

## Kashrut

What is “Kashrut”? If you refer to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Kashrut is defined as “dietary laws” – in Judaism, regulations that prohibit the eating of certain foods and require that other foods be prepared in a specified manner. Most prescriptions regarding kashrut are found in the Torah in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Genesis and Exodus. Some efforts have been made to establish a direct relationship between these laws and health, but for us, no other motive is required than the fact that God has so given us these commandments. They form a sacred path to follow and holiness is the only reason given in the Torah for their observance.

*For I am the Lord your God! Therefore, 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*

Holiness in Hebrew is “Kedusha” from the word “kadosh” meaning separated or set apart. To be a holy people, Israel had to be apart, separate from their idol-worshipping neighbors. Kashrut is one means of making the Jewish lifestyle different from that of their neighbors. Observance of the laws of kashrut has been a unifying factor for the Jewish people throughout the ages, continually serving to remind Jews of their roots.

What is “Kosher”? The word “kosher” (from the Hebrew word *kasher*) actually did not originally apply to food. It is first used in the Bible (Esther 8:5 and Ecclesiastes 11:6) to mean “good” and “proper”. In later rabbinic literature it referred primarily to ritual objects (tallit, tefillin, etc.) and meant “fit for ritual use”. Kasher is also used to describe witnesses who are “fit” and “proper,” i.e., competent, to testify. When applied to food, kosher is the opposite of *treif*, i.e., forbidden, which comes from the Hebrew word for torn since animals torn by a predator were prohibited.

*Treif* is any food or thing that is not kosher. This includes foods that are prohibited for consumption in from the outset as well as foods prepared incorrectly. From the outset, the Torah specifies which animals can and cannot be consumed. Beginning with the simplest, anything from the water needs fins and scales. There is a list of prohibited birds which mainly includes scavengers and birds of prey. Land animals must have cloven hooves and chew their cud. There are a few types of locust which are also kosher, but they are only eaten by a small number of communities. Taken together, this rules out: pigs, camels, rabbits, shellfish, eels, sharks, crabs, snakes, frogs, eagles and more.

Even if an animal can be eaten, the method in which it is slaughtered and prepared is critical. Animals may be slain for food, skins and clothing only when there is a genuine need. Cruelty toward animals and hunting for sport are strictly forbidden. Animals must be slaughtered in the most humane way possible, and there are specific mitzvot that govern animal slaughter. The ritual slaughterer, known as a shochet, carries out the act with a swift stroke of the blade across the throat of the animal. A shochet receives his authority directly from rabbis and is subject to their supervision. If an animal dies of natural causes or injury, it cannot be eaten. After it was slaughtered, it is also examined inside to make sure it was not suffering from a terminal condition.

According to the Torah, the essence of life is in the blood. To consume the blood of an animal is to consume its life, an act strictly prohibited by Jewish law. Following the slaughter, animals must be drained of blood. All residual blood is drained from the meat during food preparation, either by broiling or soaking and salting. This, plus the requirement of humane slaughter, is why we don’t eat beef or chicken from non kosher supervised sources. Fish do not have the same requirements.

Probably one of the better-known aspects of kashrut is the separation of meat and dairy products. The basis for this is found in the Torah – in Deuteronomy (14:21) and Exodus (23:19 & 34:26). *Do not cook a kid [young animal] in its mother's milk.* The separation includes not only the foods themselves but, because of how materials absorb food particles, also the utensils involved in cooking, the plates and flatware used to serve and eat the food and the towels and dishwashers employed in cleaning up. Further, you must be cognizant of your own mouth and make sure no meat is still between your teeth before moving from fleishig (meat) to milchig (dairy) in order to avoid mixing the two. This involves a wait of an hour or more.

Keeping kosher is a mitzvah, a mitzvah that defines us and has a profound influence on the domestic life of every Jewish home.

### An Example Path to Grow in Kashrut

