

# Kashrut: A Ritual Decision Which Is Not Easy (7th Grade)

By Shelly Melzer And Jeff Schein

## Teacher Resources: Background Information

"Ethical Kashrut" in *Reconstructionist* magazine, March-April 1987, pp. 9-13.

*Exploring Judaism*, Alpert and Staub, pp. 34-36 (explores contemporary options for kashrut as an example of Reconstructionist religious decision making.)

*The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time*, by Sam Dresner, Burning Bush Press, 1959.

"Observing Dietary Laws", in *Teaching Mitzvot*, Kadden and Kadden, Alternatives in Religious Education, 1988.

## Questions for Reflection Prior to Teaching Unit For Rabbi, Teacher, and Principal.

1. Review with one another: What is the synagogue's policy about kashrut?
2. How has your own observance (non-observance) of kashrut changed over the years?
3. What seems silly, holy, or puzzling about the dietary laws to you?
4. What aspect of kashrut falls into the category of "not yet" for you (i.e., something you would like to experiment with but have not yet)?
5. What is the synagogue doing (or should be doing) to promote an appreciation for the sacredness of food? What can be done as an educational staff?

## The Unit *Al Regel Ahat* (At a glance)

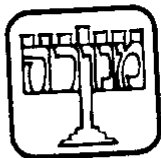
Prior to lesson SEND out letter about unit to parents; set dates for kosher week.



Jewish Understanding: Peoplehood  
Educational Challenge: Creating Focus  
Lesson 1 EXAMINE different attitudes towards food.  
Lesson 2 SIMULATE four different Jewish understandings of meaning of food.  
Between Lesson 2 and 3 REMIND parents that this is kosher week.  
Lesson 3 DISCUSS what it was like keeping kosher for a week.



Jewish Understanding: Past Development  
Educational Challenge: Expanding Meaning  
Lesson 4 EXAMINE the "Divine Compromise" in the book of Genesis about food.  
Lesson 5 CONNECT Jewish traditions about kashrut with their verses of origin in the Torah.  
Lesson 6 LEARN about rabbinic kashrut.



Jewish Understanding: Living in Two Civilizations  
Educational Challenge: Finding Relevance  
Lesson 7 PLAN class kosher dinner to culminate unit.  
GIVE quiz on factual aspects of unit (optional).



Jewish Understanding: Continuity Within Change, Change Within Continuity  
Educational Challenge: Creating Affirmative and Flexible Closure  
Lesson 8 READ and ANALYZE letter from Reconstructionist rabbi to congregants about kashrut.  
THINK about what your Jewish practice as an adult might be in regard to food.

## **Kashrut: A Ritual Decision Which Is Not Easy**

Editor's Introduction: There is an almost palpable tension in this unit between two conflicting Reconstructionist impulses: the desire to create opportunities for maximal Jewish observance, and the respect Reconstructionism accords the individual in choosing those observances. The tension is necessary. Given the background of most "liberal" Jewish families, emphasizing the "freedom to choose" motif too strongly most often insures non-exposure to a tradition like *kashrut*. Thus, in the unit, experiencing *kashrut* is made the sine qua non of later analysis. The pendulum swings back in the direction of informed choice later in the unit. Here students are asked to think ahead to a time when they might head their own Jewish families. Given what they now understand about *kashrut*, do they see it as a meaningful part of an adult Jewish life?

Teachers and principals should thus see this unit as introducing 7th graders to a process of religious decision-making. If becoming *Bnai Mitzvah* means anything, it means taking another step towards responsible Jewish decision-making. In that sense, it might be helpful to remind students at the onset that *kashrut* is only part of what they will be studying. They also will be learning what kind of knowledge Jews need to make important adult decisions about their Jewish lives.

A final note about context: This unit was developed in New York City. The resources for "kosher week" and a "kosher meal" are quite extensive. Teachers and principals may have to scale down the project and adapt it to their own communities. Shelly Melzer has already provided some help in this process of adaptation by spelling out three different alternatives in her letter introducing the unit to parents.



