



THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM KOSHER KITCHEN PROJECT

What is Kosher Lesson One

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What is Kosher / The Three T's



"Rabbi, what is Kosher and how will it affect my kitchen?"

Introduction

Early Sunday morning, Mrs. Rhodes called me up. "Rabbi, I really need a program on how to make my kitchen kosher. I've spent so much time, money and effort to try to do so, yet I still do not understand clearly what to do and then, how to keep it that way. Please help!"

"Mrs. Rhodes, I'm delighted you want to really know what to do. I'll be right over to help you."

"Oh, thank you so much."

This course is a result of scenarios like the one above and from the thousands of questions that have been asked over the years. The making of a kosher kitchen takes a certain level of consciousness of the "doings" in a kitchen. Without knowing the laws, problems will arise. In fact, without a basic understanding of the laws, one may not even see the problems that tend to arise even in the most scrupulously of kosher observant households.

Through the learning of a few basic principles, you will become aware of the most common potential disasters and will be prepared to take the necessary steps to prevent them from occurring, or to ask the necessary questions, to deal with them when they do.

We will start with the basics, with the assumption one is setting up an entirely new kitchen environment. So, please follow us along on this path, as we use Mrs. Rhodes' kitchen for our laboratory and testing ground. We hope you find this journey entertaining and rewarding.

Just relax and enjoy your journey through the “makings of a kosher kitchen”. It will be an enjoyable and fun experience in this most practical area of *Torah* study that you have ever undertaken.

We would like to take a moment to emphasize that the Laws of keeping kosher are many and detailed. This course is an attempt at educating you in this important area of Jewish Law (Halacha), which is pertinent to every single Jew. It is meant to introduce you to the general laws and give you the ability to understand the basic issues at hand. We encourage you to use the knowledge presented in these lessons as a basis for asking questions to your local Rabbi or the Rabbanim of Pirchei Shoshanim. For those who would like to learn about this topic in greater detail, we would suggest continuing with our advanced programs.

Kosher and Non-kosher Foods

The first thing we need to discuss is what is kosher. There are two main criteria to permit eating kosher animals.

1. It must be a kosher species.
2. Animals and fowl must be ritually slaughtered.

Kosher Species

Livestock

The *Torah*¹ defines for us what is deemed both kosher and not. Examples of kosher animals (*beheima tabora*) and fowl are cattle, sheep, goats, deer, chickens, domestic ducks, and turkey. Kosher animals must chew their cud and have split hooves.

Animals such as a pigs, horses, camels, and donkeys, which do not both chew their cud and have split hooves are forbidden and are called non-kosher animals (*beheima temeia*).

The above is a partial list of kosher and non-kosher animals. Please consult with your Rabbi regarding any type of animal not listed, for their kosher status.

¹ Vayikra 11: 3-8

Fowl

The fowl which are considered kosher are known to us according to a list we received as tradition at the time *Torah* was given at Sinai as passed down by oral tradition.

Non-kosher fowl include swan, pheasant, and peacock.² Additionally, creatures such as mice, rats,³ creeping or flying insects are as well forbidden.

Fish

Fish must have fins and scales ⁴ to be kosher. All shellfish such as lobster or clam are strictly forbidden.

Milk or eggs

Milk and eggs of a kosher species are permitted during their lifetime. Eggs and milk of non-kosher species are forbidden.

Blood

The *Torah* forbids blood from both kosher or non-kosher animals and fowl.⁵ Meat must be salted within the first three days in order to release the blood trapped inside it. Liver has unique koshering requirements which we will discuss later on.

Ritually Slaughtered

In addition to being a kosher species, animal or fowl must first be ritually slaughtered (*shechita*) to be considered kosher to eat their meat.

If they die through improper slaughtering, sickness, or in any other way that does not include ritual slaughtering, they are called **neveila** and are deemed non-kosher. Animals or fowl, which have specific life threatening internal defects or missing limbs, are called **treifa**, which the *Torah* considers not kosher as well. One of the most common problems of *treifa* is when the lung is punctured. Therefore, the lungs must be checked by an expert to ascertain that there are no punctures.

