



Living a Jewish Life: Rabbi's November 3-Session Mini-Course 2020

Session 2 (12 November): Kashrut

Some Texts for Discussion

I. Sources from the Torah

<p>Genesis 1:27-30 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God did he create it, male and female he created them. God blessed them, God said to them: Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth and subdue it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that crawl about upon the earth! God said: Here, I give you all plants that bear seeds that are upon the face of all the earth, and all trees in which there is tree fruit that bears seeds, for you shall they be, for eating; and also for all the living things of the earth, for all the fowl of the heavens, for all that crawls about upon the earth in which there is living being- all green plants for eating. It was so.</p>	<p>Genesis 9:1-4 Now God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth! Fear-of-you, dread-of-you shall be upon all the wildlife of the earth and upon all the fowl of the heavens, all that crawls on the soil and all the fish of the sea- into your hand they are given. All things crawling about that live, for you shall they be, for eating, as with the green plants, I now give you all. However: flesh with its life, its blood, you are not to eat!</p>
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- What are the differences between the two passages?
- Given what you know of events in the Torah from Genesis 1 to Genesis 9 what might account for the differences?

II. A Framework for Thinking about Jewish Law, and about Kashrut in particular

Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin (*The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism*) have written that every Jewish law and tradition fits into at least one of the following categories:

Category	Purpose
Reflexive Laws	To elevate the performer of the law
Laws of Ethics	To ensure moral treatment of others
Laws of Holiness	To elevate human actions from animal-like to God-like
National Laws	To identify with the Jewish nation and with its past

The Jewish dietary laws fall into *all four* of the above categories.

In each of the following passages about the Jewish dietary laws, which categories of Jewish law are emphasized?

III. Rabbi Samuel Dresner, 20th century Conservative Rabbi

There is no clearer visible symbol of life than blood. To spill blood is to bring death. To inject blood is often to save life. The removal of blood which *Kashrut* teaches is one of the most powerful means of making us constantly aware of the concession and compromise which the whole act of eating meat, in reality, is. Again, it teaches us reverence for life.

IV. Midrash Sifra, 3rd century CE

Rabbi Eleazar the son of Azariah said: "A man should not say: 'I refrain from eating pork because I don't like it.' Rather he should say, 'I refrain from eating pork, because what else should I do, considering that my Father in heaven declared such food out of bounds for me?!'"

V. Don Isaac Abravanel, Spanish-Jewish scholar and statesman, 1437-1508

There are creatures well-known for their destructiveness like vipers, adders, and scorpions not mentioned in the list of animals forbidden by the Torah. All this merely teaches us that the Divine law did not come to take the place of a medical handbook."

VI. Kenneth Storch, nutritionist, NYC, 1980's

We [observant Jews] are a nutritionist's dream. We are acutely conscious at the point of eating—we stop to recite a blessing before placing anything in our mouths. We wait prescribed periods between meat and dairy. Our very notion of food is linked with limitation and self-discipline. Add to this the value we assign to life and health, and you have the ideal candidate for improved health through dietary modification.

VII. Samuel David Luzzato, Italian Jewish writer, 19th c.

The philosopher Epictetus states that if one placed the following two words on his heart, he would be certain not to sin: '*sustine et abstine*,' i.e., 'endure and abstain' from pleasures. The numerous *mitzvot* and statutes accustom man to exercise self-control.

VIII. Keli Yakar, 16th century Bible commentary

Why ritual slaughter? Far more appropriate for man not to eat meat. Torah requires a troublesome and inconvenient procedure in the hope that the bother and annoyance of the whole procedure will restrain him from a strong and uncontrollable desire for meat.

IX. Rabbi Isaac Klein

Eating is one of the important functions of life. It begins as a biological act, a means of satisfying hunger. When we invite a friend for dinner, a new dimension is added to eating; it becomes a social act. It helps to cement friendship. ...On the Sabbath, or even more, on Passover at the Seder, eating becomes a religious act, an act of worship, with the table becoming an altar to God. Religion thus raises the biological act into the dimension of the holy. Hence the connection in the Torah between the dietary laws and holiness.

X. Arthur Waskow

The content of kashrut has puzzled many analysts... Perhaps the most interesting analysis—because it went to the heart of what the entire halakhic system was about – was the one that argued that the entire system of distinctions concerning food was an integral part of a culture that focused on distinctions.

XI. Rabbi Samuel Dresner, 20th century Conservative Rabbi

The Jew is unable to look upon the sport of hunting simply as an opportunity to get out into the open air, flex his muscles and “renew his contact with nature.” He views the deliberate shooting of an animal for no reason other than “sport” with utter abhorrence and sees in it the aggressive instinct in man coming to the fore. He knows that in the repeated act of killing, man himself may become a killer. Judaism recognizes this as a very real danger which confronts man. But it neither offers pious platitudes of condemnation nor does it confess helplessness. It has devised the laws of Kashrut as a habitual system of spiritual discipline which trains the Jew each and every day to have reverence for life, even though life must be taken to provide him with food.

XII. Rabbi Pinchas Peli, Israeli modern Orthodox rabbi, Torah Today, p. 18

"The laws of kashrut come to teach us that a Jew's first preference should be a vegetarian meal. If, however, one cannot control a craving for meat, it should be kosher meat, which would serve as a reminder that the animal being eaten is a creature of God, that the death of such a creature cannot be taken lightly, that hunting for sport is forbidden, that we cannot treat any living thing callously, and that we are responsible for what happens to other beings (human and animal) even if we did not personally come into contact with them."