### **PEOPLEHOOD: THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE**

Educational Challenge:  
Creating Focus

The task of consequence here is to put *kashrut* into a wider context of Jewish attitudes towards food. This is accomplished by simulating four distinctly different Jewish attitudes towards food. The simulation might be structured in several ways: teachers, students, professional staff, or parents might take one of the four key parts.

The specific function of the simulation is to serve as an "advanced organizer." It will help reintegrate *kashrut* into a Jewish value complex in which religious observance, rather than being an end in itself, serves as a means to the end of living a "holy" life. As students learn the details of

*kashrut* observance, the teacher should use the characters in the simulation (Kohélet, The "Deuteronomist," Israel Salanter, and The Yiddishe Mama) to ask how *kashrut* reinforces such fundamental Jewish values as enjoying life, promoting self-discipline, and expressing appreciation to God for the food we eat.

### **Simulation About Jewish Attitudes Toward Food**

#### **Lesson 1: Suggested Activities Before Simulation**

Sorting Activities:

What foods are Jewish/not Jewish?

What foods are culturally Jewish/religiously Jewish?

What foods are kosher/not kosher?

Sort through magazines like *Good Housekeeping*. What attitudes toward food are implied in pictures?

Bracha Bee: Match pictures from magazine with traditional Jewish blessings over various foods.

Look at menu from a "theme" Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Is this cute? necessary? obscene? celebrating life? *bal tashchit* (wasting?)

Oxfam simulation: Serve meals/snacks, A, B, and C to symbolize the three levels of the world food situation (poverty/starvation, subsistence, overabundance).

#### **Lesson 2: Simulation: Encounter with Four Jewish Attitudes Toward Food**

THE YIDDISHE MAMMA (PAPA)--  
ES, ES, MEIN KIND

Food is love. Giving it is offering love. Rejecting it is rejecting the person who offers it. It's always best to leave a meal a bit overstuffed. Being overweight is good insurance against future scarcity.

THE DEUTERONOMIST--

VEAHALTA, VESAVATA, UVERAHTA

Food is part of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. We should eat and be satisfied...and then fulfill our obligation to thank God (do *birkat hamazon* in later times). The food God provides is conditional. Only if we fulfill our part of the *brit* (covenant) will we be able to enjoy plentiful food.

KOHELET - IT IS BEST FOR ONE TO ENJOY FOOD AND DRINK AND ALL PLEASURES THAT LABOR EARNS (Kohélet)

Accept food for what it is — one of life's fleeting pleasures. One of the few dependable joys in a fickle world. When all noble ambitions have proven themselves to be a mere puff of wind, one can still derive pleasure from food and drink.

RABBI ISRAEL SALANTER — IT IS EASIER TO LEARN A WHOLE MASECHET OF TALMUD THAN TO UPROOT ONE BAD MIDDAH (char-

acter trait).

How do we fool ourselves in regard to food? Do we let our *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) lead us to overindulgence, which is wrong both because it ultimately denies a fair share of food to others and because it deforms our own characters?

Suggested Follow-up Activities and Questions:

Call each character back and dialogue with him/her.

With which character did you most identify? least? Did any character make you angry?

What similarities and differences do you see between the characters?

Which characters do you think would be most/least bothered by world hunger?

Which character is most/least likely to invite a schnorer for Shabbat dinner?

Begin to prepare students for "kosher week". [Editor's Note: "Kosher week" should fall in between weeks 2 and 3 of the unit. The letter from Shelly Melzer (below) should have been sent out several weeks in advance.]

Thursday, March 14, 1985

Dear Tzeerim Parents,

As you may have heard, our class is beginning to study the "how and why" of keeping kosher.

As part of our study, I would like the students to experience keeping kosher to some extent for a week, beginning Sunday April 7. WAIT! STOP! Don't throw out your dishes! The following are three alternatives from which you may choose to help your child in this experiment. None of these involve separating dishes.

