
WHY KEEP KOSHER?

The word “kosher” is universally used to denote that which is proper and meets accepted rules and standards. In Judaism, the term kosher applies specifically to food, Torah scrolls, tefillin, and mezuzot, and can even be applied to the acceptability of witnesses. Its most common use today, of course, is in regard to food, which is the subject of this shiur.

This class will address the following questions:

- ~ Why is it important to keep kosher?
- ~ What are the reasons for keeping kosher?
- ~ How does someone observe the laws of kashrut?
- ~ What are some of the Kabbalistic explanations for the laws of kashrut?

Class Outline

Section I. Principles of Keeping Kosher

Part A. Kosher Mammals

Part B. Birds

Part C. Kosher Animals and Birds Require Shechitah

Part D. *Gid HaNasheh*

Part E. Fats and Blood

Part F. Not Mixing Meat and Dairy Products

Part G. Fish

Part H. Insects

Part I. Selected Rabbinic Prohibitions

Section II. Philosophy of Keeping Kosher

Part A. Kashrut Connects a Jew to God

Part B. Spiritual Health

Part C. Damage Caused by Non-kosher Food

Part D. Kashrut Can Improve One's Character

Section III. Kabbalistic Explanations of Kashrut

SECTION I. PRINCIPLES OF KEEPING KOSHER

Fundamental principles of the kashruth laws governing permissible and prohibited foods are summarized below.

PART A. KOSHER MAMMALS

The Torah states that kosher mammals are those which chew their cud (ruminants) and are cloven-hoofed. The following animal species are among those considered to be kosher: addax, antelope, bison, cow, deer, gazelle, goat, ibex, and sheep. Mammals and fowl require special preparation as discussed in Part E below.

1. Vayikra (Leviticus) 11:2-3 – The Divine definition of the kosher mammal: it must have split hooves and chew the cud.

Speak to the Children of Israel saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals that are upon the earth. Everything among the animals that has a split hoof, which is completely separated into double hooves, and that brings up its cud – that one you may eat.

דברו אל בני ישראל, לאמר: זאת החיה אשר תאכלו, מפל-הבהמה אשר על-הארץ. כל מפרסת פרסה, ושסעת שסע פרסת, מעלת גרה, בבהמה--אתה, תאכלו.

2. Sifra Shmini, Parshat Yayin ve-Shechar, Parshah 2 – To teach the Jewish people which animals are kosher, Moshe (Moses) held up each animal and declared its status.

“This is the animal that you may eat.” This teaches that Moshe held each one and showed it to Israel, saying, “You may eat this kind” and, “You may not eat this kind.”

זאת החיה, מלמד שהיה משה אוחז החיה ומראה להם לישראל, ואומר להם זו תאכלו, וזו לא תאכלו...

PART B. BIRDS

The Torah does not list specific characteristics to distinguish between permitted and forbidden birds. Instead, it enumerates twenty-four forbidden species of fowl, while all other birds are considered to be kosher. Nonetheless, in practice we eat only those birds which have an established tradition that the species is kosher, such as chicken, turkey, duck, and goose.

1. Vayikra 11:13 – The Torah lists the non-kosher bird species.

These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination: the eagle, the osprey, the *aznaya* ...

ואת-אלה תשקצו מן-העוף, לא יאכלו שקין הם: את-הנשר, ואת-הפרס, ואת, העזניה...

PART C. KOSHER ANIMALS AND BIRDS REQUIRE SHECHITAH

Animals and birds require (*shechitah*) ritual slaughter to render them kosher. An animal that dies in any other way is not kosher.

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy)12:21 – The source for the requirement of a kosher slaughter.

And you shall slaughter from your herd and from

זבחת מבקרך ומצאנך אשר נתן ה' לך כאשר צויתך

your flock that God has given to you as I have commanded you and you may eat meat to your soul's desire.

