

### **My Kosher Diet Experience**

For my essay I chose to do the spiritual aid of kosher eating. I chose this one because since I work six days a week I don't feel I could have completed the Sabbath spiritual aid completely and I already pray consistently and wanted to challenge myself. When living in a small town (Clovis) primarily the thing you can do is to go out and eat. This is what I and my husband usually do so I found it a particularly personal challenge to try not to eat things that I typically would. For my essay I thought of three main points I wanted to present about Kosher or clean eating. What the spiritual aid is used for and how to go about trying to use it, my personal experience with the spiritual aid, and what I learned and applied to my own spiritual life as a result.

My first thought of kosher eating that I wanted to consider was why do the Jewish people put themselves through restricting their diet and to what purpose and what exactly does kosher eating permit and forbid? According to the Religion Facts site, Jews are only allowed to eat animals that chews their cud and have cloven hooves. This includes beef, sheep, goats and deer. Pork, camels and rabbits may not be eaten. Other kosher items they may eat are chicken, turkey, quail, salmon, tuna, cod (fish with fins and scales), wine made under Jewish supervision, and soft cheese or kosher cheese (separately). Some foods they cannot eat are eagle, hawk, vultures (birds of prey), crab, lobster, octopus, clam, meat with dairy (cheeseburger), any other wine or hard cheese. (<http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/practices/kosher.htm>).

In the Pentateuch it says "you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" and it is said three times. The Jewish people took this to mean that they may not eat meat and milk dishes together. Cheeseburgers, chicken cordon bleu, and Wiener Schnitzel are just a few examples of what this applies to. You must even wait to drink milk after you have eaten meat. Also, on the website I learned that most food that is prepared kosher will have a K with a circle around it meaning that it was prepared the correct way. All animals must be drained of blood and must be killed with as little pain as possible, so Jewish people are also not allowed to hunt. The website also says that most Jewish households have two sets of cookware, one for meat and one for dairy, so that the two will never be mixed.

To me my first question was why? I have never been one to do something without an explanation, so I was curious to find out more about why the Jewish people decided to maintain this ritual. For the most part the article I read said that the Jewish people deny themselves anything not kosher because basically God told them not to, and because they are holy, and God has set them apart from the rest of the world. The article also said that many Jewish people have certain speculations about why they have kept the tradition; for example it could have been a primitive health regulation in a time when it was so easy to catch something from your food. Another speculation is that there was a reverence for animal life, it cultivates self-control, or to set the Jewish people apart from others. Whatever their reasons, after learning more about kosher eating I was ready to start my experience.

The first day of going Kosher I was anticipating and excited about it. I have always been a simple eater and didn't think that I would have a problem finding the items I was looking for. I first went to Wal-Mart thinking that they would have a Jewish food section just like all the others (Mexican food, Thai food, Asian food, etc.) and found that they don't have any. I couldn't find anything with the K on it or anything that said kosher except for pickles. I looked at the juice aisle and found the same problem. After looking in the meat section I knew I would have to go somewhere else to find what I was looking for. I next went to an Albertson's store and asked if they had a kosher section and they brought me to the pickle aisle and pointed out that some of the pickles were kosher. When I asked if they had any more kosher food they said they had a small amount of kosher beef. I grabbed some steaks and called it good. For the rest of the food I couldn't find anything else that said kosher so I just decided to try and go without the food that was not named kosher.

I decided to do the whole week kosher instead of just the three days so that I could get the full experience and not waste money on groceries. The first couple of nights we just had the kosher beef with no cheese or any other type of meat. Since I couldn't find any poultry labeled kosher we just went without. I found the whole experience very frustrating and decided that being Jewish in a town like Clovis would not be very easy. All in all I didn't feel that this experience brought me any closer to God - I was just left with a huge frustration. What I thought would be a very simple change of diet turned out to be a nightmare because I couldn't tell if the food was actually kosher or not. It did get me thinking about how difficult it would be to restrict myself to only these foods when I wasn't even sure that I should be buying the items I was allowed. After reading the first article I thought that the food would be easily identifiable with a K or labeled across the top KOSHER but my ideas were obviously wrong. As far as the actual eating of the food I did find, I didn't have a hard time adjusting to any of the restrictions but I only did it for a week. We prepared the food the kosher way and even went as far as preparing a milk and meat dish so we would have to use separate pots and pans and plates. We made steak with macaroni and cheese and cooked and ate the food separately once the food had been cooked<sup>1</sup>. I love cheeseburgers so I would inevitably have to have one.

I have learned through this experience that it takes a lot of self-control not to just grab what is easiest and convenient. I have a whole lot more respect for people that have had to eat this way from birth, and undoubtedly it would be made more difficult without the modern convenience of a grocery store. I think that I don't feel a whole lot different in my relationship with God since by birth and religion I am not Jewish and know that I am not one of his "special" flock, so restricting me to a diet because God demanded it of his people went right over my head. To have the true experience of doing a Jewish spiritual aid, in my mind, would require the aspect of feeling like the chosen few who classify themselves in that group. Without that feeling I don't know that there is much to learn from the whole experience except how difficult it would be to keep to the dietary laws while amongst non-Jewish people.

All in all I am glad that I had the experience that I did. I did learn a little about the difficulties having an all kosher diet would pose. I don't think that I became any closer to God because of it but I did think about what it would feel like if I felt the need to do something only because God told me to. Through looking at what the restrictions are, my personal experience with kosher food and what I learned I feel that it was a challenge worth accepting.

#### **References**

- Author Unknown, Keeping Kosher: Jewish Dietary Laws: retrieved 8 February 2013 from <http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/practices/kosher.htm>

<sup>1</sup> One is supposed to wait several hours before eating meat after dairy foods. So one has milk and cheese for breakfast, and meat for dinner. Fruit, veggies, bread, pasta and eggs can be eaten at any time.