

## REL 402 - Judaism - eating kosher

I began this assignment with the thought that eating kosher would be easy. I wanted a fun and entertaining way to experience an aspect of the Jewish religion for three days, but I got more than that. During this time, I learned that eating kosher is not easy, and there is much more to it than abstaining from pork and shellfish. I gained an enormous amount of respect for the Jews who adhere strictly to kosher eating, and I have gained a greater understanding of the Jewish faith.

I started my journey by researching what eating kosher actually was. My mind was blown by all the rules and regulations that are apart of the kosher diet. The first thing I learned was that "Kashrut is a set of biblical dietary restrictions" that Jews abide by, and the term kosher "describes food that meets these standards" (Rich). The Kashrut gives very specific instructions about what a Jew may or may not eat. If I listed every single law this essay would be extremely long, so I will just touch on the main laws.

In the majority of my Internet resources, the laws regarding meat were the first to be addressed. Kashrut law states that Jews may eat meat from "any animal that has cloven hooves and chews its cud" (Rich). The animal must meet both qualifications to be considered kosher. When it comes to poultry, "birds of prey or scavengers" are not kosher (Rich). "Goose, duck, chicken, and turkey" are all considered kosher ("What Does Kosher..."). These animals and birds may only be classified as kosher if they are slaughtered in the proper way. If an animal is to be certified kosher, it must be slaughtered by a "Schochet, a ritual slaughterer" ("What Does Kosher..."). These men know the extensive laws, rules and regulations that go into the very precise method of slaughtering these animals and fowl.

For milk and dairy products to be considered kosher, they "must derive from kosher animals" ("What Does Kosher..."). This law is not that simple though. Dairy or milk products "may not contain non-kosher additives, and they may not include meat products or derivatives (for example, many types of cheese are manufactured with animal fats)" ("What Does Kosher..."). If there are any additives, it is best to consider the product as non-kosher and dispose of it.

This brings me to the first law that shocked me. In order to eat kosher, you may not eat meat before dairy. I was literally speechless when I read this. I was sure I would not be able to eat anything delicious for the next three days because all of my most favorite foods combine dairy and meat. I read on and my fears were eased, slightly. After the consumption of meat, "one must wait one, three, or six hours – depending on one's custom - before eating dairy," but "after dairy consumption, no interval is required before meat may be eaten" ("What Does Kosher..."). I was able to start breathing again after reading this. I did not have to give up all dairy products, just dairy after meat. I learned that this rule is in place because Jews believe that "fatty residues and meat particles tend to cling to the mouth" (Rich).

At this point in my research, I began to get worried. I was very apprehensive about the rest of the dietary restrictions, but they turned out to be very easy to follow. Insects may be consumed but only "a few are specifically permitted" (Rich). I did not plan on eating insects, but it was interesting to know that if it came down to it, I was good to go on a few of them. I was pleased to read that I could eat any fish that had "fins and scales" (Rich). I am not a fan of shellfish so the prohibition of that did not affect me. I learned that "all fruits and vegetables are kosher" provided there are no bugs in them (Rich). The only restrictions on fruits were in regards to grapes. Any beverages made with grapes "may only be drunk if the grapes come from a kosher winery, prepared under strict Rabbinical Supervision" ("What Does Kosher..."). I was crushed (no pun intended). I love having a good glass of wine with dinner, but I could not be sure that my wine was kosher so I did without.

I learned that "utensils (pots, pans, plates, flatware, etc.) must also be kosher" (Rich). If a Jewish family follows kosher laws strictly, they must own a kosher and non-kosher set of everything, and the two sets may not be mixed. All meat items must be prepared separately from dairy because "Kosher status can be transmitted from the food to the utensil or from the utensil to the food only in the presence of heat" (Rich). I did my best to follow this portion of the law. I could not afford to purchase two sets of everything, so I just resorted to washing the items in between uses.

After reading about all of the laws, I was totally amazed, and my curiosity was peaked. I wanted to know where the Kashrut laws originated from and why the Jewish people chose to follow these restrictive food and beverage regulations. Jews follow these laws because "kosher laws were commanded by G-d to the Children of Israel in the Sinai desert" ("What is..."). They believe that "holiness is not confined to holy places and times outside the everyday; rather, life in its totality is a sacred endeavor" ("What is..."). It is more to them than just a series of laws. Eating kosher is a religious and a spiritual experience.

I admire the Jewish people's dedication to the Kashrut. In my three-day attempt at eating kosher, I learned that it is a process that requires thought, planning, perseverance and willpower. I had to plan all my meals in advance to be sure I was consuming dairy before meat and not using the same utensils for each. I am not the only person living in my household, so I had to let my family know that our meals were going to be altered for three days. The reactions that I

received, during the three days, were in the form of gripes and complaints about why things were changing, pressure not to follow those “stupid rules,” and I even had to fight off my own temptations.

I did really well up until night two. I finished dinner and then watched my family proceed to dig into some delicious ice cream. I knew I had just consumed meat so ice cream was out of the question. I began to search for something sweet. I began to research every candy brand we had on the Internet to see if it was kosher, and I learned that Skittles, Starbursts and Lifesavers are not kosher due to the gelatin used in their manufacture. I moved on to dark chocolate which I was sure would be kosher. Unfortunately, I learned that the manufacture of the cocoa butter, used in both bars, could not be given guaranteed kosher status. I could feel myself reaching my breaking point, but then I saw the bananas sitting in our banana hammock on the counter. I remembered that fruit was kosher. I peeled the banana and quickly bit into it. I do not think I have ever had a banana that tasted more delicious and sweet in my life. I was proud of myself for not giving in to temptation, and I learned that I have much more willpower than I ever thought.

My three-day kosher journey was an educational and eye-opening experience. I learned what it means to eat kosher and why the Jewish people devote themselves to this practice so diligently. I also gained a deeper respect and appreciation for those that follow the Kashrut. I learned that I have the willpower and determination to follow through with my goals, even when I am being pressured not to. I know that I will not be keeping the Kashrut laws permanently, but this experience and my newly gained knowledge about the Jewish people will stick with me for a lifetime. I enjoyed my kosher journey, and I look forward to the next assignment on my spiritual odyssey.

#### Works Cited

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