ואכלת בשעריך בכל אות נפשך:

2. **Vayikra 22:8 – Prohibition of eating from a dead animal or one which has not been shechted (kosher slaughter).**

Do not eat from a carcass or from a torn animal, to be contaminated through it; I am God.

נבלה וטרפה לא יאכל לטמאה בה אני יקוק:

PART D. GID HANASHEH (SCIATIC NERVE)

The sciatic nerve (*gid hanasheh*) in each leg and the fat surrounding the nerve must be removed.

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 32:33 – The sciatic nerve must be removed from the hind legs.**

Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the *gid hanasheh* on the hip-socket to this day, because [the angel of Esau] struck Yaakov's (Jacob) hip-socket on the *gid hanasheh*.

על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה:

PART E. FATS AND BLOOD

Certain fats, known as *chelev*, may not be eaten. As much blood as possible must be removed from the meat, either by soaking, salting, and rinsing or by broiling over a fire.

1. **Vayikra 3:17 – Blood and forbidden fats must be removed from the meat before eating.**

It is an eternal statute for all your generations in all your dwelling places – all fats and all blood you shall not eat.

חקת עולם לדורותיכם בכל מושבתיכם כל חלב וכל דם לא תאכלו

PART F. NOT MIXING MEAT AND DAIRY PRODUCTS

Milk from kosher animals is kosher. However, dairy and meat products cannot be mixed. The seriousness of the prohibition of mixing meat and dairy products is underscored by its appearance three times in the Torah.

1. **Shemot (Exodus) 23:19, 34:26, Devarim 14:21 – The three sources of the Torah prohibition.**

Do not cook a goat in its mother's milk.

לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו

2. **Rashi, Shemot 23:19 – What additional laws is the Torah teaching by this repetition?**

The three places where the Torah writes the prohibition of mixing milk and meat teach that it is 1. forbidden to eat the mixture, 2. forbidden to

ובשלושה מקומות נכתב בתורה אחד לאיסור אכילה, ואחד לאיסור הנאה, ואחד לאיסור בישול:

derive any benefit from such a mixture and
3. forbidden to cook such a mixture.

3. Rabbi Yaakov Luban, OU Kosher Laboratories – The separation of meat and milk includes: not eating them at the same meal, not preparing them on the same utensils, and waiting between eating meat and milk.

The Rabbis extended the prohibition to disallow the eating of meat and dairy products at the same meal or preparing them on the same utensils. Furthermore, milk products cannot be consumed after eating meat, for a period of time. There are different traditions for how long to wait between meat and dairy, but the most prevalent custom is to wait six hours.

Meat may be eaten following dairy products with the one exception of hard cheese that is aged six months or more, which requires the same waiting time as that of dairy after meat.

PART G. FISH

Fish must have fins and scales to be kosher. Unlike meat and poultry, fish requires no special preparation.

1. Vayikra 11:9 – Any fish which has fins and scales is kosher.

This is what you may eat of all that is in the water: You may eat any creature that lives in the water, whether in seas or rivers, as long as it has fins and scales.

את-זה, תאכלו, מכל, אשר במים: כל אשר-לו סנפיר וקשקשת במים, במים ובנהלים-אתם תאכלו.

PART H. INSECTS

There are five Torah prohibitions regarding the eating of insects. The Torah states that only certain *chagavim* (grasshoppers) are kosher. But just like birds, there is a need for a tradition regarding the identity of the kosher species.

1. Vayikra 11:20-1 – Insects may not be eaten.

Every flying insect that uses four legs for walking—it is an abomination to you. The only flying insects with four walking legs that you may eat are those which have knees extending above their feet, [using these longer legs] to hop on the ground.

כל שרץ העוף, ההלך על-ארבע-שקן הוא, לכם אך את-זה, תאכלו, מכל שרץ העוף, ההלך על-ארבע: אשר-לא (לו) כרעים מופעל לרגליו, לנתר בהן על-הארץ.

