

**OUR KITCHEN
CONGREGATION SHA'AREI SHALOM¹**

"You prepare a table before me" (Psalm 23:5)

I. WHAT IS "KOSHER"?

A. IN GENERAL

The word "kosher" literally means "fit, appropriate, acceptable." The noun form of the word, "kashrut," has come to refer specifically to the dietary laws of Judaism that define which foods are acceptable for Jewish people to eat, and which foods are not. "Kosher" foods are considered acceptable for Jewish people to eat; "non-kosher" foods (in Yiddish, "treif"), are not considered acceptable for Jewish people to eat.

B. IN THE TORAH

The general definitions of which foods are kosher and which foods are not kosher are found in Leviticus 11, 17, and Deuteronomy 14. According to Leviticus 11, to be kosher:

- Land animals must have split hooves and chew the cud (cows, for example; see Lev 11:1-8)
- Poultry must fly and not be a bird of prey (chickens, for example; see Lev 11:13-19)
- Fish must have fins and scales (Salmon, for example; see Lev 11:9-12)

Leviticus 17:13-14 says that the blood of a kosher animal must be drained out before the animal is eaten.

Deuteronomy 14:21 says that animals that die on their own are not kosher, and adds that it is not permissible to boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

C. IN JEWISH LAW & PRACTICE

Historically, the laws of kashrut have been taken very seriously within Jewish communities worldwide. At least three features of interpretation and application of the Torah's teachings on kashrut stand out:

1. *Proper Slaughter of Animals*: Because Leviticus 17:13-14 says the blood of a slaughtered animal must be completely drained, only meat that has been slaughtered by a *shochet* (someone trained in the ritual slaughter of an animal

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according to the laws of kashrut), is considered kosher. If meat is not certified as kosher, then there is no way of knowing whether the blood was properly drained out and eliminated from the animal after it was slaughtered.

2. *No Mixing of Milk and Meat*: In traditional rabbinic interpretation, the command in Deuteronomy 14:21 not to boil a young goat in its mother's milk is understood to mean that milk and meat should never be eaten together at the same time. The laws of kashrut consider land animals and birds to be meat, but do not consider fish to be meat.
3. *Separate Dishes*: In order to ensure milk and meat are never eaten together, the laws of kashrut require that separate dishes be kept for the following:
 - a. Dishes for meat products only (in Yiddish *fleishigs*)
 - b. Dishes for dairy products only (in Yiddish *milchigs*)
 - c. Dishes for products that are neither meat nor dairy (vegetables, for example), called pareve
 - d. Dishes used only during Passover, during which time no food containing yeast is to be eaten

Today, within the Jewish community, there are different levels of kashrut observance, ranging from very strict to very lenient. An example of strict observance would be a family that buys only certified kosher foods, keeps separate dishes, and does not eat in places that do not hold to the same standard. An example of very lenient observance would be a family that refrains from eating pork and shellfish, does not keep separate dishes, and eats in restaurants and homes where non-kosher foods are served. It should be noted that a significant number of Jewish people within the Triangle area have some level of awareness of the laws of kashrut but do not "keep kosher" at all.

D. IN MESSIANIC JUDAISM

Generally speaking, Messianic Jews understand the B'rit Chadashah (New Testament) as affirming the value of Torah, and therefore, the kashrut standards outlined within it. Here are some passages that support this understanding:

- Mattityahu (Matthew) 5:17: Yeshua said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Therefore, whoever teaches people to forsake the least of these commandments will be counted least in the kingdom of heaven."
- Acts 25:8: Shaul (Paul) said: "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." Toward the close of his ministry, Shaul said that he had not violated the Torah. This would include not violating the laws of kashrut in the Torah. According to Acts 21:15-26, he even took a vow in order to prove that his claim was true.