#### Alternative #1

a) Go to a kosher butcher with your child to buy meat. A list of kosher butchers in the area is enclosed. Call the butcher in advance to ask him to kasher (salt and soak) the meat for you. Kosher frozen meat is also available in many supermarkets. Empire has a pre-cooked fried chicken or uncooked chicken, pre-cut.

b) Plan meals with your child that do not mix meat and milk foods. Details about what constitutes milk, meat, or parve (neutral) foods can be found in the sheets enclosed.

c) If you eat out this week, choose a kosher restaurant with your child. A list of restaurants is enclosed. OR, eat only dairy foods or fish in the restaurant of your choice.

#### Alternative #2

a) Plan meals with your child that don't require any forbidden foods such as pork or shellfish. Details about permissible foods can be found in the sheets enclosed.

b) Plan meals with your child that don't mix meat and milk foods. Details about what constitutes milk, meat, or parve (neutral) foods can be found in the sheets.

c) If you eat out during this week, choose a kosher restaurant with your child. A list of restaurants is enclosed. OR avoid forbidden foods and mixing meat and milk in your meal.

#### Alternative #3

a) Go to a kosher restaurant with your child. Look at the menu. What are the possible com-

binations of foods in this kosher meal?

b) Plan some meals with your child that do not combine milk and meat foods. Avoid forbidden foods such as shellfish or pork.

With any of these alternatives, your child may decide to consider kashrut when packing a lunch for school if s/he brings lunch to school.

Again, the purpose of this experiment is to have the students use what they have learned about kashrut. This will provide them with a basis for better understanding how and why kashrut is observed. During this week, your child will keep a journal of what s/he did each day to keep kosher, how this affected him/her, and so on. I appreciate your help with this project.

I have enclosed: 1) a list of kosher butchers, bakeries, and restaurants 2) an excerpt from The First Jewish Catalogue and 3) a form for your child's journal. The First Jewish Catalogue excerpt will give you details about permissible foods and what constitutes milk, meat, and parve (neutral) foods. It provides other information which is simply for your interest. You may keep this excerpt.

Please fill out the form below and send it with your child on Sunday, March 24, so I know you received this packet.

Thank you for your cooperation. Please call me if you have any questions or comments.

Note: On Thursday, April 18, we will kick off "kosher week" with a dinner planned and prepared by the class. Class will end at 6:00 as usual. If you are available to help shop or supervise in the kitchen (and join us for dinner) please call me as soon as possible. Thank you!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

I have received the kashrut packet. We will follow alternative # \_\_\_\_ from Sunday, April 7-Sunday, April 14.

We cannot follow any of the alternatives listed because \_\_\_\_\_

**DIARY FOR "KOSHER WEEK"**

Day 1            date \_\_\_\_\_

Day 2            date \_\_\_\_\_

Day 3            date \_\_\_\_\_

Day 4            date \_\_\_\_\_

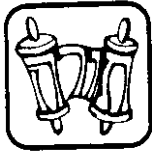
Day 5            date \_\_\_\_\_

Day 6            date \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson 3: Processing "kosher week".  
 What was it like to keep kosher? Difficult? Easy?  
 Fun? A pain?

What happened in your family?

Preliminary exploration: Why might a Jew observe kashrut today? Emphasis: Over the next four hours we will learn why and how Jews observed kashrut in the past. This will help us think about our own observance in the present and future.



**Evolving Religious Civilization:**  
**Past Development**  
**Educational Challenge:**  
**Expanding Meaning**

Lesson 4: "The Divine Compromise" About Food In Genesis.

**DIRECTIONS:**

Read the box on this side of the page, then answer the questions 1 and 2, then go to the selection from Genesis 9 and answer questions 3 to 8.

Gen. 1:27 and God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living that creep on earth."

29 God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food."

1. List three things that God tells Adam and Eve to do in verse 28.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

2. In verse 29, what does God tell Adam and Eve they may eat?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. 2 The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the birds of the sky-everything with which the earth is astir-and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. 3 Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. 4 You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it."