In addition, all milk and eggs from these animals are also not kosher.

² These particular birds for all practical purposes are considered non-kosher since they lack tradition linking them to any of the kosher species.

³ Vayikra 11:29

⁴ Vayikra 11:12

⁵ Vayikra 7:26,27

The Three T's: Taste, Temperature and Time

Now that we know what is kosher we will discuss how non-kosher food can affect kosher food.

With the help of heaven, we devised a special mnemonic device, which will be referenced throughout the course. It is the rule of the Three T's:

TASTE, TEMPERATURE and TIME.

Throughout our presentation and whenever one encounters an unfamiliar situation, remember these three simple words which will shed light upon difficult situations. Immediately, you will logically and carefully be able to recall the laws of keeping kosher.

1. Taste

The laws of taste center around the concept of (*ta'am k'ikar*). This term means that the flavor or taste emitted by a forbidden food is prohibited as much as ingesting the food substance itself. Kosher food that absorbs non-kosher taste will be considered not kosher, as long as the forbidden taste can be tasted in the mixture.

The main way that kosher food can absorb non-kosher taste is through heat. For example cooking, roasting and frying transfer tastes. We will see in later lessons that pickling (*karush*) and salting (*melicha*) can also transfer tastes. There are other examples as well as we will learn.

The absorption of non-kosher tastes into kosher food is a very pertinent issue in the field of *kashrus*, from the kitchen at home to the food manufacturing plants worldwide. Non-kosher tastes absorbed by kosher pots or milk/meat splattering, are among the most frequently asked questions to a Rabbi of a Jewish community. There are specific guidelines that the *Torah* provides for us regarding nullification, which may allow the food to be consumed despite it having mixed with non-kosher food either through taste or substance.

The Majority Rules - Nullification of Forbidden Tastes

Whenever forbidden food gets mixed with permitted kosher food, there are two possible ways they may become negated and nullified:

- Nullification by the majority ⁶ (*bitul b'rov*).
- Nullification by a proportion of sixty to one (60:1 - *bitul b'sbishim*).⁷

When similar tasting cold dry foods (*min b'mino*) are mixed, we follow the majority (*bitul b'rov*) to determine whether the food is still kosher. (The details, qualifications, and exceptions to this rule will be discussed in subsequent lessons). In the event that the taste of the non-kosher food is noticeable in a mixture (*min b'she'eino mino*), we apply the concept of *ta'am k'ikar* to determine when it is nullified and permitted and when not.

In the case of *min b'she'eino mino* we apply the nullification process of 60:1. When Biblically ⁸ prohibited foods such as milk and meat or other prohibited foods or tastes combine, their flavor will become diluted and nullified when for example, the milk part is negated by 60 times as much meat – the ratio at which the taste is deemed to no longer be noticeable.

2. Temperature

The second issue we must always keep in mind is the temperature. In order for taste to be transferred by heat it must have the minimum heat that a hand will instinctively retract when touching it. This is called *yad soledes bo*.

Yad Soledes bo

The minimal temperature according to Jewish law (*halacha*) to affect a transfer of taste is at least 43° C (109.4° F).⁹

⁶ *Shemos* 23:2. We learn this out that the majority of judges is needed for a guilty verdict. Here too we follow the majority of the food. If the majority is kosher then the entire food is deemed kosher.

⁷ The *Gemora* in *Chullin* 98a-b derives this concept from the portion of a sacrifice (the *z'roah* – the foreleg) that is set-aside for a *Kohen* (descendant from the family of Aharon the brother of Moshe), which is strictly forbidden for a non-*Kohen* to eat. Yet, the Torah specifically commands us (*Vayikra* 6:19) to cook it together with the rest of the sacrifice. This part is referring to the Nazarite offering belonging to the Kohanim. (pl. for *Kohen*) Since we see that the *Nazir* can eat the *korban* after the *z'roah* has been separated even though both have been cooked together we see that the taste (*ta'am*) of the *z'roah* was nullified (*batul*). Otherwise the *Nazir* could not eat the *korban* he brought because the taste of the *z'roah* is an absorbed forbidden taste (*issur balua*). The Rabbis calculated that the proportion of the foreleg - *z'roah* to the rest of the animal is at least 60:1.

