

Congregation B'nai Chaim Kashrut Guidelines

Introduction

Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods we can and cannot eat and how these foods must be prepared and eaten. “Kashrut” comes from the Hebrew root *Kaf-Shin-Reish*, meaning fit, proper or correct. It is the same root as the more commonly known word “kosher,” which describes food that meets these standards.

On an unofficial level, our congregation has been practicing Reform kashrut since its foundation. This document, written by the Ritual Committee, is only intended to reinforce Kashrut principles and to make it easier for everyone to understand such principles by clarifying what foods may or may not be brought to B'nai Chaim functions.

Why Kashrut?

To the best of our modern scientific knowledge, health or environment does not explain the prohibitions of keeping kosher. Jews observe the laws because the *Torah* says so. The *Torah* does not specify any reason for these laws. Why show our obedience to G-d by following these laws even though we do not know the reason? In his book, *To Be a Jew*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin suggests that the dietary laws are designed as a call to holiness. The ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, pure and defiled, the sacred and the profane, is very important in Judaism. Imposing rules on what you can and cannot eat ingrains that kind of self-control, requiring us to learn to control even our most basic, primal instincts.

Reasoning for Kashrut Guidelines

While Reform Judaism leaves it to the individual to decide whether or not to observe the kashrut laws, many Reform Jews who observe the dietary laws, totally or in part, do so because for them,

- a. it adds to their personal expression of Judaism with meals serving as reminders of Jewish ideals and holiness.
- b. it provides an additional link with other Jews and a link to history.
- c. it encourages ethical discipline.
- d. it allows everyone in our congregation and guests to participate in all congregational events and it strengthens our sense of community.

A large number of Reform Jews observe some modified form of the dietary laws by abstaining from the forbidden foods and/or the mixing of meat/poultry and dairy products.

For these reasons, we are following this same expression of Judaism for meals/any activity involving food inside the premises of B'nai Chaim or at any other functions

sponsored by the congregation.¹ Our goals are both to create a common ground that will be inclusive of and welcoming to any of our congregants and guests, and to encourage our members' spiritual growth by practicing the *mitzvah* (commandment) of kashrut observance, even if only for a short time.

It is important to note that:

a. while we strive to abide by Reform Jewish dietary laws, we understand that kashrut concepts can be difficult to grasp. The main thing is that, in the spirit of community and out of respect for our heritage, everyone make EVERY EFFORT to conform to the guidelines outlined in this document.

b. this policy is NOT intended to require congregants to observe the dietary laws in their daily lives outside of the temple. While the congregation encourages each member to educate himself or herself about kashrut (and other traditional Jewish practices as well) so as to be able to make an informed decision, the choice of whether—and to what extent—to observe the dietary laws outside of temple functions is the individual congregant's choice alone.

B'nai Chaim Practice

It shall be B'nai Chaim's practice to observe "Kosher style" with respect to food provided at all congregational functions (whether or not conducted in the temple) and with respect to food brought by a member for his or her own consumption or to share with others. Meals will be designated as either MEAT/poultry/fish or DAIRY/fish.

B'nai Chaim's kitchen is not kosher in the traditional sense. Our kitchen will not contain separate dishes, implements, or serving platters designated specifically for meat or dairy meals. In an effort to recognize our Jewish heritage and the role that kashrut has played in our history, some element of kashrut will be observed on the temple's premises.

The following dietary rules should pertain to all foods served at congregational functions or brought into the temple.

1. Permitted Foods²

Some foods (including all fruits, vegetables, permitted fish³, and eggs) are considered *pareve*, meaning that they are neutral (neither meat/poultry nor dairy) and may therefore be part of either a dairy or a meat/poultry meal.⁴

¹ This includes events like Shabbat in the Park and Wine and Dine. However, regarding B'nai Mitzvah/wedding meals taking place outside of the B'nai Chaim premises and congregational meals taking place at restaurants the degree of kashrut observance is at the discretion of the families and individuals involved.

