

Attitudes, Beliefs & Values Shaping Jewish Practices¹

Jewish values that underpin *Kashrut* – כשרות -- Ethical, Mindful Eating:

Avadim hayinu bemitzraim -- עבדים היינו במיצריים

We were slaves in Egypt [Deut. 6:21]: Having experienced physical and spiritual degradation, Jews believe that this should create empathy with all who are downtrodden, victimized or in pain, and implies the obligation of support for them. “You shall not oppress a stranger.” (Ex.22:21)

Bal tash-heet -- בל תשחית

Avoiding waste: Material resources are limited, and we have the responsibility to guard against overconsumption and needless waste. A person may not wantonly destroy or pollute anything that may be of use to another—either practically or simply for its beauty. Bal Tash-heet reflects gratitude for what we have and appreciation for the needs of all. We are the caregivers of God’s creation.

B’riyut -- בריאות

Health & wellness: Jewish tradition values the body and good health and supports measures to protect them. Taking pleasure in the senses and avoiding destructive behavior reflect this value, as does the pursuit of spiritual and emotional health.

Brit -- ברית

Covenant: The parties in a relationship have obligations to each other. Jewish tradition describes our covenant with God, with other members of the Jewish community, with all humanity, and with the natural world.

Darchei Shalom -- דרכי שלום

Paths of peace: Jewish tradition asks us to utilize emotional, political and financial resources in ways that create harmony – at home, in our local and international communities. We work to decrease tension between nations, individuals and ethnic and religious groups.

D’veykut -- דביקות

Connection to God: Awareness of the presence of the Divine in our lives brings the knowledge that our lives are a precious gift. We can be uplifted by living in harmony with the rhythms of the universe and with awareness of God’s presence in our lives. That presence can be sensed both in everyday (mundane) actions and those intended to be holy/sacred – when we pay attention.

Emet -- אמת

Truth and integrity: Speaking truth to oneself and others allows us to create lives and communities characterized by trust, cooperation and mutuality. Living a life guided by the pursuit of truth and integrity removes stumbling blocks to spirituality and loving relationships.

Haganat Hateva -- הגנת הטבע

Protection of Nature: We are both the beneficiaries of the bounties of nature and the stewards of the natural world. As our power to damage the earth’s ecology grows, our ability

¹ Adapted from *A Guide to Jewish Practice, Kashrut, the Jewish Dietary Laws*, by Rabbi David A. Teutsch, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, Wyncote, PA, Second Edition, 2003.

to benefit from Creation – and perhaps even human survival – depend upon the effectiveness of our stewardship.

Hesed -- חסד

Covenanted caring: Loving-kindness in action does not always flow from feelings. Hesed is the caring we bring to members of our communities and our families when they need it simply because we share the bonds of interpersonal connection. Caring for each other is part of what makes us fully human.

Hodaya -- הודאה

Gratitude: Our lives are a gift. We can never fully earn our opportunities for experiencing life, love, beauty, growth or joy. No matter how much we give, we can never give as much as we have received. Savoring each of these gifts means not living with a bloated sense of entitlement, but instead living a life charged with meaning, gratitude and generosity.

Kavanah -- כונה

Intention: Bringing full attention to our thoughts, actions and words increases the fullness with which we live. Mindfulness guides us not only in prayer but with bringing purpose, meaning and depth to all our human actions.

Kedushah -- קדושה

Holiness: Leviticus teaches: “You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.” Of all the creatures of the world, humans can consciously strive for holiness, create holiness through our words and actions, experience holy moments, seasons and places, putting us more fully in touch with the Divine within us and the Divine in the world. *Kedusha* has a root meaning of separate, dedicated, or set apart.

Kehilah -- קהילה

Commitment to Community: According to Jewish tradition, human beings can only fulfill themselves fully in relationship. Community is the locus of our relationships, and Judaism can only be fully experienced in the midst of community. Jews strive to create communities that manifest justice, holiness and peace.

