

# Shlom Bayyit

## How We Eat

- ◆ It is a \$9 billion market today.
- ◆ About 1 million American Jews do it.
- ◆ Even vegetarians, Muslims, Seventh Day Adventists indulge.
- ◆ 55% of Americans who do it say they believe it is healthier.

### Have you guessed?

We're talking about eating kosher. Many will tell you that for Jews keeping kosher arose as a set of primitive health regulations in biblical times that have today become obsolete with modern methods of food preparation. Others understand that kosher foods are those foods that are blessed by a rabbi. Although there are blessings that observant Jews recite over food before eating it, and some of the Jewish dietary laws might indeed have beneficial health effects, both of these explanations do not accurately explain what keeping kosher is all about.

### What is the truth?

Kosher, means "fit" or "proper." Jews keep kosher because Torah says so. Obeying the Laws of *Kashruth*, Jewish dietary laws, is a mitzvah – a commandment from God and its subsequent interpretation and decisions by rabbis. We observe these laws to show our holiness and obedience and to maintain our relationship to God.

### Where is it written?

The mandates appear many times in Genesis, Deuteronomy, Exodus and Leviticus. Three times it is legislated, (Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21) "*You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.*" Thus the rabbinical deduction that milk and meat products are not to be prepared or eaten together. In Leviticus 11:1- 45 we are informed about what animals, fish and fowl are kosher and then the passage, "*For I the Lord am your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy,*" thus setting *kashruth* as a commandment.

### How do you do it?

Rabbi and humorist Jack Moline, (Growing Up Jewish), has said that "Everyone who keeps kosher will tell you that his version is the only correct version. Everyone else is either a fanatic or a heretic." There are in fact many ways that Jews observe this biblical injunction. Thousands of "How-To" pages have been written on this sub-

ject. To make a commitment to observe this mitzvah one must start somewhere.

There are those who keep kosher only when eating at home. Others do not follow all the Laws of *Kashruth*, but refrain from eating such non-kosher foods as pork and shellfish. A budding movement, eco-kosher, combines traditional Jewish dietary laws with new concerns about industrial agriculture, global warming and fair treatment of workers. The most observant Jews strictly adhere to the commandment and its interpretation by rabbis. They will only eat in their own homes, in homes of those who strictly follow the laws, or in restaurants with scrupulous rabbinical supervision by a *mashgi-akh* who is always on the premises.



### What does the kosher language mean (the short list)?

Fleishik - a Yiddish term referring to food containing meat (and fowl) or meat products – includes only animals that chew their cud and have split hooves like cattle, sheep, goats and deer

Hechsher - an identifiable symbol on a label certifying that the food has been rabbinically supervised and is kosher "OU" is considered a very reliable symbol in US foods.

Kashering - process of making vessels, utensils, dishes ovens, sinks kosher under the watchful eye of a rabbi. Also the process of making meat kosher by extracting all blood through salting or broiling

Milchik - a Yiddish term that refers to foods containing milk and milk products

Pareve - neither meat nor dairy, a neutral food like fruit and vegetables and kosher fish (ones with fins and scales)

Shechitah -Torah requirement of the prescribed ritual slaughtering of animals and fowl

Treif - a Yiddish word meaning the opposite of kosher. It actually means torn, from the commandment not to eat animals that have been torn by other animals. It refers to the not permitted foods.

For those who observe the Laws of *Kashruth* every meal is a reminder of the fact that they are Jews. The simple act of eating is a religious ritual. The Jewish dinner table is then elevated to a Temple where Jews maintain their connectedness to God.