



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Religious Rules and Ethical Treatment of Animals”**

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My major project is a look at Kashrut, or kosher rules, why they got started, and why they are still kept today. It is also a paper about the ethical treatment of animals in the food preparation process.

The kosher rules are rules for food preparation, handling, and eating, for Jews. Many Jews, mainly Orthodox, still keep these rules, while many Jews do not. The earliest version of these rules is found in the third book of the Torah, called the Book of Leviticus, dating back to around 800 BCE. The rules have been expanded and elaborated on ever since, in the Talmud and later rabbinic commentaries.

The rules of Kashrut explain what can and can't be eaten. Of the land mammals, you may eat any animal that has cloven hooves, and chews its cud, like the cow, deer, goat, and sheep. Cloven hooves are when the hoof of an animal is split down the middle so that it looks like the animal has two toes. Animals that chew their cud partially regurgitate their food, then swallow it again.

If an animal doesn't both have cloven hooves and chew its cud, then it is “treyf”, which literally means “torn”. Originally, this term was used to describe animals that were unacceptable because they were torn by other animals. Later, the term “treyf” was expanded to refer to animals that were slaughtered incorrectly, or were off limits because of other rules. For example, treyf animals include the pig, horse, and camel.

Of the creatures that live in the water, you can eat anything that has both fins and scales. Examples include trout, salmon, sole, and carp. Anything without both fins and scales is treyf, including shellfish.

Moving on to birds, you may eat them if they do not eat other animals. Examples of kosher birds include chicken, turkey, and pheasant. You may not eat birds of prey, such as the hawk, eagle, or vulture. Rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and insects are also forbidden. Vegetables are automatically kosher.

Even when animals qualify as kosher, there are only certain parts that you are allowed to eat. Blood cannot be eaten, nor can an egg with a blood spot in it. Also, the sciatic nerve and its adjoining blood vessels cannot be eaten. This is why you are not allowed to eat the hindquarters of an animal. The sciatic nerve is located in the hindquarters, and it is too hard to remove. A certain fat called “chelev” which surrounds the vital organs and the liver cannot be eaten as well.

Many people think that to make a food kosher, a rabbi has to bless it. Actually, a rabbi has nothing to do with making the food kosher. A rabbi comes to inspect the slaughterhouse on a regular basis, but that is pretty much it. Actually, to make food kosher, birds and mammals must be slaughtered in accordance with the slaughtering rules. This is done by a trained person called a shochet. The animal has to be killed with one quick stroke across the neck with a sharp, perfectly smooth blade, so it is not “torn”. It is explained by rabbinic teachings that this is to minimize the pain that an animal feels when it

is being slaughtered. This also allows for rapid and complete draining of blood, which is essential to Kashrut. All the blood needs to be thoroughly removed, by draining, salting, or broiling.

The origin of not eating blood comes from the Noah's Ark story in the Book of Genesis. After the flood is over, God makes a pact with Noah. "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you and just as I gave you the green plants I give you everything only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." It goes on to say that "If you take the blood from an animal, I will require it from you". Interestingly, in the Noah's ark story, all animals are permitted, not only ones with cloven hooves that chew their cud. Also, according to legend, before the flood, Adam and Eve were allowed to eat animals with blood in them, but now Noah is being prohibited.

As many of you probably know, the other main rule of kosher is that meat can't be eaten with dairy, served on the same plate as dairy, or eaten with the same utensils as dairy, or from plates cleaned in the same dishwasher load as dairy, or basically have any contact with dairy, and meat and dairy must be eaten at least 3 hours apart. The origin of this separation of meat and milk is based on a verse in Leviticus: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." This means that you cannot boil a baby goat in goat's milk. This specific example has been made into a broader rule, saying that it is "unclean" to eat meat and milk together. Fish, eggs, fruit, vegetables, and grains (such as rice and bread) can be eaten with both meat and dairy.

The Islamic religion has similar food rules as the Jewish religion, but there are also differences. These rules come from the Koran, the book that religious Muslims consider holy. These rules are called Halal, which means "permissible". Muslim food rules are divided into two types; Dhabiha Halal, and Bismillah Halal. Dhabiha Halal is very similar to Kashrut. The similarities include not eating pork, pork products, or anything made with pork fat. Also, blood is forbidden, just like in Kashrut. Amphibians, such as frogs, are also prohibited in both. And animals that eat other animals are prohibited in both Kashrut and Dhabiha Halal.

