Kugel, Kefilte Fish, Kosher?

Everything you always wanted to know about Jewish Dietary Laws, but were afraid to ask.

By Lori Riegel, Religious and Cultural Education Coordinator

Handmaker Jewish Services for the Aging
“Well There Were 613 Commandments…”

Mitzvah = Commandment
Mitzvot = Commandments

Categories of Mitzvot

- Positive and Negative
- Light and Heavy
- Between individual and G-d / Between individual and other people
- Mishpatim and Chukim - “We are holy because G-d is holy.”
Biblical Sources

First mention of dietary guidelines: Genesis 1:29-30 – It was assumed that all people would be vegetarian – all seed bearing plants and seed-bearing fruit

After flood – Genesis 9:3-4 – Can eat meat, but not with blood

Foundations of Kashrut – first found in Exodus 23:19 - “...You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.”

Which animals we can eat – Leviticus 11:1-47 – The what and the why!
Leviticus 11:1-47
Which animals can we eat?

**Do's**
- Animal that has cleft hooves and chews cud
- Anything in water with fins and scales
- Winged swarming things that have jointed legs to walk on ground (chicken, turkey, duck, geese, pigeon, pheasant*)
- Locusts and grasshopper (all varieties)
The Do Nots

- Animals that *only* chew cud or *only* have split hooves not both (e.g. camel, rock-badger, hare, swine)
- Sea creatures without fins and scales (e.g. shellfish, eel)
- Unclean birds – birds of prey: great vulture, bearded vulture, ospray, kite, falcon, raven, ostrich, hawk, sea-mew, owl, pelican, carrion-vulture, stork, heron, hoopoe, bat
- Mammals with paws
- Swarming things: weasel, mouse, lizard, crocodile
- Swarming things (smaller insects, worms, slugs)
- Belly crawlers (snakes) and those with many feet (spiders, caterpillars, centipedes)
- Animal that would be kosher that dies of natural causes
Kosher Slaughter - Shechitah

- Shechitah = prescribed manner for slaughter
- Shochet = highly trained ritual slaughterer
- Fulfillment of commandment *Tza'ar Ba'alei Chaim* – prevention of cruelty to animals
- According to Maimonides we are not permitted to torment the animal by slaughtering in a clumsy manner or causing undue suffering
- Using specially equipped knife, the shochet cuts the trachea and esophagus cleanly and swiftly
Meat, Dairy and Pareve

Meat (*fleishich*) includes poultry, beef, lamb, goat

Dairy (*milkech*) includes all milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, products with whey

Pareve includes items that are neutral – they can go with either dairy or meat meals: fish, fruits and vegetables, grains, soy products, margarine, oils

Practicalities:
- Separate dishes, utensils, pots and pans
- Cutting boards
- Storage containers
- Dish towels
- Wait-times between meals
It's all in the **Hechsher**

- Stamp of kashrut
- Proctor & Gamble – Crisco – One of first major manufactueres to ask for hechsher
- OU, Kof-K, Star-K, etc., etc., etc.

For up-to-date alerts and info go to [www.kosherquest.org](http://www.kosherquest.org)

- Not all products need a hechsher (e.g. maple syrup, rice, unflavored tea)
Spirituality of Kashrut

- Formula for eating: blessing, eat, prayer of thanks
- One can judge a person's character by “his cup, his pocket and his anger.” (Kosso, Kisso, Ka'aso) -- Talmud
- Eating has wider meaning than intake of food
- Dead Sea vs. Sea of Galilee – receiving and letting go
- Eating to live, not living to eat – elevate eating to an act of holiness
- Rabbi Yosef Eisen – quote from Rambam – Doing mitzvot brings us closer to G-d – a kosher meal contains a lot of mitzvot!
- Reverence for life
- We are holy because G-d is holy
Passover

- Remember the Exodus from Egypt. G-d brought us out with a strong arm.
- Matzah – bread of affliction
- Cannot eat any of five grains, other than flour that has already been made into matzah (wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats)
- Ashkenazic rabbis – added: rice, millet, corn and legumes

To *Bean* or not to *Bean*, that is the question!

Ashkenazic authorities: legumes can be confused with grains

Sephardic practice: legumes are substantial part of diet