agents or glazing agents?

All these substances can be problematic according to the laws of *Kashrut*. The continual technical advances also have applications in the foodstuffs industry. New techniques like gene manipulation and biotechnology create the possibility to remove all sorts of substances from enzymes, cells or micro

organisms for use in the foodstuffs industry. It is also possible to imitate natural substances by complicated technical processes. All these techniques complicate the compliance with the laws of *Kashrut*.

3.4 Supervision, guarding and inspection in the modern mega *Kashrut* business

Halakhah recognises the possibility of subcontracting certain aspects of *Kashrut* to third parties – provided that Rabbinic supervision is in place. The *Kashrut* inspector must know the laws of *Kashrut* thoroughly.

There are different levels of *Kashrut* supervision: permanent and random inspections.

During permanent supervision the *Kashrut* supervisor is present constantly and he/she sometimes performs checks during the proceedings. Permanent supervision is required in a *kosher* slaughterhouse or butcher's shop, homes for the elderly, *kosher* restaurants which serve meat and all sorts of *kosher* hotels. For factories which process *kosher* meat *Halakhah* also requires permanent supervision.



For supervision consisting of random checks the *Kashrut* inspector only performs checks at certain unannounced times. This sort of supervision is required at for example a fish restaurant, a vegetarian restaurant, establishments serving only milk, like a *kosher* pizzeria, *kosher* bakeries and at the production of *kosher* products not based on ritual basic products.

To be able these days to make a statement on whether a certain product is *kosher* in the very complex foodstuffs industry, experts in *Kashrut* will first

have to investigate the production process down to the smallest details. Some knowledge of technology and science is required for this. When it is established that the conditions for *Kashrut* have been met, the food can be eaten in principle. Checks will have to be performed by these *Kashrut* authorities, to make sure that no fraud takes place and no changes in the production process have taken place.

A *Kashrut* certificate is only awarded to a product if permanent supervision by a *Kashrut* supervisor takes place. In certain cases the *Kashrut* inspector activates certain production processes, like the starting of an oven, to adhere to the criteria of *Halakhah*.

In many countries the opinion is current these days that only foodstuff products under complete *Kashrut* supervision may be eaten.

Despite this, the Chief Rabbinate of France and the Netherlands have compiled very satisfactory *Kashrut* lists for people who live in the provinces or for people who for financial reasons cannot afford the very expensive *kosher* products with a certificate.



3.5 A *Kashrut*/*Kosher* certificate on the basis of a working visit

To acquire a *Kashrut* certificate by an internationally recognised *Kashrut* authority like the American OU (Orthodox Union), a local Rabbi, who is an expert in *Kashrut*, makes a on site inspection to check if the product is *kosher*. The complete factory is inspected. Special attention is given to the circuit of steam, with which the food is heated, the methods for cleaning the installations, the oven and transportation mechanisms. The other products produced in the factory are also looked at. The extent to which non-*kosher* products are kept separated from permitted foodstuffs is investigated. Chips with a bacon taste, which are not *kosher*, cannot use the same conveyor belt as chips with salt which are *kosher*.

To halt the production process, for example to *kosher* the conveyor belt, is of no interest to the producer. Only specially made products with a seal and permanent *Kashrut* supervision are of interest for the factories, because these products are often exported to the *kosher* market in foreign countries. The factory then gets a part of the proceeds.

3.6 The European Commodities Act and Food Safety Act and the laws of *Kashrut*

Many civilised countries have laws to guarantee the safety of food, both from the perspective of public health and of quality. In this way the authorities wish to prevent the adding of harmful substances. On the other hand the Commodities Act must prevent fraud by producers – one can think of adding water to milk or of cheap oil to real olive oil.



In Europe the content of a product is supposed to be mentioned on the packaging. Is this however also sufficient for people who eat *kosher*? In the Rabbinic Responsa literature of the last centuries attention is paid to this question. Various Rabbis permitted the use of butter, milk, yoghurt etc. – also without Rabbinic supervision. An official quality mark or seal is in this case sufficient to combat fraud. Especially the addition of non *kosher* milk or of forbidden animal fats is feared.

On the other hand, the Commodities Act and *Halakhah* use different criteria. The Commodities Act stipulates that there is no obligation to mention a substance which is less than 2% of the total ingredients on the label. A tanker with oil, which has been cleaned only superficially can still contain residual animal fats. From the perspective of *Halakhah*, this is really a problem. Only when a producer mentions that a product is 100% pure ..., the product may not contain any other ingredient according to the Commodities Act.