3. List three things that God tells Noah to do in verses 1 and 2.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. In verse 3, what does God tell Noah he may eat?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. In verse 4, what condition is attached to this?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. How did people's eating change from the time of Adam and Eve to the time of Noah, according to Genesis?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How did God's attitude change between the time of Adam and Eve and the time of Noah?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What does the "Divine Compromise" have to do with kashrut?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Lesson 5: The Torah and kashrut.**

1. The Torah gives some of the basic rules of kashrut, and also some reasons why you should observe them.

## RULES GIVEN IN THE TORAH

- a. You may only eat certain animals, and nothing that has died a natural death.
- b. You may not eat the blood of an animal with the meat—pour it on the ground.
- c. You may not boil a kid in its mother's milk.
- d. Only eat animals which chew the cud and which have a split hoof, like the cow.
- e. Only eat fish with both fins and scales.
- f. Only eat insects with hind legs jointed at the "knees" like the grasshopper, locust, or cricket.
- g. Don't eat the thigh muscle of an animal.

## REASONS WHY YOU OBSERVE THEM

- To be holy, or because these things are "unclean".
- Because blood=life.
- The Bible does **not** give a reason for this. We think that it may have to do with cruelty and what other peoples did in their religions.
- To be holy, or because other things are "unclean".
- To be holy, or because other things are "unclean".
- To be holy, or because other things are "unclean".
- Because of the story of Jacob wrestling with the angle. (Gen.32:25-33)

Below you will find a set of verses from the Torah. After the verses put the letter of the rule (a-g) the verse helps explain. (Some verses may be related to more than one kashrut tradition.)

### Lev. 11.44-45

44 For I the LORD am your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves unclean through any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. 45 For I the LORD am HE who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy. \_\_\_\_\_

### Deut. 14.21

21 You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. \_\_\_\_\_

### Ex. 22.30

30 You shall be men holy to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field: you shall cast it to the dogs. \_\_\_\_\_

### Lev: 7.26

26 And you must not consume any blood, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. \_\_\_\_\_

### Lev. 17.13

13 And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. \_\_\_\_\_

### Gen.9.4

4 You must not, however, eat flesh with its life blood in it. \_\_\_\_\_

### Ex. 23.19

19 The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the LORD your GOD. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. \_\_\_\_\_

### Ex. 34.26

26 The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the LORD your GOD. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. \_\_\_\_\_

### Deut. 12.23-25

23 But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh. 24 You must not partake of it; you must pour it out on the ground like water: 25 you must not partake of it, in order that it may go well with you and with your descendants to come, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD. \_\_\_\_\_

**Lev.11.2-8**

2 Speak to the Israelite people thus:

These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals: 3 any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud, such you may eat. 4 The following, however, of those that either chew the cud or have true hoofs, you shall not eat: the camel, although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 5 the camel although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 6 the hare although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 7 and the swine, although it has true hoofs, with the hoofs cleft through, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. 8 You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcass; they are unclean for you.\_\_\_\_\_

**Deut.14.3-8**

3 You shall not eat anything abhorrent. 4 These are the animals that you may eat: the ox, the sheep and the goat; 5 the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, the mountain sheep, 6 and any other animal that has true hoofs which are cleft in two and brings up the cud, such you may eat. 7 But the following, which do bring up the cud or have true hoofs which are cleft through, you may not eat: the camel, the hare, and the daman, for although they bring up the cud, they have no true hoofs, they are unclean for you; 8 also the swine, for although it has true hoofs, it does not bring up the cud-is unclean for you. You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses.\_\_\_\_\_

**Lev.11.9-10**

9 These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales, these you may eat. 10 But anything in the seas or in the streams that has no fins and scales, among all the swarming things of the water and among all the other living creatures that are in the water, they are an abomination for you.\_\_\_\_\_

**Lev.13-19**

13 The following you shall abominate among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; 14 the kite, falcons of every variety; 15 all varieties of raven; 16 the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull; hawks of every variety; 17 the little owl, the cormorant, and the great owl; 18 the white owl, the pelican, and the bustard; 19 the stork; herons of every variety; the hoopoe, and the bat.\_\_\_\_\_

**Deut.14.9-10**

9 These you may eat of all that live in water: you may eat anything that has fins and scales. 10 But

you may not eat anything that has no fins and scales: it is unclean for you.\_\_\_\_\_