XIII. Dennis Prager / Joseph Telushkin, *Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism*

Why [kosher] land animals must chew their cud and have split hooves is a fascinating question, but it is irrelevant to Kashrut’s moral purpose of limiting our killing and eating of animals. It is analogous to asking why red lights signify “stop” and green lights mean “go.” There may be psychological or other reasons for the choice of these colors, but they are irrelevant to the primary purpose of traffic lights, which is to guide traffic. Red and green may have been selected arbitrarily. Similarly, the signs of kosher animals may be regarded as having been arbitrarily selected. Given Judaism’s goal of limiting the number of animals Jews could kill to eat, some signs delineating kosher and non-permitted animals had to be selected.

XIV. Rabbi Bradley Artson

For thousands of years, the dietary laws have created a potent bond, solidifying Jewish identity, forging a link with Jews throughout time and across the globe, and strengthening family and friends into communities devoted to a more humane order on Earth.

XV. Arthur Waskow

(a) are tomatoes grown by drenching the earth in pesticides “kosher” to eat, at home or at a synagogue wedding reception?

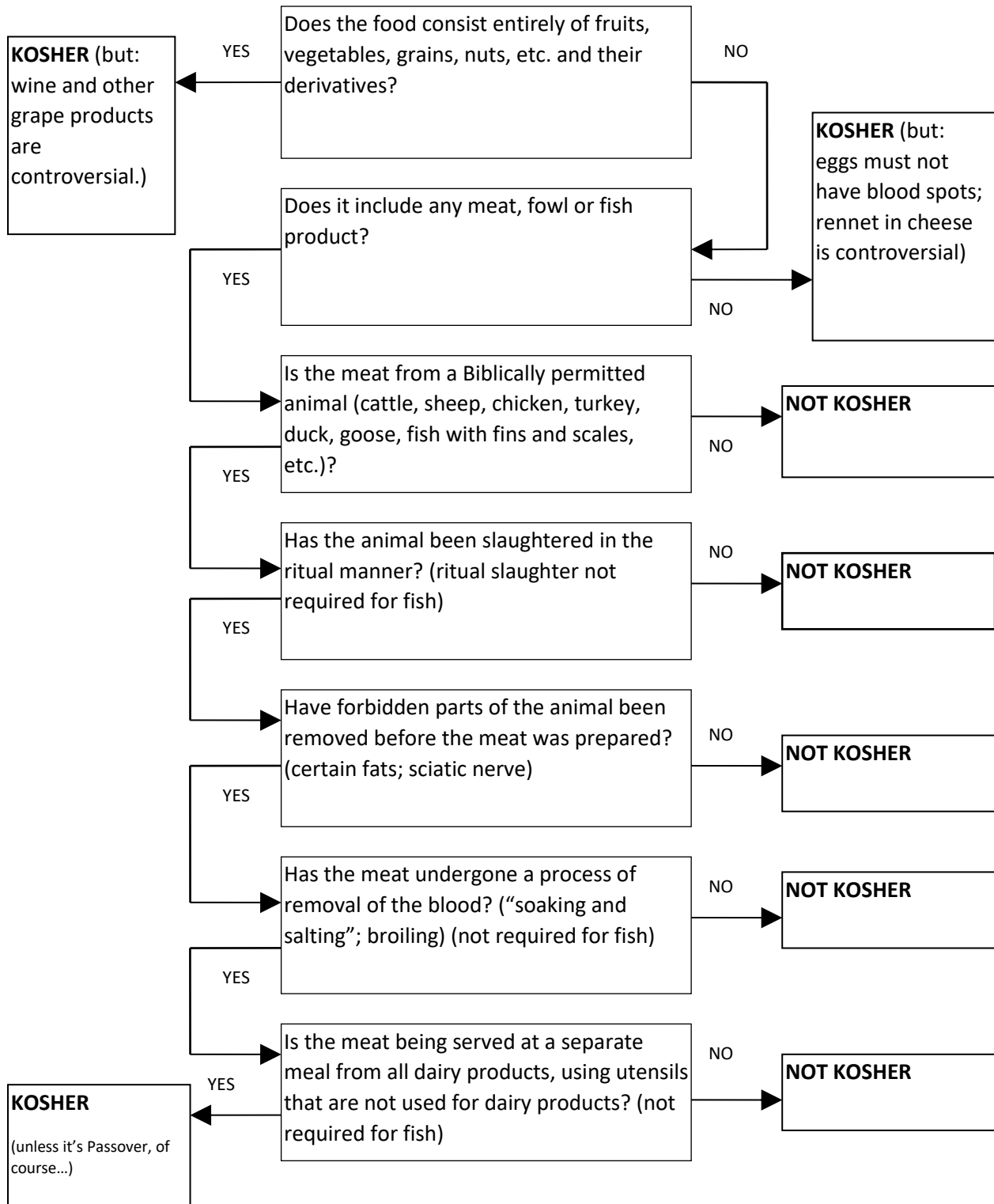
(b) is newsprint made by chopping down an ancient and irreplaceable forest “kosher” to use to make a Jewish newspaper?

(c) What about windows and doors so built that the warm air flows out through the m and the furnace keeps burning all night? Are such doors and windows “kosher” for a home or for a Jewish Community Center building?

(d) Is a bank that invests its depositors’ money in an oil company that befouls the ocean a “kosher” place for me or for the UJA to deposit money?

If by “kosher” we mean what we have so far called by that name—the traditional law code of proper ritual slaughter, etc.—then the correct answer to all these questions is that the category of “kosher” does not apply to them. But what if we both draw on the ancient meaning of “kosher” and go beyond it? ... What if by “eco-kosher” we mean a broader sense of good everyday practice that draws on the wellsprings of Jewish wisdom and tradition about the relationships between human beings and the earth? Then perhaps the answer is that these ways of behaving may not be “eco-kosher.”

IS IT KOSHER?



"Is it Kosher?" graphic produced originally for a program at the 92nd Street Y by Rabbi Robert Scheinberg