

REEH (DEUTERONOMY 11:26-16:17)

A Little Bit Kosher?!

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

“There’s no such thing as ‘a little bit pregnant.’ There are no two ways about it; either you are or you aren’t.

Wouldn’t it be nice if Kosher law was so simple?

The Kosher consumer is often confused by the plethora of Kosher symbols and kosher phraseology. What, for example, does “*Glatt Kosher*” mean? What is “*Cholov Yisroel*”? Why are there so many Kosher symbols? What does it all mean? Is it kosher or not?

There is no way that I can fully address this complex issue in a few short paragraphs. However, I hope I can at least begin to clear up a bit of the confusion.

GLATT KOSHER

The term “*Glatt Kosher*” today has come to be understood as meaning “Strictly Kosher.” This is not an accurate translation. “*Glatt Kosher*” is a technical term that specifically describes the condition of an animal’s lungs.

When you will desire to eat meat ...you may slaughter from your cattle and your flock that G-d has given you, as I have commanded you... (Deuteronomy, 12:20-21)

“...you may slaughter ... as I have commanded you.” There are specific rules as to how to slaughter an animal to make it Kosher. If the knife is not absolutely perfectly sharp, or if the knife is not used properly, or by someone who is not qualified, the meat may not be eaten.

Once it is established that the animal was slaughtered properly, the animal itself must be inspected to insure that it was healthy. Certain health defects will render the animal as a “*Treifah*,” [literal translation = “torn” -- a reference to “*do not eat flesh torn off in the field by a predator; cast it to the dogs.*” (Exodus, 22:30)] and prohibited to be eaten.

One of the defects the Kosher inspector looks for is the presence of adhesions on the lung. Some adhesions disqualify an animal; some do not. If the adhesion invalidates the animal, the animal is declared a *Treifah*, and is usually sold to a neighboring non-Kosher meat packing plant. If, after careful

examination, the rabbi determines that the adhesion can be removed without damage to the lung, the meat is designated as Kosher. If there are no adhesions at all, the unblemished lung is considered to be *Glatt* [Yiddish for “smooth”] and the meat is designated as *Glatt Kosher*.

The practice among Sephardic Jews is to accept only meat that is *Glatt Kosher*. In Ashkenazic practice, if the inspector has successfully removed the adhesions leaving the lung intact, the meat is permissible. However, it is preferred, although not strictly required, to limit one’s meat consumption to that which is *Glatt Kosher*. The Orthodox Union (O.U.), for example, does not certify meat that is not *Glatt Kosher*.

Many people, especially older people, will ask, “What’s this ‘*Glatt Kosher*’ thing all about? My parents were very religious. We never HEARD of such a thing! Who made this up?!”

The answer, I believe, is economic. Certainly every *Shochet* -- meat slaughterer and Kosher inspector was aware of the PREFERENCE that the lungs be totally unblemished. However, if a farmer had one steer that was slaughtered for meat, it was a major investment. If the animal was declared unfit, it meant a major financial loss. If, in fact, the lungs were damaged, there was nothing that could be done about it. In such a case, the animal was a *Treifah*, and the carcass was relatively worthless.

Due to that situation, if the lungs were minimally acceptable, the meat was permitted. The Sages did not want to make PREFERENCES so essential that they would place an undue financial burden on people. Insisting upon *Glatt Kosher* was a luxury that many people in the past didn’t have.

If you look at what many of us spend our money on today, it is clear that if our priorities are straight, we’ll find the few extra dollars to buy meat which is of the preferred variety.

CHOLOV YISROEL

Kosher mammals produce Kosher milk. Non-Kosher mammals produce non-Kosher milk. The Kosher consumer can go into your local 7-11 and buy a gallon of milk, safely relying upon the assumption that the product is 100% cow’s milk.

That has not always been the case. Consider the situation of a farmer with a small herd of cows and other animals as well. It was once the practice to blend cow’s milk with those of other species, unbeknownst to the customer. For this reason, our Sages enacted a requirement that in order for milk to be considered Kosher, it had to be milked and bottled under supervision. This supervised milk is called *Cholov Yisroel* – “Jewish milk.”

In the United States, herds of dairy cows are not typically kept together with non-kosher animals, and Federal law prohibits mixing other milks with cow’s milk. It has therefore been argued that in the U.S., *Cholov Yisroel* should not be required. This was the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. Many Kosher

certification organizations, including the Orthodox Union, rely upon Rabbi Feinstein's ruling, and will accept milk that has not been supervised during the milking.

It is important to point out that even Rabbi Feinstein, who was lenient in this matter, felt that it was preferable, when possible, to use the supervised milk products. Also, this ruling does not apply universally. The rabbi in Beijing, for example, told me that Rabbi Feinstein's ruling would not apply in China, where local milk must be ASSUMED to be non-Kosher unless certified.

KOSHER SYMBOLS

"Why are there so many Kosher symbols? What ever happened to the plain, simple "K"? O-U, O-K, Star-K? OY VAY!!!!"

The problem is that since a single letter such as a "K" cannot be registered as a trademark, anyone can determine what his own Kosher standards are and certify a product as Kosher. Let us take, for example, gelatin. Almost all Kosher certification agencies prohibit the use of gelatin from non-Kosher sources. Yet, one can go into a store and find gelled deserts with a "K" certification. The Kosher consumer sees the "K" and assumes that the product is Kosher, not realizing that the product is, at best, controversial.

Examples abound. As I mentioned two weeks ago in reference to Mezuzah, there are, unfortunately, unscrupulous individuals who will sell a sub-standard product to an unsuspecting public. Make sure that you purchase products that bear a reliable Kosher certification. A "K" does not automatically mean that a product is not reliable. But it certainly doesn't mean that it IS kosher, either. When in doubt, consult a rabbi whose standards you trust.

I still haven't answered the question about dual standards. Must meat be Glatt kosher or not? Must milk be Cholov Yisroel or not? IS SHE PREGNANT OR NOT?!

In Jewish Law, not everything is black or white. There are some absolutes. Pork chops are not Kosher. Apples are Kosher. But in many situations, there is a "Plan A" and a "Plan B." Why?

Life is an opportunity for growth. Even in fulfillment of religious obligations, it is possible to find loopholes. We can take the easy way out, or we can extend ourselves.

We are a bit more than a month away from Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. We want G-d to judge us favorably. We want Him to bestow upon us His Blessings for long life and prosperity. We want to be healthy and to see our children and grandchildren succeed. We want to live in a safe and peaceful world.

We are asking for a lot. Perhaps even for more than we deserve. Doesn't it behoove us to try a little harder, to do a little extra, to fulfill G-d's will? Do we want G-d to give us the bare minimum of what is coming to us? Or do we want Him to go overboard and shower us with His Blessings?

Minimally Kosher is a start. Going the extra mile in serving G-d shows Him that we are truly devoted to His Torah.

Sometimes "just good enough" just isn't good enough.

Have a great Shabbos.

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