- Acts 15:19-20: Under the headship of Yaakov (James), the brother of Yeshua, the Jerusalem Council ruled that non-Jewish followers of Yeshua must keep themselves from blood and strangled meat. These are some of the kashrut standards outlined in Torah. The ruling presupposes that Jewish followers of Yeshua will normally follow the kashrut standards presented in the Torah.²

Just as in the Jewish world in general, individuals, families, and communities within Messianic Judaism hold to different levels of kashrut observance. For example, some simply refrain from eating non-kosher meat. Others never mix milk and meat and keep separate dishes in their homes. The reason for this diversity is that some Messianic Jews seek to apply the kashrut standards presented in the Torah apart from the interpretations of those passages handed down by rabbinic tradition, while other Messianic Jews voluntarily choose to adhere to the rabbinic interpretations of the laws of kashrut. The former practice is far more common among Messianic Jews.

Over the past few decades, one claim that has commonly been made within Messianic Judaism is the claim to be keeping “Biblically Kosher.” Those who use this phrase mean that they accept what the Scripture has to say about which foods are kosher and which foods are not. Therefore, they do not eat the meat of non-kosher animals. People who use the phrase “biblically kosher” generally consider the prohibition against mixing milk and meat, and the necessity of keeping separate dishes, to be “extrabiblical” requirements, and therefore do not practice them.

There are at least a couple of problems with the claim to be keeping “biblically kosher.” First, those who use this phrase generally do not restrict themselves to eating only certified kosher meat. This means there is no way of knowing if the blood of the slaughtered animal has been properly eliminated as the Torah requires. There is, therefore, a question as to whether the person really is keeping kosher according to the Scriptures. Second, the phrase “biblically kosher” does not formally exist in the wider Jewish community. Therefore, use of the phrase does not provide an occasion of commonality and connection when relating to non-Messianic Jews. For these reasons, we at Sha’arei Shalom discourage the use of the phrase “biblically kosher.” Instead, we prefer to speak of our practice in terms of “our kashrut standards,” “our level of kashrut observance,” or our “community practice with respect to kosher and non-kosher foods.”

² Two passages in the B’rit Chadashah are sometimes adduced in order to claim that Yeshua abolished the kashrut instructions in the Torah. First, Acts 10: The vision of Kefa (Peter) does not mean that all foods are now “kosher” for Jewish people to eat. Rather, the vision means that Yeshua has broken down all barriers to fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, and that Jewish followers of Yeshua now share intimate fellowship with non-Jewish followers of Yeshua. Indeed, this is the meaning of the vision according to Acts 10:28. Second, Mark 7:1-23: In this passage, Pharisees debate Yeshua’s disciples concerning the tradition of hand washing prior to eating. The entire context of the passage is hand washing, not kosher vs. non-kosher food. Mark adds the comment “thus He [Yeshua] declared all foods clean.” Jewish people did not consider non-kosher animals to be food. Since the context of the passage is hand washing, the passage should be understood to mean “thus, He [Yeshua] declared all [kosher] foods clean [even if a person had not washed his hands in the traditional manner prior to eating].”

Although generally speaking, people associated with a Messianic Jewish community will have some kashrut standard, we at Sha'arei Shalom view kashrut as an area in which it is okay to "agree to disagree." We do not consider kashrut to be an issue upon which one's eternal destiny hinges. We affirm that our salvation is a gracious gift of G-d. We do not judge or condemn other Messianic Jews, non-Messianic Jews, or non-Jewish Christians for their practice in this area. We do not claim that our approach is the only correct approach. Ultimately there is freedom for lifestyle choice and calling in this area.

In sum: We seek to avoid division over the issue of kashrut, and we encourage discussion of kashrut that is rooted in Scripture, and humbly and peacefully seeks out truth, while being sensitive to variation in individual convictions, callings, and customs.

II. VISION FOR OUR KITCHEN

The vision for our kitchen is three-fold:

A. TO BE FAITHFUL TO SCRIPTURE

We envision a congregational community that is faithful to the plain meaning of Scripture with respect to kashrut observance. This means adhering to the instructions outlined in the Torah (see Section I.B. above). Yeshua declares that he did not come to abolish the Torah (Matt 5:17), and Shaul affirms that the Torah is holy, righteous, good, spiritual, and that in his heart he rejoices in it! (See Romans 7:12-22) It is, therefore, a tragic twist of history and theology that people who seek to follow the plain meaning of the Torah with respect to kashrut are sometimes required to defend their conviction to do so!