**Lev.11.20-23**

20 All winged swarming things, that walk on fours; shall be an abomination for you. 21 But these you may eat among all the winged swarming things that walk on fours: all that have, above their feet, jointed legs to leap with on the ground. 22 of these you may eat the following: locusts of every variety; all varieties of bald locust; crickets of every variety; and all varieties of grasshopper. 23 But all other winged swarming things that have four legs shall be an abomination for you.\_\_\_\_\_

**Gen.32.25-33**

25 Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 26 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. 27 Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 28 Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." 29 Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." 30 Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. 31 So Jacob named the place Penuel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." 32 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. 33 That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.\_\_\_\_\_

Process Questions for Lesson 5: (to be asked and discussed after students have completed exercise).

1. Summarize the attitude in the Torah towards food in several sentences.
2. How had attitudes changed from the time of the covenant with Noah to the completion of the Torah?
3. Are the same commandments repeated in the Torah (perhaps in slightly different language)? Give several examples of laws of Kashrut being repeated.
4. What is the purpose of these repetitions? Traditionally, Jews felt repetition reinforced the importance of the commandment or taught us some subtle variations. Modern scholars, however, suggest that different human "editors" of the Torah may have wanted to get their own version "published." What purpose do you think the repetitions serve?

## Lesson 6: Rabbinic Kashrut.

Since much of this information will be new to students, teachers should treat this as an informational lesson, utilizing their favorite techniques (games, directed reading, lecture, discussion, etc.) to impart the material.

Part A: Why did the rabbis of the Talmud feel it necessary to stress the importance of rules of Kashrut that we don't find in the Torah? (Circle the best answer.)

1. Because the rules in the Torah are not specific—they don't tell you what to do specifically.
2. Because they and the Jewish people interpreted the laws in the Torah to include much more than their obvious meaning.
3. Because they felt that these laws (in the Torah) were so important that they safeguarded them with other rules.
4. All of the above

Answer: 4

### Part B: Sheḥita—the Kosher Method Of Killing An Animal

Steps (in Order)

1. The Shoḥet must be a pious, good person, and say a blessing before killing the animal.
2. The knife is checked before use. It must be razor sharp, and must not have any nicks or imperfections in its edge.
3. The Shoḥet kills the animal with a quick motion of the knife, slitting the jugular (neck) vein in an instant. The animal quickly dies.
4. The Shoḥet pours out as much of the blood as possible on the ground, and covers it with dirt.

(Note: Ask "Why?" after each question and leave room for the response).

### Part C: Removing the blood from the meat: SALTING AND SOAKING

Below are four steps in the "salting and soaking" process of removing blood from meat. Put them in their logical order:

Preparation for salting—the meat is placed on an inclined board so that the blood will run off.

Soaking—Meat is soaked for a half hour before it is salted.

Washing—The salt is removed with running water.

Salting—All sides and surfaces of the meat are coated with coarse kashering salt.

### Part D: Separating Milk and Meat

It is traditional to have separate utensils for meat and dairy.

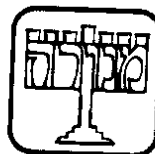
Circle the verse below that this tradition elaborates:

1. (Deuteronomy 14.3) "You shall not eat anything abhorrent."
2. (Exodus 23.19) "The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God [that is, the Temple which stood in Jerusalem], and you shall not boil a kid in it's mother's milk."
3. (Deuteronomy 12.23) "But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh."

Answer: 2

Part E: Learn the meaning of the following terms:

1. Pareve -neither meat nor dairy.
2. Milhic or halvi - all dairy products.
3. Fleishic or besari - meat (chicken, beef).
4. Kasher - something kosher.
5. Kashrut - laws of keeping kosher.
6. Tahor - a kosher animal.
7. Treif - non-kosher meat.



LIVING IN TWO  
CIVILIZATIONS:  
CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION  
Educational Challenge:  
Finding Relevance

Lesson 7: Review and plan for kosher dinner (be able to make own menus) together as a class.

1. Go over sample menus prepared by teacher. Have students call out "zonk" when you come to an item that disqualifies a menu. Have them suggest how to correct menus.
2. Students should propose their own menus for



class meal. Have class decide together on an official menu.