K'lal Yisrael -- כלל ישראל

Unity and survival of the Jewish people: Despite our internal differences, the Jews are one people with a shared history. We are responsible for each other regardless of differences in ideology and practice. Since the days of Abraham and Sarah we have needed each other not only for our own survival but to strengthen each other to work to make the world a better place.

Ladonay ha'aretz umelo'o -- ליהוה הארץ ומלואה

“The earth and all that is in it belong to God.” (Ps.24:1): Human beings do not ultimately own what is theirs in the world; it is on loan to us and we are responsible for doing with it what we believe its owner would will. This value is the basis of Jewish environmentalism and social ethics.

Limud Torah -- לימוד תורה

Jewish learning: Ours is a textual tradition. We study our texts not only as an intellectual resource but as a stimulus for creativity and an opportunity for moral growth. Text study can create bonds between people who study together, be a spiritual experience and a source of emotional strength. Study is part of Jewish worship. Our texts begin with Torah and

expand to rabbinic texts (Talmud, Midrash), philosophy, mystical texts, legal codes, contemporary authors of prose, fiction, poetry.

Mitzvah -- מצוה

Obligation: Jewish tradition teaches that God gave us 613 laws to follow in the Torah. Those laws have been interpreted, adapted and changed over time. Reform Judaism grants the individual with the autonomy to obligate him/herself to those mitzvot that bring Jewish meaning, community, commitment, holiness and covenantal connection into life. A community living in harmony and pursuing the Divine helps its members to discover the transformative power that comes from honoring obligations. Mitzvot serve as pathways to connect us to our community and our people, to our highest values, to humanity and to God.

Physical pleasures: Our bodies are a gift. We demonstrate our appreciation of that gift by taking pleasure in all our senses. According to one Midrash, we will be held accountable for every permitted physical pleasure we pass up – a wonderful meal, a comfortable bed, a walk in a forest, a loving hug. The *Birchot nehenin*--נהנין--בירכות, are a large group of blessings that mark these pleasures.

Shalshet Hakabalah--שלשלת הקבלה

Preserving the chain of tradition: The oral and written traditions of the Jewish people stretch back through the millennia. Our inheritance comes from this unbroken chain of living, evolving tradition. We are the current link in the chain, preserving the extraordinary richness we have inherited and adding our own experience and insight so that we leave a powerful legacy for subsequent generations.

Shmirat Haguf -- שמירת הגוף

Protecting the body: Our bodies are key to all we can do in the world – and they are a gift to us. Taking care of them allows us to experience and accomplish all else that is important in our lives, to honor that we are created in God's image.

Simcha--שמחה

Joy and Celebration: Joyously marking Shabbat, holidays and lifecycle milestones with friends and family, food, drink and music helps us appreciate what we have, acknowledge transitions in our lives, and make the most of life. Ps. 100:2 proclaims: "Serve God in joy!"

Tikkun Olam -- תיקון עולם

Improving the world: Judaism has always had a messianic vision of a world redeemed, a world characterized by justice, sufficiency, harmony and peace. In Pirke Avot (2:16) we learn: "We cannot expect to complete the task of bringing the world to that ultimate redemption, but we are not at liberty to neglect the task." On the interpersonal, political and environmental levels, there is an enormous amount to be done, and each good thing we do makes a difference.

Tza'ar ba'alei chayim -- צער בעלי חיים

Prevention of pain to animals: Kindness to animals as God's creatures should shape our interactions with them. This applies both to avoiding cruelty and to acting kindly.

Tzedek -- צדק

Social justice: From Biblical times through the present Jews have had a tradition of resisting oppression. To ensure just treatment means preserving human dignity and meeting

basic human needs, including education, dignified work, food, clothing and shelter. We live in a just society only when every one of its members is treated justly. Accomplishing that is a shared challenge. Providing funds and assistance for that purpose is the act of *tzedakah*.

