

Notes from the Cantor – May 2006

A Personal Journey Towards Kashrut – Keeping a Kosher Home

**By
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Keeping a Kosher home is relatively new for me and I view this as a journey, as I still consider myself a novice in learning, understanding, and practicing the laws of Kashrut. I want to share with you some basics of Kashrut, my reasons for keeping a Kosher home, and the challenges and joys of doing so.

Kashrut is that part of Jewish law that determines what is proper, and improper, for a Jew to eat. The Hebrew word “Kosher” literally means ritually pure or fit and has been often used in the context of ritual objects, such as a Kosher Torah or a Kosher mezuzah scroll.

The laws of Kashrut are mentioned in various parts of the Torah, but the Rabbis developed the actual interpretation and practice over a long period of time. For example, three times it is stated in the Torah that “you shall not boil a kid in it’s mother’s milk,” which later led to rules about not preparing and eating milk and meat foods together. It also led to other rules about how long one must wait before eating meat after a dairy meal and vice versa. Another example is the law that forbids one to consume an animals’ blood, which then led to the rules of ritual slaughtering.

In Leviticus (11:44-45), after we are told which animals, fowl, and fish are permitted and which are forbidden, the reason for these laws is given: “I am the Lord, Your God: sanctify yourselves therefore, 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.” So the overriding reason for Kashrut is holiness. In Samuel Dresner’s book “The Jewish Dietary Laws,” he states “Kashrut, therefore may be defined as part of Judaism’s attempt to hallow the act of eating by teaching us reverence for life.” We do not live to eat, we eat to live, even the act of eating can be sanctified, and even the act of eating can become a means for achieving holiness.”

Reform Judaism has expanded the concept of Kashrut to include ethical Kashrut which means making food choices based on the values that shape our lives. For example, one may choose to avoid foods that are harvested by oppressed food workers, or not eat animals that are raised under cruel conditions, or not eat food that is harmful to the environment.

I began my journey into the world of Kashrut about 6 years ago when I married Loren, who had always maintained a Kosher home. Last summer, my Orthodox stepdaughter and family came to live with us during job relocation. We made a decision to bring our home up to a stricter form of Kashrut so that my extended family could eat and prepare food in our home. Bringing our Kashrut practice up to a stricter level was not an easy

process. Some of the things we did included: disposing of any foods that did not have an acceptable “hechsher” – Kosher symbol on it, boiling our silverware to “rekasher” it, changing the racks in our dishwasher, further delineating milk and meat areas which included having 2 different dish drain boards, purchasing new pots and pans, consulting with an Orthodox rabbi who visited our home. We also put away two sets of previously used stoneware dishes for a year and are now trying to determine if they can be “rekashed.”

What are the challenges of keeping a Kosher home? When I shop, I need to read labels to make sure that there is an acceptable Kosher symbol on the food. (Not all Kosher symbols are accepted by every Jewish community, and I follow the guidelines of my Orthodox family.) I need to shop at stores that are further away from my home in order to find more Kosher food. I am learning to adapt recipes to make sure that milk and meat foods are not served at the same meal. Since most of my friends and extended family do not maintain Kosher homes, when I invite them over for a meal, they cannot bring foods prepared in their own homes or from non-Kosher sources into my house. I need to tavel, or ritually immerse, any new metal or glass items into a mikveh before using them. This has nothing to do with Kashrut, but rather with the sanctification of vessels as ownership passes to a Jew.

Rabbi Rachel Mikva said that: “Dietary practice is not an all or nothing proposition. Jewish food practices are steps towards revealing the “kedushah,” the holiness of life in God’s creation...” For me, keeping a Kosher home has helped me to sanctify the act of eating and has added a level of “kedushah” into our home. I am learning mindfulness when I prepare food. Cooking and sharing meals with my Orthodox family has also brought our family together on another level and anyone can now eat in our home.