

# Kosher: You are What AND HOW You Eat

It makes very good sense to me that an ideal society would give much attention to what and how people eat. Conversely, the selection, procurement, and handling of food says a lot about a society. There are many issues in play here: health, sensitivity to animals, and attitudes toward life in general and toward the harmony of nature. The Jewish laws regarding diet address these issues and foster health along with the most sensitive or civilized behavior.

## Part 1.

**A very brief summary of the laws follows. They fall into four categories:**

1. *What animals we may consume*
2. *How the animals should be killed*
3. *How they should be cleaned*
4. *The mixing of dairy and meat*

1.) In Jewish law there seems to be a desire to seriously limit the variety of animals we can eat. One can guess about the health aspects of this. For ancient times, the benefits of abstaining from certain animals are more obvious. Many people today would say that excluding these from our diets can no longer be justified in light of modern hygiene and inspections. I beg to disagree.

I give the benefit of the doubt to the Author of these recommendations and consider our current understanding of human health to be not very advanced. I feel there is more to these laws than we'll ever know. I do believe there are good reasons why particular animals or categories are prohibited.

Some religious people believe that our not being allowed to eat certain types of animals might have no health reason but is instead a test of faith. I disagree and say again, G-d does not play those types of games with us.

Speaking of health, note that animals that are sick or die naturally are not allowed.

2.) The insistence of the kosher laws that animals be slaughtered as painlessly as possible shows remarkable sensitivity. Our food should bring as little suffering as we can arrange. We don't hunt, fearing that an imperfect attempt would cause terrible pain to the hunted. We don't hack animals carelessly to death, we don't tear them, drown them, or burn or steam them alive.

It's not clear to me that humans were originally meant to eat animals. This may all be a concession to our more base instincts; but if we are going to consume higher life forms, Judaism seeks to civilize that interaction.

3.) Jews don't eat blood, regarding it as the flow of life in the animals. This law is another reminder that the creature was not long ago full of life and part of the amazing creation that is nature. So the blood is removed from slaughtered animals as thoroughly as possible. We also don't eat most organs. Health reasons are easy to find for this practice (and health reasons very much apply to blood also).

4.) Our not mixing meat and dairy at the same meal is a practice that many find puzzling. It stems from the following law: don't boil a kid in its mother's milk. This must have been a common practice in ancient, near-eastern times and maybe even more recently in various cultures.

I am in awe of the sensitivity demonstrated here, toward animals, toward motherhood, toward the nurturing of the young, toward the harmony of nature. This prohibition is far ahead of its time and apparently of our time as well. It is an appeal for us to think about our food and where it comes from. It begs us to eat in a consciously ethical way.

Some might ask about milk from one type of animal and meat from another type of animal. They are missing the point. The purpose of milk is to sustain new flesh; you don't drink it down with flesh itself. That is gross insensitivity and it falls far short of humans' ethical potential. You cannot eat thoughtlessly and expect to perfect your society.

## **Part 2.**

Back-To-Basics Judaism tries to reach back to the ideas in the Five Books of Moses and to find the originally-intended sensible path. The laws of kosher are only one aspect among many of setting up an ideal society. A few more things need to be said about their proper interpretation.

First, these laws, like all the others, are for our benefit. They are not laws in the conventional sense where if you don't obey someone comes and punishes you. You keep kosher for yourself! The more of it you do, the more you benefit; it's as simple as that. If you keep any part of it, no matter how small, you will improve your life. If you do more, you will gain more. You are not doing these things for G-d. He does not need the commanded behaviors; you need them. He gave the law to us so that we would have better lives. Take the advice! You don't understand much of it? You don't understand many things (medicine, finance, etc.) and so you look for a trusted authority. If you believe that G-d wants you to enjoy life, that He is pleased by your success ( I believe this and hope you do also), then give His wisdom a chance to work for you.

Second, don't swing to the other extreme of making the laws of kosher your full-time preoccupation. They can become that if pursued on a microscopic scale. Kosher food can become an all-consuming task... time, energy and expense-wise, and in terms of consciousness. Back-to-Basics-Judaism does not believe that kosher was ever meant to take such a disproportionate role in our daily activities. When kosher becomes an obsession, there can be harmful consequences. Other aspects of Judaism can be crowded out, i.e. they may not receive sufficient attention. It takes many laws to create the ideal society; if you stress some too much, others will probably get neglected.

It can happen that zeal regarding kosher causes interpersonal relations to suffer. The molecular approach to kosher can cause problems in sharing meals with family and friends. Feelings can be hurt and families can be put under much strain or even estranged if kosher takes a higher priority than reasonable. I am not saying that on a macro scale kosher shouldn't be diligently followed; but to let the microscopic scale do damage to relationships is not what I think was ever intended.

So we come back once again to the moderation that Back-to-Basics-Judaism recommends, where by "basics" I mean the original intentions as I see them. Basically, Judaism asks for a conscious and balanced approach to personal ethical lives and a steady approach to the ideal society that the laws, including kosher, are intended to enable.

## **[Share Article With a Friend](#)**