

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>  
Instructor: Dr. Marsha B. Cohen  
E-mail: [marbcohen@gmail.com](mailto:marbcohen@gmail.com)

## Topic: Laws and Customs of Kosher Observance

**Key Idea** –Many religions have dietary restrictions that serve not only to enhance the sense of identity of the religious community but which are regarded as an aspect of spiritual as well as physical discipline. Stricter discipline (i.e. more dietary restrictions, including what one eats, when and how, as well as limitations on whom one may eat with) is associated with a higher level of ritual purity that allows one to approach the Divine and higher status within the community. If we examine Jewish dietary laws from this perspective, we gain a richer understanding of the significance of these regulations and how they have evolved.

### *Our discussion of the texts :*

**Text 1:** Esther 8:5 and Ecclesiastes 11:6. Use of words derived from the root *k-sh-r* in the *Ketuvim* (Writings) section of the *TaNakh*.

**Text 2:** Leviticus 11:1-23. permitted and forbidden land animals, fish, and birds.

**Text 3:** Genesis 9:4 . The prohibition against eating the flesh of a live animal (*ever min hachai*).

**Text 4:** Deuteronomy 12:23. The prohibition against consuming blood.

**Text 5:** Deuteronomy 12:20-21. The *kashrut* requirement that permitted animals be slaughtered in a prescribed manner (*shechita*). An animal not properly slaughtered is *neveilah*.

**Texts 6:** Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21. The Torah states 3 times that a kid may not be cooked in its own mother's milk.

**Text 7:** *B. Talmud, Chullin 115b*. Three different lessons derived by the Rabbis from the above texts. Rabbinic interpretation further extends this prohibition to cooking *any* animal in *any* milk, including poultry, whose mothers don't even give milk. The Rabbis also derive from these passages the need for dairy (a/ka/ *milchig* or *chalavi*) and meat (a/k/a *fleishig* or *basari*) pots, dishes and utensils.

**Text 8:** *B. Talmud, Yoma 67b*. The Torah contains two different types of laws, *mishpatim* and *chukkim*. While it is easy to understand the *mishpatim*, which are rules of social order common to most civilized societies. *chukkim* don't seem to make sense in everyday terms (and when they seem to it is tempting to try to subvert the alleged reasoning behind them). The Rabbis teach that these laws have meaning although that we don't understand them, and we should follow them because we are commanded to do so by God.

**Text 9:** Dayan Isidore Grunfeld –Although it might seem that freedom is a condition which allows human beings to do exactly as they please, acting in accordance with their instincts, impulses and desires, the opposite is true. Satisfying animal appetites keep humans enslaved, while choosing to follow God's law represents the real opportunity for human freedom. The laws of *kashrut*, which subject what, when and how we eat to a complex system of regulations, the act of eating is elevated to an exercise of spiritual and moral discipline.

**Text 10:** Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub. *Kashrut and Eco-Kashrut*. Environmentalism and treatment of animals as aspects of *kashrut*.

**Text 11:** Morris Alan and Richard Lederman. *Hekhsher Tzedek? A Kosher Certification for Justice*. Treatment of workers as a criterion for *kashrut*.

**Suppl. text:** Marsha B. Cohen, Parshat Shemini, *Laws of Kashrut*. *Boston Jewish Advocate*, March 30, 1989 (see reverse). An early appeal for adding ethical requirements rather than *chumrot* (stringencies) to the technical aspects of *kashrut* observance in order to fulfill their spiritual rationale.