However, there are differences between Kashrut and Halal. In Dhabiha Halal, consumption of alcohol, no matter how small, is strictly forbidden, even in something like rum cake and even if all the alcohol is baked out. In Jewish rituals, it is customary to have some wine, but excessive drinking is not encouraged. The exception to this is on the holiday of Purim, when it is accepted to drink to excess as part of the celebration; getting drunk is encouraged.

The slaughter of animals in Halal is basically the same as slaughter of animals in Kashrut. It involves one quick cut on the throat with a perfectly smooth blade. In fact, some people consider Kashrut an acceptable substitute for Halal.

I also did some limited research on food rules in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Many Buddhists try to avoid intentional killing, and are therefore vegetarians. In Hinduism, vegetarianism is preferred, but if you are going to eat meat, cows are strictly off limits because they are sacred. There is a principle in Hinduism about not harming anything. I think that this stems from the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Christianity has no universal rules about food as far as I was able to find.

There are many different explanations for why rules about food developed in ancient times. Some are scientific, some are cultural, and some are religious. One of the scientific explanations is health. Keep in mind that there was no refrigeration back then. This means that, without salting and curing, meat would spoil quickly. Also, milk was hard to keep fresh. Someone could have eaten some bad milk with some bad meat, and gotten ill and then later died, and this might have happened to other people, so the religious leaders decided to ban milk and meat together. Also, people did not understand

the concept of germs and infections back then so someone could have gotten terminally ill from shellfish or pork or anything else, and people thought that this death was God telling them not to eat that food. Also, I think that pork was unacceptable because pigs roll in the mud, so they seem unclean. But the real reason that people were getting sick from pork might have been that pork is susceptible to a bacterial infection called trichinosis, a parasitic disease found in pork and wild game. It makes you sick, and when it goes untreated it can kill you.

There is also an ecological explanation for why the prohibition on pork developed. The Middle East is very dry, and there are no forests in which wild pigs could live. This means that they could not forage for food. So to raise pigs, people would have had to feed them grain, which requires water to grow. But all the water was needed for the people to live. Other animals, such as cows, sheep, and goats, were easier to take care of because they could graze in the grass along the riverbanks without being fed grain. Pigs do not eat grass.

A second kind of explanation for why the rules developed is cultural. The Jewish food rules are strict and are very detailed and specific. Jews were required to follow these rules and the rules helped to identify who was a Jew. In contrast, when Christianity developed it did not require its members to follow these strict rules. A reason that there might have been no food rules in Christianity was that there were recruitment efforts going on. If Judaism had all of these food rules, and Christianity did not have any, then people naturally might want to be Christian because they would have to worry less about what food they were eating. It might have been a way for Christians to attract new members.

The Jewish rules were so complicated and strict that there was no way to get around them. It was hard to eat with, socialize with, or marry someone who did not share your food rules. This means that there was little intermarrying between Jews and Christians. People thought that this would keep the Jewish religion going by making it so that Jews didn't gradually assimilate into other cultures. In the Torah, these rules were given without reason. Basically, it was "do it because God says so". Even now, some Jews still follow the rules because they believe God commands them to do so. But nowadays, many Jews do not follow the rules so strictly. Some may keep some of the dietary laws, but out of tradition, not because they feel commanded. Others may not follow the rules at all.

The rules teach ethical behavior. They help to define right and wrong. In the Jewish and Muslim religions, it is wrong to kill an animal inhumanely. That is why the slaughter needs to be done with one quick stroke across the neck with a smooth blade. It is wrong to have an animal suffer. This ties in to my big personal food rule. I will not eat baby animals. I would never think about eating veal or lamb. Baby animals that are raised to be food do not have a chance to experience life. In factory-farming commercial meat production, from almost the moment they are born, the animals are confined to a small space, so they can barely move. This makes their muscles soft and tender, and people like to eat them. I would not eat a baby cow or sheep even if it was allowed to run free. It has to do with their age. Baby animals do not have a chance to live, and I will not take away their life while they are so young.

Personally, I do not follow the rules of Kashrut. For a long time, I didn't know that there was such a thing as kosher. Until I was five or six, I didn't know that there was any kind of Judaism other than secular Humanism. Now that I know that these rules exist, I find them interesting as an aspect of Jewish culture and history.