Certain supporting substances also do not need to be mentioned on the label according to the Commodities Act. This concerns substances which are not real ingredients, but which do play a part in the production of foodstuffs. An example is animal fats which are put on baking forms or trays to facilitate the removal of the biscuit or cracker. In the Benelux countries bakeries mostly use animal fats for this, which is prohibited according to *Halakhah*. This is the reason that the Rabbinate in the Benelux countries require supervision for bakeries.

3.7 Food additives as a symptom of the modern foodstuffs industry

A whole range of substances is added to our foodstuffs to make our food look nicer, fresher and tastier so as to animate us to consume liberally. These substances can be of synthetic, vegetable or animal origin. To be able to state that something is *kosher*, requires the exact tracing of the origin of the specified substance.

The red colouring agent E120, which is an ingredient of many sweets, jam and canned foods, contains dried scale bug (coccus). According to the laws of *Kashrut*, insects may however not be eaten.



Another group of substances often used are emulsifiers. An emulsifier helps to mix two substances which normally do not mix, like oil and water, into a smooth, homogenous solution. These substances are used in many products: among others in chocolate, margarine, salad oil/dressings and mayonnaise, cakes, biscuits and bread. Many of these emulsifiers can be made from animal fats or synthetically. *Kosher* products can only contain synthetic emulsifiers. Because this can in most cases not be checked, most products containing emulsifiers are not permitted to be eaten.

The flavours and flavour enhancers (substances for smell and taste) which are added to the foodstuffs form another problem. Natural aromas need not be mentioned on the label according to the Commodities Act. However, these aromas can be of animal origin, for example from cats, beavers and whales. These animals are however not *kosher* and thus not allowed.

4. My table is my altar (*Pirke Avoth/Ethics of the Fathers*)

4.1 Introduction

A considerable part of the commandments in the *Torah* concern the sacrificial ritual (*Vayikra/Leviticus*). Most sacrifices were animals which were offered and burned on the Altar in the Tent of Meeting and the Temple, after slaughter and other rituals. The Altar with the sacrifice was a symbol for the approach of and sometimes also for reaching of/realisation of reconciliation and forgiveness between man and G'd.



The whole ritual was in principle performed by the priests (*Kohanim*). They were the only ones allowed to enter certain sections of the Temple. Despite the criticism of some Prophets against the sacrificial service, the service in the Temple remained a dominant factor in the religious life during the First and Second Temple Eras.

4.2 From Temple to house

Many concepts from the Temple service were transported to the home/domestic sphere. Already in the first century B.C.E. there were groups of pious *Chassidim* who subjected their food to strict ritual rules of cleanliness which normally only applied to Priest. An example is the washing of the hands before the meal.

The domestic table was considered a sort of altar. By consuming the meal in the correct way the food was sanctified. One then, as it were, reached the

same high spiritual level as when bringing a sacrifice on the altar. The sanctified food was a substitute for the bringing of animal sacrifices in the Sanctuary in Jerusalem for these Chassidic groups and also for the Essenians.

The addition of an extra dimension of spirituality and holiness to the meal could occur in different ways.

In the *Mishnah* we read the following: [source](#)

“Rabbi Shimon says: When three people have eaten at a table together and no words of Torah have been spoken, then of such persons it is said: All tables are without the Presence of G´d (*Yeshayahu/Isaiah 28:8*). But when three people have eaten at a table and spoken words of Torah, then it is as if they have eaten from the table of G´d, as is said: And he said to me: This is the table that stands before G´d.” (*Yecheske-el/Ezekiel 41:22*).

In other words, by speaking about the *Torah* (words and thoughts) during the meal, one transforms the table of ones earthly existence into something spiritual: a table before G´d.



4.3 Spiritual nourishment

The presence of a Halakhic Authority during a meal can lift the physical eating to a high spiritual level, according to the *Talmud*.

“Rabbi Avin the Levite/HaLevi said: When someone is present at a meal of which a Halakhic Authority partakes, it is as if he enjoys the Divine Radiance/Presence, for it is said: And Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe, before G´d (*Shemot/Exodus 18:12*).

