

**How Do We Keep Kashrut Relevant?**  
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I was recently posed this question:

*How do we keep kashrut holy, yet allow it to evolve with the times?*

First we need to address the premise of the question, does *kashrut* need to evolve with the times? Adam and Eve first lived in the Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden) which means literally a “garden in time.” Though they were expelled the building of the Tabernacle detailed in Exodus clearly serves as a tool for humanity to rectify the sin of Adam and Eve and return us to that “Eden like” state. In other words, from a theological view, it is not our job to make God’s commands evolve with the times but rather to bring our modern sensibilities in line with God’s commands so that we return the world to its “Eden like” and mend our relationship with God. This is not to say that Jewish practice cannot be influenced for the better by modernity as it often has.

In fact, the Jewish legal system does allow for change from within the system. Perhaps the most famous case is *Pruzbul*, in which Hillel; in order to ensure that financial loans would be made available found a loophole which allowed debates to be collected even after the sabbatical year. Hillel’s innovation was a necessary economic stimulant that solved the problem which had been caused by lenders refusal to loan money as the sabbatical year approached for fear they would not be paid back. Furthermore, the rabbis instituted the “Sale of Hametz” before Passover as a way of easing the financial burden that observing the holiday had imposed. Before this loophole was developed, people would simple have to throw away all of their Hametz before Passover. Now it can be sold and bought back thus averting monetary loss.

Even today leniencies are relied upon. Though original Jewish law required Jewish supervision of milk to ensure that the milk was coming from a kosher animal, today various rabbinic authorities

find the supervision of the USDA to be sufficient. This leniency makes eat much easier to find kosher dairy products at a reduced price.

It is also important to remember that *kashrut* is not simply the science of determining as to whether something is or is not *kosher*, its purpose is far loftier than that. As eluded to above, God's commands serve to help us return ourselves to an "Eden like" by state narrowing the gap between heaven and humanity, therefore, it is important not to lose the forest in the trees as we get involved in the technicalities as to what makes something *kosher* or not.

After a major *kashrut* scandal broke which exposed the unethical practices of a kosher food producer a prominent rabbi declared that ethics are to *kashrut* as poetry is to hygiene. In other words, they have *kashrut* and ethics have nothing to do with each other. This is an example of missing the big picture. The Talmud teaches that the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* (commandment) made possible by a transgression is invalid. For example, one cannot fulfill the *mitzvah* of the *lulav* with a *lulav* he stole. Likewise, violations of Jewish law (which also requires us to obey the secular law of the land) should not be committed in order to produce "*kosher*" food. To do so undermines our mission.

The great bible commentator, Rashi, explains that God's begins the Torah with the creation story to emphasize that he owns the entire world and he can parcel out land to whom he chooses to. In fact, God commands the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites and establish their own society in its place. But this is not an act of random favoritism on the part of God. Israel is given the land but warned not to emulate the practices of the wicked Canaanites such as child sacrifice. Israel is being given the land in order to build a more just, more "Eden like" society. Jewish law must serve as our road map back to Eden and not be viewed as a mere set of technical instructions.

Now that we have looked at the big picture lest remind ourselves that God's laws are not to be abrogated because they appear to some to be antiquated and keep us from fully intergrading ourselves into the mainstream of society. In fact, it has been my experience that non-Jews tend to be very respectful and impressed with Jews who observe *kashrut*. Laws such as *kashrut*

have helped us to preserve our identity, and it is certainly not an accident that the Jews of the ancient world that sought to radically Hellenize Judaism endeavored unsuccessfully to abolish *kashrut*. But we also must remember the big picture, *kashrut* and the observance of other commandments should help us to elevate ourselves and the world.