B. TO FOSTER RESPECT FOR JEWISH TRADITION

We envision a congregational community that, through its kashrut standards, promotes informed respect for Jewish tradition. While we do not blindly adopt any tradition, we recognize that the vast majority of rabbinic traditions are rooted in, and wholly compatible with, the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Chadashah (New Testament). When there is a problem with traditional observance, it is generally not the tradition that is the problem. More often, it is the case that the problem lies in the heart-orientation of the person observing the tradition. We seek to serve G-d from the heart in a way that draws upon, and respects, historic Jewish practice in the area of kashrut.

Here are some reasons why a positive orientation toward the traditional Jewish understanding of kashrut is crucial for our congregational community:

- Adhering to a kashrut standard establishes a point of commonality between Sha'arei and non-Messianic Jewish congregations. Having common experience is helpful in building relationships with non-Messianic Jewish family members and friends.

- It is a good testimony to Jewish people that we adhere to a level of kashrut observance.
- It will foster respect among non-Messianic Jewish people of any persuasion that we take kashrut seriously. They may, therefore, be more apt to take seriously our faith and identity even though our standards and practice may be different from theirs. We should seek to be informed about what we do and why.

C. TO ENRICH OUR WALKS WITH YESHUA

We envision our congregational kashrut practice enriching our walks with Yeshua. We believe this will take place in a variety of ways. First, our kashrut standards remind us that preparing and eating food is a holy enterprise. The word “holy”—in Hebrew “kodesh”—literally means “set apart.” When we make a distinction between what we eat and what we don’t eat, we are reminded of G-d’s holiness, and that He calls us to be holy and set apart for Him. We are reminded that it is only through Yeshua that we are counted by Him as holy.

Second, our kashrut standards are for our entire congregational community.³ This is something we do in our life together as a community. Keeping a common standard reminds us of our interconnectedness to one another. We are reminded of the call to serve one another, to care for one another. We are reminded of Yeshua’s love for his people, and that together we comprise his Body.

Third, paying careful attention to how we handle G-d’s physical provision for our lives (food), reminds us to pay careful attention to the necessity to draw from the spiritual provision that He has granted us through Yeshua, the bread of life.

Fourth, and finally, holding to our kashrut standards helps us grow in Messiah-likeness. If adhering to the kashrut standards in the Torah with the right heart-orientation, and in a spiritual manner, were good enough for Moses & David, Yeshua & Shaul, then they are certainly good for us!

III. OUR KITCHEN GUIDELINES⁴

A. A Non-Meat Kitchen

Our kitchen is a non-meat kitchen. Only dairy and pareve items are permitted in our kitchen. This includes individuals’ meals brought to the building (such as by staff or volunteers). The kitchen may not be used by anyone, including a caterer, for meat or poultry products. The refrigerator may be used to store perishable dairy or pareve items only.

B. No Foods with Non-Kosher Ingredients

³ We do not require or ask that these standards be kept in the home lives of members and regular attenders, although our standards are certainly a fine model for people to adopt in their personal lives if they feel so led!

⁴ The following policy has helped us in formulating our own: http://www.chkehillah.org/kashrut_policy.htm.

Foods that contain non-kosher ingredients may not be served at Sha'arei.

C. Fish

Kosher fish is considered pareve and may be prepared in, and served at, Sha'arei. Only fish that has both fins and scales is considered kosher. Shellfish is not kosher. If there is a question as to whether a particular fish is kosher, we recommend the following website: <http://www.crcweb.org/kosher/consumer/fishList.html>.

D. Cheese

All cheeses are permitted unless there is an obvious addition of a non-kosher substance added to the cheese. Animal rennet is often included in cheese and this is not acceptable. However, cheeses with vegetable rennet are increasingly popular and are acceptable.