PART I. SELECTED RABBINIC PROHIBITIONS

1. Is it Kosher? Rabbi E. Eidlitz, p. 66 – Food and wine prepared exclusively by a non-Jew is prohibited.

Foods cooked by an *akum* [a non-Jew] are forbidden, since it is possible that he would serve non-kosher food, and this is also a precaution against assimilation.

בישול עכו"ם – שמא יאכילנו דבר טמא או משום חתנות

Wine prepared by an *akum* is forbidden as a precaution against assimilation.

סתם יין עכו"ם — משום חתנות

SECTION II. PHILOSOPHY OF KEEPING KOSHER

PART A. KASHRUT CONNECTS A JEW TO GOD

1. Shemot (Exodus) 22; 30 – A holy people needs holy food.

You shall be a holy people to Me, and you shall not eat the flesh of an animal that has been torn in the field, but you should throw it to the dog.

ואנשי-קדש תהיון לי ובשר בשדה טרפה לא תאכלו
לקרב תשליכו אתו:

2. Rashi, *ibid.* – Our holiness and closeness to God depends on what we eat and how we eat.

“You shall be holy people to Me.” If you are holy and separate yourselves from the disgusting carcasses and torn animals then you are Mine. If not, you are not Mine.

ואנשי קודש תהיון לי. אם אתם קדושים ופרושים
משקוצי נבלות וטרפות הרי אתם שלי ואם לאו אינכם
שלי:

3. Harekanti, Vayikra, Tazria p. 60 – Kashrut helps to reach one’s potential and come close to God.

According to the simple meaning the reason that it is forbidden to eat impure animals is that they cause decay and illness to the soul. They prevent a person from reaching his perfection and coming close to God.

הטעם לאסור הבהמות הטמאות, לפי הפשט כי הם
מולידים עפוש רע וחולי בנפשות ומעכבין שלימות
האדם מלהדבק בשם יתברך

4. Seforno, Devarim 14:4 – Our elevated national status after the giving of the Torah requires that we eat “elevated” food.

Before the Torah was given the difference between impure and pure animals was known as is clear from Noach (who differentiated between them in the Ark). Nevertheless it was not prohibited for non-Jews to eat non-kosher animals. But you [the Jewish people], since you are holy, it is not fitting for you to be sustained by these forbidden things.

קודם מתן תורה נודע הבדל הטמא והטהור, כמבואר
בנח, מכל מקום לא אסר לנח אכילתם, ואתה בהיותך
קדוש, אין ראוי לך להיות ניזון מהאסור.

PART B. SPIRITUAL HEALTH

1. **Kli Yakar – Kashrut ensures the well-being of the soul.**

The reason for the laws of kashrut is not for physical health benefits, as the Ramban (Nachmanides) explains. We see that non-Jews eat non-kosher foods and are healthy. Rather their purpose is for the well-being of the soul. Non-kosher foods remove the spirit of purity and holiness, and create a blockage in the intelligence, and cause cruelty. This only helps “them,” Israel, for they will live in the world to come. But for non-Jews there is no purpose in this mitzvah.

מלמד שאין ענין המאכלות האסורות לבריאות הגוף ככרמב"ן, שהרי האומות אוכלים ובריאים, אלא כונתם לרפואת הנשמה, כי מגרשים רוח טהרה וקדושה, ומולידים אטימות השכל ואכזריות, וזה דוקא מועיל "אליהם" לישראל, שהם לחיי העולם הבא, אבל לאומות העולם אין תועלת במצוה זה.

2. **Midrash Tanchuma, Shmini 7 – Kashrut leads to the perfection of a person.**

God said to the Jews, “Be careful that you do not make yourselves disgusting with non-kosher animals or creatures.” King David said, “God’s ways are perfect. The word of God has been perfected” (Tehillim/Psalms 18:31) – in order to perfect His creations.

Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) said, “What difference does it make to God if the Jews eat without proper slaughtering, or if they tear open the neck and eat, or slaughter from the back of the neck? Know that the only purpose of the commandment of slaughtering was to perfect the Jewish people...”