Did they then eat before G´d? Surely they ate in the presence of Moshe? This teaches us that when someone partakes of a meal in the presence of a Sage,

it is as if he partakes of the Divine Presence.” (Babylonian *Talmud Berachot* 64a)

A Sage of the Talmud had the following motto about spiritual nourishment: “This world is not like the World to Come. In the Hereafter there will be no eating, drinking, sexuality, trade, jealousy, hate or competition. The Just sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the Divine Radiance, as it is said: “And they beheld G’d, ate and drank.”” (Babylonian *Talmud Berachot* 17a)

4.4 Forgiveness

Just like the Altar in the Temple, the table also has the possibility of affecting reconciliation and forgiveness.

In the Talmud we read:

“Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish both declared: During the times of the Temple the Altar affected reconciliation; these days it is someone’s table with which sins are forgiven “ (Babylonian *Talmud Chagiga* 27a).



How can a table affect reconciliation?

Through the charity one performs during the meal: “Let your house be open wide, treat the poor to be members of your household” was a motto of Rabbi Yose ben Yochanan, a well known *Mishnah* Sage from *Yerusalayim* in the second century C.E. (*Pirke Avoth*/Ethics of the Fathers I, 5)

This is the sort of charity/These are the sorts of acts of kindness Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had in mind as substitute for the Temple service, after the destruction in 70 C.E.

”Once Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah were leaving *Yerusalayim*, when Rabbi Yehoshua saw the ruined Temple. “Woe to us”, he cried, “because of the destruction of the place where the sins

of the Jewish People were atoned for”. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him: “My son, do not despair. We have something else which, just like the Temple, can affect reconciliation/is a source of atonement, namely *Gemilut Chasdim*/charity/acts of kindness. It is written: “Because I desire *Chesed*/charity/acts of kindness and not animal sacrifices”” (Hoshea 6:6) (*Midrash Yelamdeinu*)

According to Maimonides (1135-1204 C.E.), Sage from the Middle Ages, one has a special moral duty to invite the poor, singles, widows, orphans and people on the fringe of society, to partake of our meals on the Festivals. Especially *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Succoth* have to be celebrated abundantly according to the Torah. According to Maimonides this does not entail that one only eats and drinks excessively. Such a celebration would merely be profane and without any trace of spirituality. By inviting the poor, orphans, widows and others in need, we add a spiritual tone to the festivities by also remembering others who are less fortunate.



4.5 Customs

The Rabbinic comparison of a table with the Altar has led to some customs in everyday Jewish life. For example, it is customary to first dip a piece of bread in salt at a meal. The source for this is the command in the Torah: “Upon every one of your offerings you shall offer salt.” (*Vayikra/Leviticus 2:13*)

The most well known explanation for salt in connection with the sacrifices or with the first piece of bread in salt, is the remembrance of the promise of G'd to humanity to never again bring a Flood. The Flood consisted for the most part of the salty sea water.

Another custom is to remove or cover the knives during the Grace after Meals (*Bentshing*). The reason for this is also the parallel between Altar and table. By reciting the Grace after Meals a spiritual dimension is also added to the meal

and the table changes into an altar. The Torah prohibits the use of stones worked on by metal for the building of the Altar.

“And when an Altar of stones you make for Me, do not build them of hewn stone, for your sword you will have raised against it and you will have desecrated it.” (*Shemot/Exodus 20:22*)

The idea behind this is that the knife is a sort of weapon which shortens life. The Altar is a symbol of life and spirituality and these two therefore do not harmonise.

The basic idea that the table resembles an altar can be found in Rabbinic sources and there it is clarified as follows:

“Rabbi Shimon, the son of Eleazar, says: The Altar is meant to lengthen the life of man, the iron was created to shorten it. That is why it is prohibited to use that which shortens life with something which lengthens it (*Mechilta*)

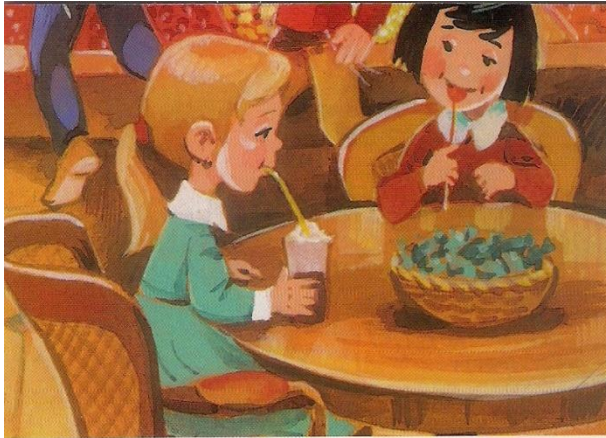
In other words, iron is connected to death because of the use of iron in all sorts of weapons. An altar however brings reconciliation between man and G´d and hereby lengthens life. It would be wrong to mix these two.