⁸ *Avoda Zara* 69a One olive size of milk with 60 of meat or pork the size of an olive combined with 60 olives size of permitted food is nullified and therefore permitted.

⁹ *Iggros Moshe Orach Chaim* 4:74.

3. Time / Utensils

As we have seen above, tastes are transferred from one food to the other with heat. The same applies to utensils. Most utensils will absorb tastes when they are used with hot food. If a utensil absorbs non-kosher taste or if a meat utensil absorbs milk taste or visa versa, the utensil must be koshered. If the utensil is used without koshering, it will transfer its forbidden taste to the food being cooked in it and the food will be prohibited.

Aino Ben Yoma

Here is where **time** comes in. When we say that the tastes absorbed in a pot will prohibit food cooked in it this is only if it is cooked within 24 hours of the cooking of the prohibited food. However, if the second food is cooked after 24 hours of the time of the cooking of the prohibited food, the second food cooked in the pot will be permitted. This is because the taste that lingers in a pot for more than 24 hours become spoiled (*pagum*) and the rule is that spoiled taste does not render food prohibited. A pot that is left for 24 hours is called "*aino ben yoma*" – literally not of the same day, meaning not within 24 hours.

The Due Process of Koshering Pots

Koshering means discharging and purging the tastes of non-kosher foods. When foods are absorbed by foods we have an outline of the nullification process. In pots we also have to deal with this issue as tastes from different kinds of food get absorbed inside the walls of the pot itself and are subsequently released the next time the pot is used.

Not all Utensils Are Created Equal

"I think I'm beginning to understand," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I've heard that glass is unique and so are clay utensils. But I don't know why."

"Yes, you are right. According to some authorities of Jewish Law (*poskim*), glass utensils don't absorb non-kosher food even if they are used for cooking. Earthenware or even a glazed mug cannot be koshered.

A. Metal

The *Torah* tells us that metal can be koshered. The *Torah* lists six types of metals: gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead. However, all other metals such as aluminum are included and can be kosher.

B. Earthenware:

If the utensil is made of earthenware (*cheres*), it cannot be koshered through boiling in hot water (*bagala*) because the taste comes out a little at a time, and some taste is left behind.¹⁰ Therefore, one must destroy the taste by using fire (*libun*) to kosher it. However, torching (*libun*) would crack the utensil and someone using this method of koshering would not do a thorough job for fear of ruining it. Therefore, an earthenware utensil can never be koshered.¹¹

C. Glass:

The Custom of Sephardim

According to the *Mechaber*, a glass utensil does not absorb taste.¹² Therefore, even if the glass pot is used for cooking on the stovetop, all that it needs is a good cleaning.¹³

The Custom of Ashkenazim

The *Rama* says that one should be strict to treat glass like earthenware concerning the laws of *chametz* (leavened bread products) on Passover.¹⁴ There is an argument what the *Rama* holds by other non-kosher food. Some hold that glass can be used without boiling in hot water (*bagala*), others hold that glass needs to be koshered by *bagala*, like metal, still others hold it is like an earthenware utensil because it is made out of sand.¹⁵ One can rely on those who hold that glass can be koshered with *bagala* (boiling in water) except in the case of *chametz*. (leavened bread products).

¹⁰ Pesachim 30B

¹¹ The only way to kosher it would be by putting it back into a kiln.

¹² Orach Chaim 451:26

¹³ However, a thin coating of glaze on an earthenware vessel does not prevent the taste of food from being absorbed. Such a vessel cannot be koshered by boiling in hot water (*Hagala*) or through torching (*Libun*).

¹⁴ In order to make bread products yeast must ferment the wheat. Fermented wheat products are forbidden on Passover.