I do agree with the principle of humane animal slaughter. Even though there is no such thing as truly humane slaughter, there are some ways of killing animals for meat that are less cruel than others. This connects to my value of concern for the suffering of animals, and that has inspired me to look at some work by a woman named Temple Grandin. Temple Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University. She is also autistic. Her work focuses on making sure that the slaughter of cows and pigs is done humanely. As of 1995, she had designed one-third of all the livestock handling facilities in the United States.

These systems are designed to improve the treatment of livestock. Temple Grandin thinks that it is morally wrong to make an animal unnecessarily stressed by being cruel to it during slaughter, and I agree. She believes that animals should be slaughtered in a humane way, but she is not a vegetarian. She says that she needs to eat animal protein or else she does not feel right. She has designed many slaughterhouses where the animals are not scared by being killed. She says that because she is autistic, her brain works a little differently than other peoples', and she is able to "put herself in the place of the animal". She imagines what it would be like to be an animal in that slaughterhouse, and she makes corrections accordingly. She works with McDonalds, Burger King, and Wendy's on ways to make slaughter a less frightening experience.

In the slaughterhouses that she has designed, the animals do not moo and bellow and scream. Her animal handling systems do not have things that distract animals in them. She says that animals are very sensitive to details and she tries to eliminate all frightening details in her systems. These details can include the area being too light or too dark, reflections, sounds, and strange movement like slow rotating fan blades, jiggling chains, or small pieces of metal that stick out.

Professor Grandin says mistreatment of animals by humans is the number one cause of concern in slaughterhouses. All the high-tech equipment means nothing if the workers are not kind or gentle to the animals. She says that managers also need to treat the plant's employees humanely. Otherwise they will not treat the animals well if they are not given rests. Also, the employees should rotate positions so they don't spend all their time killing and the actual killing should be done by a machine.

Professor Grandin has done a lot of work to improve the conditions of kosher slaughterhouses as well. In kosher slaughterhouses, a method, known as "shackling and hoisting," had become common practice so the workers could cut the animal's throat in one quick stroke as is required. This method involved hanging the animal by one hind leg with a metal chain. Instead, Professor Grandin either has the cow straddling a moving conveyor belt, or confined in an upright pen with a comfortable head restraint system. With Prof. Grandin's methods, the animals can be treated well, and slaughtered according to kosher rules.

Kosher slaughter has been banned in some European countries. It has been banned in Switzerland since 1897 because people thought it was inhumane. However, some people believe that these early rules were a way to get rid of Jews. Kosher slaughter was later banned in Norway, Denmark and Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s. There are arguments that can be made both ways: that the ban is for humane purposes, and that the ban is anti-Semitic. Even as late as 2002 in Switzerland, the ban still stands, because, the law requires animals to be anaesthetized before slaughter, something forbidden in kosher slaughter. I think the ban is anti-Semitic, because although it bans kosher slaughter, the Swiss government does allow the import of kosher meat. How does it show concern for the suffering of animals when you are allowed to import the meat but not do it yourself? Also, we know that there are humane methods of kosher slaughter because of Professor Grandin's work, so kosher slaughter is not necessarily cruel or inhumane. To the contrary, kosher slaughter was developed as the most humane way to kill animals for food, and I believe that it should still be done that way.

Since my family were secular Jews going back to when they lived in Europe, they did not keep kosher, so these bans would not have affected them. In my family, we keep traditions about food, but we don't follow these rules. A tradition is something you keep not because you have to, but because you want to, and a rule is something you do not because you want to, but because you have to. My family sometimes eats traditional Hungarian food because they were Hungarians living in Romania. When my grandparents and their parents moved to America, they brought their habits of eating with them. But the emphasis on these habits of eating has worn off a little bit with each generation. For instance, my grandparents like to eat traditional Hungarian food, like Wiener schnitzel, a cheese spread called kotezett, and stuffed eggs. My mother's generation, being born in America, eats Hungarian food only on special occasions. But in my generation, we don't like these foods very much. But having them at our family gatherings is important to my family because it preserves our identity. Even though I don't like the traditional Hungarian foods now, I might like them as I get older, and having them at family gatherings will always be important to me because it preserves the Farber identity.

In conclusion, it is interesting to see how rules about food reflect values. Originally, when I started this paper, I didn't think that kosher rules had anything to do with my life. But now I realize that they do, even though we don't follow them. They have to do with some of my values – not being cruel to animals, and keeping your culture. In addition to mandatory food rules, I have found that other traditions about food help to define a family and a culture.