3. Plan how to shop, cook, and eat together. Assign responsibilities (see earlier letter for parental help).

4. Meal should be served at the end of lesson 8 as a **siyum** (religious banquet) in honor of how much has been learned.

5. Give optional quiz (appendix).

6. Discussion: Was it easier to plan for this meal than kosher week? Why? Talk about the knowledge of **kashrut** which has been gained over the past six weeks.



CONTINUITY WITHIN CHANGE,  
CHANGE WITHIN CONTINUITY:  
TOWARDS THE JEWISH FUTURE  
Educational Challenge: Achieving  
Affirmative and Flexible Closure

Lesson 8: Future Choices.

A. The following letter written by a Reconstructionist rabbi helps us look at **kashrut** through Reconstructionist eyes. Study the letter carefully (depending on the age of the group you may want to simplify or only reproduce a portion of the letter). What does Reconstructionism find positive in **kashrut** observance? In what ways does Reconstructionism differ from the Biblical and Rabbinic understanding of **kashrut** you studied earlier?

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The Reconstructionist Synagogue Of The North Shore  
One Willow Street  
Roslyn Heights, New York 11577  
(516) 621-5540

February, 1978

Dear Congregants,

I am writing this letter about the Synagogue's **kashrut** policy, as formulated by the Board, in response to several questions which have arisen. I hope you will view what follows as an opportunity to understand more deeply a Reconstructionist approach to a ritual matter.

The Synagogue's **kashrut** policy is basically very simple. We ask that you do not bring meat or meat products into the Synagogue. All meals brought into the Synagogue should be either dairy or **parve** (i.e. neither milk nor meat). Examples of **parve** foods are eggs, fish, and vegetables. This enables us to conform with the Rabbinic laws of **shehita** stipulating that only animals slaughtered in a ritually approved manner may be eaten. The manner of slaughter is designed primarily to minimize the suffering of the animal. At the same time, keeping meat and meat products out of the Synagogue and school means that the Talmudic regulations banning the mixing of meat and milk are also being observed.

The above guideline has only one serious complication. (The life of a Jew is never easy!) The most difficult part of any **kashrut** observance is learning to check the labels of items such as baked goods to see what kind of shortening is used as an ingredient.

Items containing animal fat should not be brought into the school or Synagogue. Products marked simply "shortening" are often made from animals and we ask you not to bring those products in either.

Having come to know you as an inquiring and thoughtful group, I'm sure many of you are asking yourselves why the Synagogue is being kept "kosher", when most individuals in the Synagogue do not keep a kosher home. Usually such a decision in a non-Orthodox Synagogue is made on the basis of two principles. Both are important to Reconstructionism. Perhaps in a few months when we come to the Biblical text on which the **kashrut** laws are based in our weekly Torah readings we can discuss the matter in more detail.

The first principle is that we try to accommodate the widest possible spectrum of Jewish beliefs and practices within the synagogue. We want everyone—Synagogue members, guests of members, Jews from distant lands marooned on Long Island during ice storms—to be able to participate in those Synagogue functions that involve food. By observing **kashrut**, we allow individuals who feel that dietary discipline is an important part of their Jewish identity, to comfortably enjoy the Jewish fellowship which brings both observant and non-observant Jews to the Synagogue in the first place.

It is true that the policy mapped out by the Board cannot accommodate everyone. We do not, for instance, require that food brought into the Synagogue be made in kosher pots or pans. Some individuals' **kashrut** observance is such that they would not be comfortable eating food made in non-kosher utensils even if the food itself is kosher. We simply extend our circle of accommodation as far as we possibly can. In

trying to take the Jewish tradition seriously and yet deal with the realities of most Jews' home observance we inevitably strike a balance between principles and pragmatism. Still, we're happy if the Synagogue *kashrut* policy enables more of *k'lal Yisrael* (the total Jewish community) to be comfortable in our building.