¹⁵ See *Sefer Hagalas Kailim* page 312

D. Pyrex®/Duralux®:

There are those that say ¹⁶ that Pyrex and Duralux have lead in them, therefore even according to the *Mechaber* they will absorb and *hagalah* is required.

E. Corelle®:

The following is a quote from corelle.com. "Each piece of Corelle® glass dinnerware is like a sandwich, consisting of two different glass compositions (core and glaze). The lamination results in Vitrelle® glass that exceeds the normal strength possible for any single glass composition. Put simply, lamination does for glass just what it does for wood: It yields a finished product that is much stronger than the individual components from which it is made". Therefore, Corelle will have the same law as glass.

F. Corningware®:

The following is a quote from corningware.com. "The original CorningWare® bakeware which was first introduced in 1958, was made of a glass-ceramic material that could be used on the stove, in the oven and under the broiler. After World Kitchen acquired the brand in the late 1990's, CorningWare products were switched to ceramic stoneware production". Ceramic is earthenware and therefore Corningware has the law of *cheres*.

G. Teflon® Frying Pans:

If a frying pan is used with little or no oil it requires koshering through *libun* (direct fire). In the case of Teflon frying pans, which are made to be used in a way that food is directly cooked without oil, *libun chamur* (intense heat) is required. Therefore, such a frying pan cannot be koshered because *libun chamur* or (intense heat) would ruin their Teflon coating.

H. Porcelain:

Porcelain is earthenware and cannot be koshered. However, since it is coated with a thin glass glaze there may be situations that it is permitted to kasher porcelain. A Rabbi must be consulted.

¹⁶ Tzitz Eliezer 8:21. See also Sefer Hagalas Kalim pages 418-420.

I. Plastic

There is a big discussion amongst the Rabbis what is the law by plastic. Depending on the factors a Rabbi may say one way or the other. Therefore, each case must be asked separately.

How Tastes Transfer In and Out of Pots

The Torah states the following guidelines for Koshering:

Elazar the Cohen said to soldiers who came to the battle, "This is the Torah Decree, which Hashem commanded Moshe. Only the gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead - Anything that is used with fire – you must pass through fire and it will be purified (tabor), however, it must be purified with the sprinkling water, but anything (of these materials) that is not used with fire you must pass through water."¹⁷

1. Used With Fire

The term **used with fire** denotes something that was used with heat either for roasting or cooking or with any hot food. During these processes, the tastes of the non-kosher foods are absorbed into the walls of the pots and are released subsequently into the food cooked in it the next time. Therefore, the utensil must be koshered. There are two methods of koshering:

1. **Libun** – heating up the utensil with direct fire, for example a blowtorch.
2. **Hagalah** – putting the utensil in boiling water.

2. Not Used With Fire

Any vessel not used with heat rather exclusively for cold foods, do not require koshering by *libun* or *hagalah* and washing it is sufficient.

¹⁷ Bamidbar – 31:21-23

Tevila

In addition to removing the non-kosher tastes, utensils acquired from a non-Jew must be immersed in a *mikvah*.¹⁸ This is a form of “conversion” which elevates it to Jewish ownership. We will learn more about this in Lesson 4.

Review Questions

- 1) What are the characteristics of animals that make them kosher?
- 2) What are the characteristics of fish that make them kosher?
- 3) Besides being a kosher specie what other requirements are there for an animal to be kosher?
- 4) What are the two ways to negate non-kosher food?
- 5) What is the minimum temperature for heat to transfer taste?
- 6) How long does taste absorbed into utensils retain its good taste?
- 7) Can glass be koshered?
- 8) What is the status of Duralux, Pyrex and Corelle; do they absorb and if so can they be koshered?
- 9) What are the two ways to kosher utensils?
- 10) What other requirement is there for utensils bought from a non-Jew to be able to use it?

¹⁸ A mikvah is a specific type of body of water, which must primarily be gathered into a hole dug into the ground and filled with water that is not drawn with any vessel or container. Jewish communities worldwide construct these easy to use mikvas specifically designed for the immersion of new kitchen utensils purchased from non-Jewish suppliers.