אמר הקב"ה לישראל, הזהרו עצמכם שלא לשקץ את עצמכם בבהמה טמרה ובשרץ טמא, אמר דוד הא-ל תמים דרכו, אמרת ה' צרופה (תהלים י"ח), בשביל לצרף בריותיו.

אמר לו רבי מה אכפת לו להקב"ה שיאכלו ישראל בלא שחיטה שיהא ישראל נחר ואוכל, ושוחט מן הצואר מן הירך, תדע שלא נצטוה השחיטה הזה אלא כדי לצרף את ישראל...

3. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Yoma 39a – Eating non-kosher food desensitizes a person ...**

It was taught by the school of Rabbi Yishmael: Sin blocks up a person’s heart, as it states, “Do not contaminate yourselves through [eating] them (*sharatzim*), lest you become contaminated through them” (Vayikra 11:43). Do not read it as “contaminated” (*nitmeitem*), but rather “blocked up” (*nitamtem*).

תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: עבירה מטמטמת לבו של אדם, שנאמר (ויקרא יא: מו) ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמתם בהם אל תקרי ונטמתם אלא ונטמטם.

4. **Rashi, ibid. – ... and diminishes one’s wisdom.**

“Blocks up” – seals and closes it from any wisdom.

מטמטמת - אוטמת וסותמת מכל חכמה.

5. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Devarim 14:3 – Strong language to emphasize protecting the soul.**

“Do not eat anything disgusting.” The Torah wanted to add an explanation for the forbidden

לא תאכל כל תועבה - הנה רצה להוסיף ביאור במאכלים האסורים, ולכך אמר "לא תאכל כל

foods. Therefore it says, “Do not eat anything disgusting,” to teach that everything which is forbidden is disgusting for a pure soul.

תועבה" להגיד כי כל הנאסרים נתעבים לנפש הטהורה.

PART C. DAMAGE CAUSED BY NON-KOSHER FOOD

All Torah authorities agree that kosher food has a beneficial effect on the soul and non-kosher food the opposite effect. However, they disagree as to whether non-kosher food can physically damage the body. The sources listed below maintain that non-kosher food physically damages the body. The Kli Yakar cited in B:1 above disagrees.

1. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Mesillat Yesharim (The Path of the Just), Ch. 11 – Food penetrates the body and soul.**

The prohibitions concerning forbidden foods also involve many details, as is reflected in all of the commonly known laws that are treated in the Halachic writings. One who is lenient in relation to these laws when he has been instructed to be stringent is destroying his soul ... For sin dulls a man's heart in the respect that it causes true knowledge and the spirit of wisdom that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gives to the righteous (as it is said [Mishlei/Proverbs 2:6], “For God gives wisdom”) to depart from him, and he remains beastly and earthy, immersed in the gross materialism of this world. Forbidden foods are worse than all other prohibitions in this respect, for they enter into a person's body and become flesh of his flesh ...

Any intelligent person will regard forbidden food as poison, or as food with which some poison has become mixed. Would anyone allow himself to partake of such food? If there were any room for suspicion or even the slightest doubt, he would certainly not permit himself to eat of it; and if he did, he would be regarded as an absolute fool. Forbidden food, as we have explained, is poison to the heart and soul. Which intelligent person would allow himself to eat food which has any question whatsoever about its permissibility?

ופרטיהם רבים ככל דיניהם הידועים והמבוארים בספרי הפוסקים, והמקיל בהם במקום שאמרו להחמיר אינו אלא משחית לנפשו... שהעבירה מטמטמת לבו של אדם, כי מסלקת ממנו הדעה האמתית ורוח השכל שהקדוש ברוך הוא נותן לחסידים, כמו שאמר הכתוב (שם ב'): "כי ה' יתן חכמה", והנה הוא נשאר בהמי וחמורי משוקע בגסות העולם הזה. והמאכלות האסורות יתירות בזה על כל האסורין, כיון שהם נכנסים בגופו של האדם ממש ונעשים בשר מבשרו...