The second principle involved in keeping the Synagogue kosher hinges on the difference between individual actions and group actions. The Reconstructionist guide to ritual urges Jews as individuals to consider the various personal meanings *kashrut* observance may have. Some Jews might observe *kashrut* because they believe it is a law given at Mt. Sinai, others because a "kosher" home strengthens their Jewish identity, and still others because the discipline of regulating food intake is the best possible reminder that the food we eat ultimately comes from God (however conceived) and not the local supermarket. Reconstructionism does not pass judgment on which of these reasons for observing *kashrut* is the best one. Nor does it view critically the Jew who, having examined the issue, decides that *kashrut* has no real meaning for him or her. In regard to ritual law, (as opposed to ethical law), Reconstructionism allows a maximum latitude for individual Jews to

use their own judgment. It also encourages us to feel that our inquiry will not jeopardize our Jewishness regardless of our final decision.

We do and should, however, act differently as a group than as individuals. Collectively, we are always looking for ways to instill Jewish tradition into our group life as Jews. Observing *kashrut* in the Synagogue helps render it a distinctively Jewish institution. *Kashrut* also gives the Synagogue an ethnic and cultural flavor that does not come out of the more "religious" functions that go on within the building. It also keeps alive the option of a personal observance of *kashrut* by providing an environment where Jews who may want to observe *kashrut* but simply don't know how may comfortably come into contact with both the mechanics and meaning of the observance.

I hope that this letter has clarified the Synagogue *kashrut* policy. If you have any questions, please call me. I would be glad to discuss the more philosophical responses to these principles.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Jeffrey Schein

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## KASHRUT GUIDELINES

(To be put on the Doorposts of your kitchen as a short-hand for the enclosed letter. Please read the letter!)

1. If the Congregation is having a pot-luck, do not bring meat products. All such functions are "dairy meals".
2. If you as an individual are sponsoring a meal (Bar/Bat Mitzvah, etc.), meat products may be served if they are served by a certified Kosher caterer, or if you have yourself gotten the meat from a kosher butcher. Please be sure not to serve meat and milk products at the same meal.
3. Please check all baked goods to make sure that they are not made with animal shortening. Packages marked simply "shortening" should be considered animal shortening and therefore unacceptable.
4. These guidelines apply to both Synagogue and School functions.

B. There recently appeared in the Reconstructionist an article by Rebecca Alpert and Arthur Waskow about "ethical *kashrut*". They argue that an alternative form of *kashrut* might build upon the ethical sensitivities of preset *kashrut* observances. Such observance of "ethical *kashrut*" would emphasize such issues as the nutritional value of the food we eat and the way human beings are treated in the process of producing and marketing the food. According to standards of such an "ethical *kashrut*", food which has too many artificial preservatives in it might be considered *treif* because it violated the commandment of *shmirat ha-guf* (taking care of one's body); food harvested by non-union labor might also be considered *treif* because of the *oshek* (exploitation of labor) involved.

Alpert and Waskow leave it to the individual to decide whether such observance might supplement or replace traditional *kashrut*. Why do you think some people might find this form of "ethical *kashrut*" meaningful? Would it be for you? Why or why not?