According to a mystical custom, there must always be bread or something edible on the table. Just as on the Altar, on which, according to the Torah, there always needed to be wood to keep the Eternal Fire burning, the table for meals must always have something edible on it. Through this the Divine blessing can, as it were, reach the human via the table.

4.6 A Chassidic tale as epilogue for this serious theme

A kosher tongue

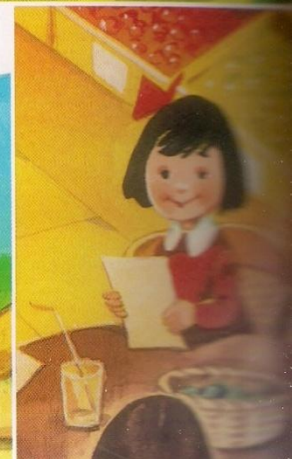
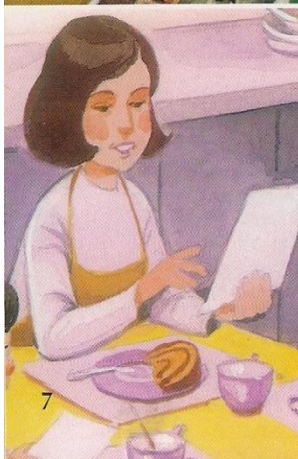
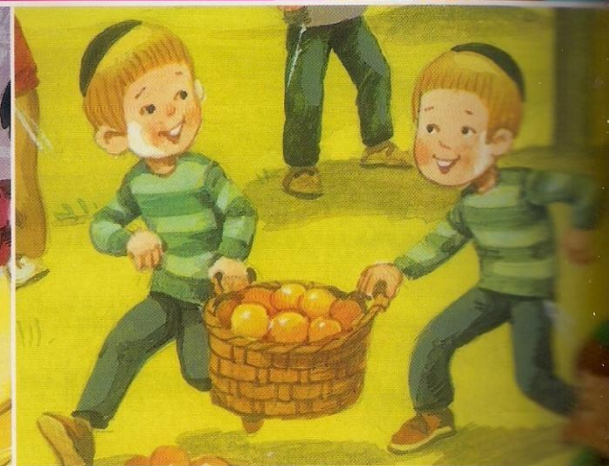
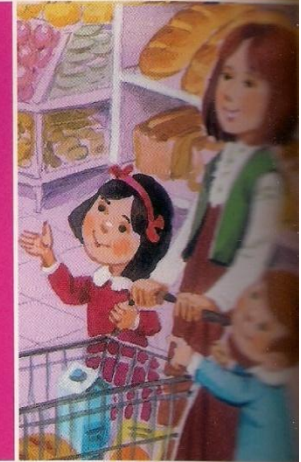
Reb Ya´acov Yitschak of Pashyscha, the Yid *HaKadosh*, commanded his eldest disciple, Reb Simcha Bunim, to undertake a journey to a remote hamlet. When he enquired about the purpose of the journey, the Yid *HaKadosh* remained silent. Reb Simcha Bunim took a few *Chassidim* to accompany him and went on his way. The sun was already setting when they reached their destination. Because the village had no inn, Reb Simcha Bunim ordered his driver to stop at the first house. He knocked on the door and he and his students were asked to enter. When they asked their host if they could join the meal, the man answered that he had no milk products and that he could only offer them a meal with meat. Immediately the *Chassidim* bombarded the man with questions about his level of *Kashrut*. They wanted to know who the *Shochet* was. Were the longs of the animal without any spots and was the meat salted enough to remove all traces of blood, as the Law commands? The cross examination might have continued for some time, had they not been called to order by an imposing voice which came from the back of the house. They diverted their attention from the owner of the house to a man who was dressed as a beggar and who sat next to the hearth smoking a pipe. “My dear *Chassidim*”, said the beggar. “You are most meticulous concerning what



בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֵנִין

Bircas HaNehenin

Berachos on food and other things you eat, drink, and enjoy.



enters your mouth. But with what comes out of your mouth, you are not so particular". When Reb Simcha Bunim heard these words, he knew what the reason had been for his journey. He nodded respectfully to the beggar, thanked the owner of the house for his care, had the wagon turned around and told his students: "come, now we are ready to return to Pashyscha."

15 Av 5773 22 July 2013

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