והנה כל בר ישראל שיש לו מוח בקדקדו יחשב אסורי המאכל כמאכלים הארסיים או כמאכל שנתערב בו איזה דבר ארסי, כי הנה אם דבר זה יארע היקל אדם על עצמו לאכול ממנו? אם ישאר לו בו איזה בית מיחוש אפילו חששא קטנה, ודאי שלא יקל לא יהיה נחשב אלא לשוטה גמור, אף איסור המאכל כבר בארנו שהוא ארס ממש ללב ונפש הישראלי, אם כן מי איפוא יהיה המקל במקום חששא של אסור, אם בעל שכל הוא?

2. **Ramban, Torat Hashem Temimah (p. 166 in Vol. I of Chavel edition Kisvei Ramban) – Non-kosher food is damaging to the body and the soul.**

The Torah further enlightens us with the secret of cause and effect. It prohibited us from eating certain animals, birds and fish. This is in keeping with the other laws of the Torah. The Torah further enlightens us with the secret of cause

ועוד התורה מאירה עינים בסוד התולדה, שאסרה לנו מקצת בהמות וחיות ומקצת עופות ומקצת דגים, וגם זה הולך בשאר דרכי התורה שכל דברים טובים.

and effect. It prohibited us from eating certain animals, birds and fish. This is in keeping with the other laws of the Torah, which are beneficial both for the body and the soul. For all these forbidden foods are known to be foods which are not good for one's health. However, besides this they cause damage to the soul. This is why the Torah writes, "They will make you blocked up (*nitmetem*)" without the letter *aleph* (which would spell *nitmeitem* – you will become impure) to teach that they block up the heart.

An illustration of this point can be found in the list of non-kosher birds. These are all birds of prey, except for two, and include all the birds of prey in the world. These birds are all cruel. Through consuming their flesh and blood, the soul absorbs the attribute of cruelty. Therefore it is appropriate that the Jewish people, who are commanded to be merciful and to love one another, be forbidden from these things.

לגוף כנוהג שבעולם, וטובים לנפש, מצד היצירה ומצד המצות, כי הדברים האלה ידוע שאינן מאכלים טובים לרפואה ולבריאות, ומלבד זה יש להם נזק בנפש מצד התולדות, וזהו ונטמתם חסר א' לומר שהן מטמטמות הלב,

כאשר ידענו כי העופות האסורין כולן דורסין חוץ מפרס ועזניה ואין בעולם עוף אחר דורס אלא הם והם בעלי אכזריות, ודמם ובשרם מוליד אכזריות בנפש, וישראל, שנצטוו להיות רחמנים ואוהבים זה לזה, ראוי הוא להאסר להם.

3. **Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 73 – Non-kosher food can harm the body, which is the platform for the soul.**

The reasons for this mitzvah [of kashrut]: The body is a tool for the soul, through which the soul accomplishes its tasks. The soul cannot function without the body. Any deficiency of the body will thus limit the soul's ability to function. Therefore, the Torah instructed us to refrain from eating anything that could cause us damage. This is the simple explanation for the forbidden foods in the Torah.

Do not be surprised that some of these dangerous foods are known to us, but not to doctors, because the Faithful Doctor, Who instructed us about them, is far wiser than you or any human doctor. How foolish is someone who thinks that these foods are not dangerous because he does not know that. You should know that it is for our benefit that the Torah does not explain why they are forbidden or the damage they cause: because some people who claim to be very wise may come and tell us that the dangers that the Torah refers to in a certain food is non-existent, or that it applies only in a certain place, or only to certain people. Lest you be swayed by their words to follow these fools, the Torah did not reveal to us the reasons [as to why certain foods are forbidden], to spare us from this stumbling block.