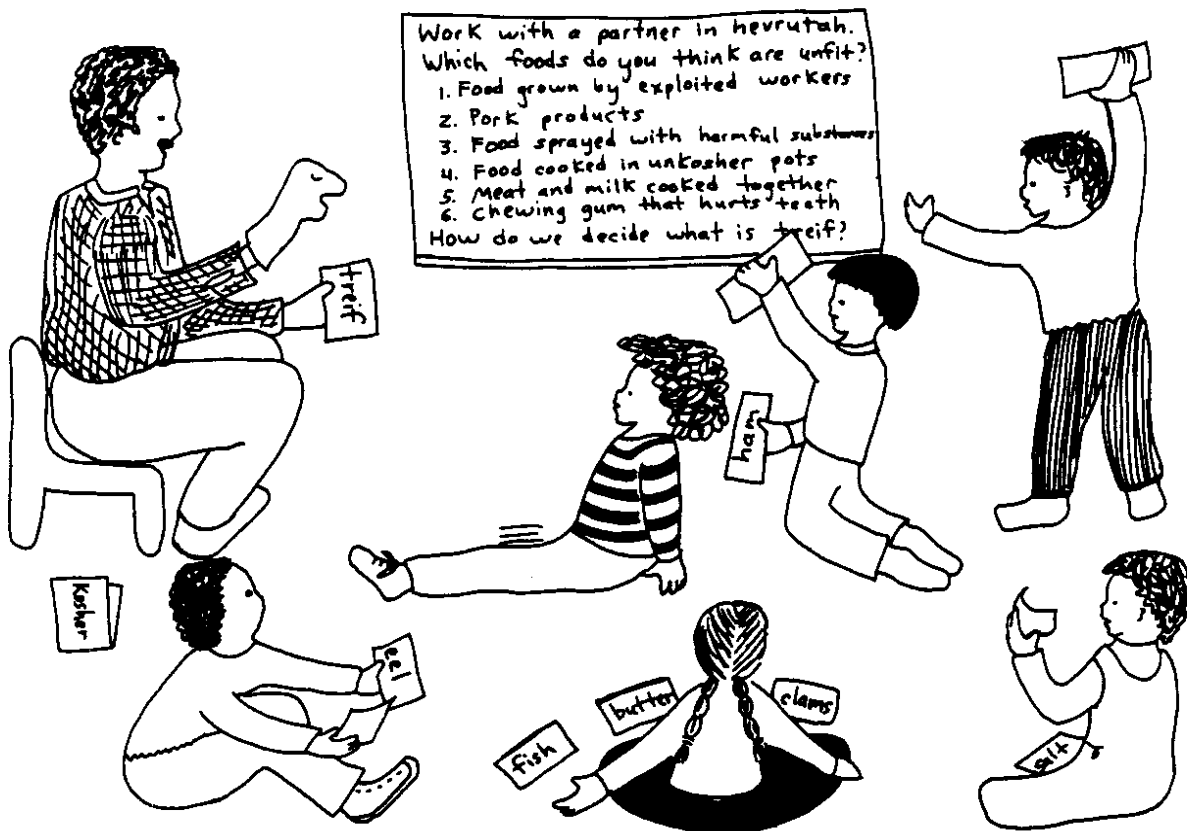
### C. Closing Activity:

Someday you will be master of your own Jewish destiny. You will be making choices about Jewish observances such as kashrut. No one wants to deprive you of your right to grow and change over the next dozen years, so think of these decisions as preliminary. Given what you now understand about kashrut, check which option you imagine yourself choosing as an adult?

- Observing kashrut
- Observing kashrut in own home; not outside
- Combining traditional and "ethical" kashrut
- Observing "ethical kashrut" rather than traditional kashrut

- Becoming a vegetarian as the most consistent way of honoring all life and food as holy
- Eating reasonably but with no moral or religious restrictions.

Write a letter to your family explaining the basis for your decision to treat food in this particular way.



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix: Optional Quiz

1. Give the three reasons the Bible mentions for the laws of kashrut.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_  
c) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Circle the animals that are tahore. Put a box around the animals that are not kasher.

split hoof and  
chews its cud  
(ex. cow)

smooth hoof,  
chews its cud

smooth hoof, doesn't  
chew its cud  
(ex. pig)

fish with fins,  
but no scales

fish with fins,  
only

fish with fins and  
scales

insect with jointed  
legs above feet (ex.  
locust, cricket,  
grasshopper)

spider

vulture

fly

chicken

3. Describe the correct process of Sh'chita.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Put the following in the correct order for the process of kashering:

\_\_\_\_\_ drain meat

\_\_\_\_\_ rinse meat with water

\_\_\_\_\_ rinse 3 times with water

\_\_\_\_\_ cover with salt for one hour

\_\_\_\_\_ soak for ½ hour in water

5. Why do you separate milk and meat if you have a kosher home?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Label each M (milchic), F (fleishic), P (parve).

\_\_\_\_\_ fish

\_\_\_\_\_ apples

\_\_\_\_\_ beef

\_\_\_\_\_ chicken

\_\_\_\_\_ cheese

\_\_\_\_\_ eggs

\_\_\_\_\_ broccoli

\_\_\_\_\_ peanut butter

\_\_\_\_\_ yogurt