Yirat Shamayim --יראת שמים

Awe of God: When we recognize the Power that unifies the diversity and complexity of the world, the Source of life, spirituality and ethics, we experience awe and reverence. Humbled by our smallness, we are inspired to reach higher live better, more just and more meaningful lives.

Kashrut Overview

Of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah, 15 pertain to dietary regulations. These can be divided into three categories: permitted and forbidden foods, proper slaughtering of meat and fowl, and separation of milk and meat. "*Kosher*" is both a noun and a verb: the noun refers to food that can be eaten in accordance with Jewish dietary regulations and the verb means to make something *kosher* and is used with regard to food itself or to dishes and utensils. Any food that is not *kosher* is regarded as *trayf*. *Trayf* originally referred to meat that had been torn from an animal, but it has come to mean anything not kosher.

With regard to land animals, any animal that has true hooves which are cloven and that chews the cud is permitted (Lev. 11:3). Specifically prohibited are the camel, hare, and daman, because they have no true hooves, and the swine because it does not chew its cud. (Deut. 14:7-8)

Anything that lives in water that has both fins and scales is permitted (Lev. 11:9). Shellfish or non-scaled fish such as shark and whale are not kosher.

With regard to fowl, the Torah says, "You may eat any clean bird." (Deut. 14:11), but does not specify any characteristics a bird must possess to be considered clean. Instead, the text lists more than 20 birds that are prohibited. The Talmud explains that "any bird that seizes its prey in its claws is unclean, and any that has an extra toe, a crop and a gizzard that can be peeled is clean." (Chullin 59a) Most domestic birds may be eaten; most wild birds and birds of prey may not. In addition, eggs from non-kosher birds are not kosher, while eggs from kosher birds are kosher. However, if the egg contains a blood spot, it may not be eaten because of the prohibition against eating blood. Most insects are forbidden.

Animals and fowl that are permitted to be eaten must be slaughtered in the proper manner in order to be kosher. The Torah specifically prohibits eating the flesh of an animal that has died naturally (Deut. 14:21) or flesh that has been torn away from the animal (Ex. 22:30) Game taken through hunting is prohibited. The term for proper slaughtering of animals is *shechitah*; the ritual slaughterer is the *schochet*.

The Torah does not specify how animals or fowl are to be slaughtered. But rabbinic law stated: "just as the consecrated offerings must be killed in the prescribed manner, so animals killed for food must be killed in that manner."

In a proper *shechitah*, the knife must be specially prepared and its blade examined to be certain it does not contain nicks or other irregularities. "The method consists of cutting the throat with a single, swift and uninterrupted horizontal sweep of the knife in such a way as to sever the trachea, esophagus, carotid arteries and jugular vein." The process "is designed to cause the animal the least amount of pain, to bring about instant death, and to remove as much blood as possible." (The Jewish Dietary Laws). After the animal has been killed the Shochet inspects certain of its internal organs to be sure that they are free of diseases or defects that would make the animal *treyf*. "Glatt" (smooth) indicates that meat is from an animal whose lungs have been found free of all adhesions. The phrase "Glatt Kosher" is often used to mean unquestionably kosher. *Nikkur* (the special cutting and butchering procedures) is the process of removing many blood vessels, nerves, and lobes of fat which are forbidden. Not

all parts of the animal are kosher, even if they come from a permissible animal. For example, the sciatic nerve and portions of fat must be removed to render kosher the hindquarters or kosher animals. In order to remove as much of the blood as possible, the meat from the animal must be soaked and salted.

The Torah says: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." (Ex. 23:19, 24:26, Deut. 14:21). Since this command is repeated three times, the Rabbis derived three prohibitions from it: not cooking the two together, not eating the two together, and not deriving benefit from cooking the two together. If meat (or fowl which is considered meat) is to be eaten at a meal, then nothing with milk or a milk product may be eaten (and vice versa). Food that is pareve (neither meat nor milk) may be eaten with either. It is traditional to have separate dishes, utensils and pots for each and to wait a certain length of time between eating meat and dairy – some say 6 hours, some 3, some one hour)