משרשי מצוה זו, לפי שהגוף כלי לנפש ובו תעשה פעולתה, וזולתה לא תשלם מלאכתה לעולם... בהיות בגוף שום הפסד מאי זה ענין שיהיה תתבטל פעולת השכל כפי אותו הפסד, ועל כן הרחיקתנו תורתנו השלמה מכל דבר הגורם בו הפסד. וכמו כן ועל הדרך הזה לפי הפשט נאמר שבא לנו האיסור בתורה בכל מאכלות האסורות,

ואם יש מהם שאין נודע לנו ולא לחכמי הרפואה נזק, אל תתמה עליהן, כי הרופא הנאמן שהזהירנו בהן חכם יותר ממוך ומהם, וכמה נסכל ונבהל מי שחשב שאין לדברים נזק או תועלת אלא במה שהשיג הוא, ויש לך לדעת כי לתועלתנו לא נתגלה סיבתן ונזקן, פן יקומו אנשים מחזיקים עצמן כחכמים גדולים ויתחכמו לומר נזק פלוני שאמרה התורה שיש בדבר פלוני איננו כי אם במקום פלוני שטבעו כן או באיש פלוני שטבעו כן וכן, ופן יתפתה לדבריהם אחד מן הפתאים. על כן לא נתגלה טעמן להועיל לנו מן המכשול הזה.

PART D. KASHRUT CAN IMPROVE ONE'S CHARACTER

1. Ramban, Devarim 14:21 – Kashrut prevents the trait of cruelty.

The reason it states, “For you are a holy nation to the Lord, your God” in connection to “Do not eat a kid in its mother’s milk” is not because this is a disgusting food. Rather, it is forbidden in order that we should be holy regarding our food and not act as a cruel and merciless nation – milking the mother in order to cook her kid in her milk.

All meat and milk is included in this prohibition [even when someone does not cook meat in its mother’s milk, which one might think is not considered cruel] nonetheless, since any nursing mother is called a “mother,” and any nursling is called a “kid,” cooking them together is always considered cruel.

וטעם כי עם קדוש אתה לה' אלוהיך - דבק עם לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו - כי איננו מאכל נתעב, אבל יאסור אותו להיותנו קדושים במאכלים, או להיותנו קדושים שלא נהיה עם אכזרי לא ירחמו שנחלוב את האם ונוציא ממנה החלב שנבשל בו הבן.

ואף על פי שכל בשר בחלב יכנס בלאו הזה, כי כל מינקת תקרא אם וכל יונק יקרא גדי, והוא דרך הבישול, והנה בכלם אכזריות.

SECTION III. KABBALISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF KASHRUT

1. Rabbeinu Bachya, Vayikra 11:43 – Connection to God is impacted.

“You will become blocked up with them” – from the word *timtum* (blocked up). The heart becomes blocked when eating non-kosher foods and a person cannot receive Divine Inspiration. It is possible that the reason the letter *aleph* is missing [from the Hebrew word *timtum*] is because it alludes to the Prime Unity, and [if a person eats non-kosher food] God departs from this person. Similarly the word *chet* (sin) is sometimes written without an *aleph* to show that God also departs from a person because of his sins.

ונטמתם בם – מלשון טמטום, שהלב מיטמטם באכילתם ואין רוח הקודש שורה בו, ויתכן שהאל"ף חסרה בו, כי היא מורה על היחוד והקדמות, ומזה השכינה מסתלק, וכן כתב מחטו לי בחסרון אל"ף, שעל ידי החטא מסתלקת גם כן.

2. Shelah, Shaar Ha-Osios, Os Kuf; Kedushat HaOchlin – Non-kosher food blocks our ability for spiritual connection and causes impurity of the body and soul.

The Torah warned us about forbidden and permitted foods. “You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, and not make your souls disgusting.” The Zohar explains that the impure foods that the Torah warns us against have an external impure spirit. Someone who eats them makes his soul impure and demonstrates that he has no share in purity or in the God of Israel. The impure thing becomes part of his physical body, which the soul is clothed within. In this way he profanes his soul and makes it impure, and an impure spirit rests on him.

