

The Double-Edged Sword

By **Rabbi Jack Goldman**
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Kashruth in America is a double-edged sword, but let's think of it as two sides of a coin. On the one side, we have the kosher consumer, the Jewish housewife, entering the market place with a shopping list and the hope — some would even say a presumption — that everything she is going to buy is kosher. On the shelves, she sees a large variety of kosher emblems. Some, she is very familiar with, others seem strange to her. Very often, I'm sure, she has doubts: Is this symbol reliable? Is this product kosher without a kosher emblem? She wishes the rabbi were there in the supermarket with her, but he's not. She reads the list of ingredients, but some of the listed items are unfamiliar. Does she muse, "When in doubt, leave it out?" Or does she say, "I'll take a chance!" Or, in a more aggressive mood, does she strike out with "What can be treife in a bagel, a slice of bread, a can of chick peas?"

One of the largest problems the well-intentioned consumer faces is the lack of updated information on kashruth. The world of kashruth is in constant flux. New products appear on the market every day, new kosher certifying agencies appear on the horizon and, along with the old ones, unscrupulous food manufacturers are constantly making use of kosher emblems without permission, products that are dairy are labeled "Pareve," etc. It becomes a gargantuan task to separate the wheat from the chaff, in other words, to keep a completely 100 percent kosher home. How can we mitigate our losses? Only by spreading more knowledge of kashruth, only by making it a key issue in Jewish life, only by stressing the importance of kashruth in the home in every sermon delivered from the pulpit, in every issue of every synagogue bulletin, only by having kashruth workshops in the synagogue at least twice a year: one right after Yom Kippur (to capture the spirit of renewed interest in Jewish living generated by the High Holy Days), and one just before Passover (when many Jewish housewives become suddenly more keenly aware of the care one must give to kashruth in the home).

The ancient Romans were very sharp in the market place. They used to warn every shopper, "Caveat emptor!" "Let the buyer beware!" Nothing about kashruth may be taken for granted. Any food that has been processed in some way, any food that has been changed from the way it appears in nature requires rabbinical supervision, and it should have a reliable kosher emblem.

An ordinary can of peas, for example, may be kosher, if there's nothing in the can but peas and water. If we're dealing with other canned vegetables, such as chick peas (garbanzos), we're in another ballpark. These are very hard. In order to be edible, they must be cooked in a kettle. The question now arises behind the scenes: what else was cooked in that kettle? Was it, perhaps, a chicken soup or a clam chowder?

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Even a bottle of soda can no longer be trusted! Some soft drinks contain non-kosher wine, glycerines, or flavors which may be of animal origin, thus rendering them unfit for the kosher table. Many of the red flavored sodas are colored with "grape skin derivative" which is a barrel of non-kosher wine, or carmine, which is the blood of certain small bugs that are squeezed to death for their "juice."

Here's where the local rabbi enters the scene. Part of his professional responsibility is to be on top of everything in the kosher food industry. He must apprise himself of the latest developments and pass them on to his kashruth-observant congregation.

We need more kosher food expos, more emphasis on all phases of Jewish observance, more competent leaders in our communities because one mitzvah leads to another, as we read in the Ethics of the Fathers. Observance of kashruth leads to observance of the Sabbath; observance of the Sabbath leads to honoring the laws of Jewish family purity. This will stem the tide of intermarriage and assimilation and bring us to the advent of the Messiah!

Friday, June 17, 1988

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