E. Bagels

We consider purchased bagels (such as from New York Bagels or Brueggers Bagels) to be pareve. Bagels may, therefore, be served on Sha'arei platters.

F. Packaged Foods Brought to Sha'arei

Packaged foods brought to Sha'arei must be marked with a *hechsher* – a little symbol by an agency that certifies the product is kosher. The most common of these is the Orthodox Union symbol, which is a U inside of a circle. There are many other kosher certification symbols. If you would like to familiarize yourself with the most common symbols, we recommend the following website: <http://www.yrm.org/koshersymbols.htm>.

G. Preparation of Foods Outside of Sha'arei's Kitchen

We do not limit the type of kitchens in which non-packaged foods brought into Sha'arei are prepared. When preparing foods at home for Sha'arei events, members are expected to make sure that the food contains no non-kosher ingredients (such as lard, shellfish extracts, etc). If one is preparing a dish from a box (such as brownies), it is strongly encouraged that the package have a *hechsher* symbol (see above III.F.).

H. Prepared Foods Brought into Sha'arei

Prepared food brought to Sha'arei should remain on the owner's dish (on which it is brought to Sha'arei). If it is necessary to place the food on a platter, then a paper/disposal platter should be used.

I. Sha'arei Platters

Only foods that come directly out of packages bearing a *hechsher* may be placed on Sha'arei platters. Prepared foods should not be placed on Sha'arei platters.

J. Snacks for Classrooms and Nursery

Only pareve snacks should be served to the children, and they should be served on paper goods. Packaged snacks must come from packages marked with a *hechsher* symbol.

K. Personal Dishes

People who bring dishes for oneg are encouraged to bring their dishes home without washing them. If a person needs to wash her/his dish(es), s/he may do so in the sink designated for this purpose.

L. Passover

During the week of Passover, in addition to the above-mentioned guidelines, foods classified as *chametz* (leaven), and all products containing *chametz*, are not permitted at Sha'arei Shalom. We are in the process of drafting guidelines for Passover.

M. Cleaning Products

All cleaning products in the kitchen should be marked with a kosher certification symbol. Sha'arei Shalom's preferred line of cleaning products is Seventh Generation.

N. Avoid Common Pitfalls

Animal rennet, sometimes found in cheeses, and gelatin, sometimes found in packaged products, are not kosher and to be avoided.

O. Periodic Kashering of the Kitchen

The kitchen will be kashered periodically throughout the year, and definitely in preparation for Passover. We are in the process of standardizing the kashering procedures.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF SOME IMPORTANT TERMS AND PHRASES

Kashrut/Kosher: The dietary laws of Judaism that define which food is and is not fit to eat. The word “kosher” means “fit” or “acceptable.”

Non-Kosher: All foods that are not fit to eat, including pork, shellfish, fish without fins and scales, non-kosher meat or poultry, and foods that are made from these products.

Dairy: Foods that consist in whole or in part of milk or products derived from milk. In traditional practice, dairy products cannot be served with meat products.

Meat: Foods that consist in whole or in part of ingredients derived from the flesh of animals. To be kosher, meat must come either from an animal that has split hooves and chews its cud (like cows), or from poultry that flies and is not a bird of prey (like chickens). For both meat and poultry the animal must be slaughtered and prepared according to the requirements of kashrut under rabbinic supervision. In traditional practice, meat products cannot be served with milk products.

Fish: Only fish that has both fins and scales is considered kosher. Shellfish is not kosher. Kosher fish is considered to be pareve (neither meat nor dairy).

Pareve: Foods that in their natural state are neither meat nor dairy. Examples include fruits, vegetables, fish, eggs, pasta, grains, nuts, honey, unflavored coffee, and tea. Pareve foods can be served with either dairy or meat.

Kosher Certification: Food products are often marked with a *hechsher* – a little symbol by an agency that certifies the product is kosher. The most common of these is the Orthodox Union symbol, which is a U inside a circle. There are many others. If you would like to familiarize yourself with the most common kosher symbols, we recommend the following website: <http://www.yrm.org/koshersymbols.htm>.