התורה הזהירה במאכלות אסורות ומותרות, והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים ולא תשקצו את נפשותיכם, ופירש בזוהר ענין הזה, כי המאכלות המטמאים שהזהירה לנו התורה מהם, שורה עליהם רוח חיצוני וטמא, ולכן האוכל מאותן הדברים מטמא את נפשו, ומראה על עצמו שאין לו חלק בקדושה ולא באלקי ישראל, כי הדבר הטמא נעשה חלק אבר בעצם האדם והנפש מתלבשת שם, נמצא שהוא מטמא נפשו ומטמא הנפש המתלבשת בגוף, ורוח הטומאה שורה עליו.

Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin writes that the primal desire of man is to eat of the forbidden. Adam and Chava (Eve) succumbed to that desire, and as a result it has remained pre-dominant in the human psyche since that eventful day (Bereishit 2:15-3:24). In the next source, Rav Tzadok describes how following Adam's error, food contains an element of the forbidden taste of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. By eating kosher food in a proper manner, one can correct that mistake so that food will again taste like the Tree of Life, which represents Torah.

3. **Rav Tzadok HaKohen, Pri Tzadik, Tazriah 3 – Care in kosher food is considered as if one has fulfilled all the mitzvot of the Torah.**

The observance of the laws of kashrut encompasses all the other laws of the Torah. In the Garden of Eden the snake was only able to entice them [Adam and Chava] to sin by creating a desire for the forbidden food [the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil]. Someone who is careful about only eating kosher foods and imbuing them with holiness thereby keeps all the mitzvot of the Torah, because the only way that the Evil Inclination can rule over a person is through eating and drinking, as the verse states, "You shall eat and drink ... Be careful lest your heart lead you astray" (Devarim 11: 15-16).

In the Zohar it states, "The tree that Adam HaRishon ate from was wheat, others say it was grapes, and others say it was a fig. These opinions do not disagree with one another, but are all true." How can they all be true when they disagree about the facts of what happened?

The truth is that when the Torah states, "The Tree of Life, was in the middle of the garden..." This means that the inner spirituality of each tree in the garden was the same as that of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If Adam had eaten first from the Tree of Life in every other food that he ate he would have tasted the taste of Torah, which is life. But when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil he made every other food contain within it the taste of that tree, and this is the source of all sin. When a person corrects this sin through eating in holiness, he thereby keeps all the mitzvot and is saved from the challenges of the Evil Inclination.

קדושת המאכלים כולל כל התורה, ושורש הסתת הנחש היה להכניס תאוה באכילה, ומי שהוא מוגדר באילה שמאכלו בקדושה ממילא שומר כל המצוות שבתורה, שאין יצר הרע שולט אלא מתוך אכילה ושתיה כמו שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת... השמרו לכם.

ובוהר הקדוש ... אילן שאכל אדם הראשון חטה היה ואחרנין אמרין גפן הוה כו' תאנה היתה. ולא הוה כולקין במילוליהן דכלא קשוט וכו' ואיך יצויר כלא קשוט כשחולקין במציאות,

ואמרנו שבאמת כתיב ועץ החיים בתוך הגן, והיינו שפנימיות כל עצי הגן היו עץ הדעת טוב ורע. ואם היה אדם הראשון טועם באכילה הראשונה מעץ החיים היה מרגיש בכל האכילות טעם עץ החיים שהוא תורה... וכשאכל מעץ הדעת אז הרגיש בכל האכילות מכל המינים עץ הדעת טוב ורע וזה שורש הקלקול, וכשמתקן שיהיה האכילה בקדושה אז ממילא שומר כל המצוות וניצול מקטרוג יצר הרע.

This class was prepared by Rabbi David Sedley
and edited by the Morasha Curriculum Team