² Some of these are not permitted during Passover – see section 5.

³ See below.

Meat from cud-chewing animals with cloven hooves (most commonly, beef, veal and lamb) is permitted. Meat from poultry (i.e. chicken, turkey, duck, and geese) is permitted.

Fish that have both fins and scales are permitted. The list of permitted fish can be found at: <http://www.kashrut.com/articles/fish/> (see relevant section).

2. Prohibited Foods⁵

Meat from animals that do not chew the cud and/or do not have cloven hooves. Therefore, pork and pork products are not allowed. Therefore, foods such as lard, pepperoni, pork bacon, ham, prosciutto, pork salami, and pork sausage, etc. are not permitted. As a pork product, gelatin is not permitted.⁶

Fish that do not have both fins and scales are prohibited. Therefore, shrimp, lobster, catfish, scallops, prawns, calamari and eel, etc. are not permitted. The list of prohibited fish can be found at: <http://www.kashrut.com/articles/fish/> (see relevant section).

3. Mixing of Dairy and Meat/Poultry Foods

No dairy products (such as butter, milk, cream and cheese) or products containing dairy ingredients should be brought when meat/poultry is being served and/or are available.⁷

No meat/poultry foods or products containing meat/poultry ingredients⁸ should be brought when dairy foods are being served and/or are available, as a symbol of our adherence to dietary observance.⁹

Any *pareve* foods may be served with meat/poultry/products containing meat/poultry. Any *pareve* foods may be served with dairy foods/products containing dairy ingredients.

⁴ Please note: Some *pareve* foods are not allowed during Passover – see section entitled ‘Prohibited Foods During the Week of Passover’.

⁵ For Passover restrictions, see section 5.

⁶ Gelatin, which is most commonly made of pig bones, is present in products such as fruit snacks, Jello, candy, marshmallows, rice bars, pies/tarts, and cakes, including cheese cakes. Gelatin labeled as ‘kosher’ or ‘bovine’ is fine. Alternatives to gelatin include jelly and fruit pectin.

⁷ Margarine/mayonnaise/dressing may be part of a meat/poultry meal provided they are *pareve* / they do not contain anything dairy. For baking without regular milk, soy/rice/almond milks can be good substitutes.

⁸ For example, chicken/beef broth/stock/bacon in dip mixes, soups and dressings.

4. Permitted Foods During the Week of Passover

Pareve foods containing no *chametz*¹⁰ are allowed.

Dairy foods, such as butter, milk, cream and cheese containing no *chametz* (provided the meal or the like does not involve meat/poultry) are allowed.

Permitted meat/poultry products (provided the meal or the like does not involve anything dairy) containing no *chametz* are allowed.

There also exist packaged foods that are labeled as kosher for Passover. Those can come in handy when it comes to baked desserts in particular!

5. Prohibited Foods During the Week of Passover

Chametz is leavened bread and anything made with wheat, rye, barley, oat or spelt, which has not been supervised to ensure that it has not leavened (leaven products such as yeast and baking powder/soda are prohibited). Therefore, foods such as regular bread, crackers, pasta, pizza, cookies and cakes are forbidden.

Ethical Kashrut

Many congregations across the country are beginning to address this subject. Kashrut offers the opportunity to behave ethically and the additional opportunity to integrate ecological concerns. Below are the initiatives that our congregation has taken.

1. When we serve on disposable products, we will make every effort to use products that are recyclable and/or made from recycled products.
2. Our congregational meals will be accompanied by an opportunity to remember the poor and the hungry, by donating to the Weinberg food pantry and/or to Mazon.
3. When planning meat/poultry menus, committees/organizers will make sure dairy free vegetarian and dairy free fish dishes are available to accommodate people who are unable to eat the meat/poultry dishes.

When planning dairy menus, committees/organizers will make sure a *pareve* and gluten free option is available for those who do not eat dairy or gluten food.

4. Communal meals will always be preceded and/or followed by a communal opportunity to give thanks for the food on the table. This may be the traditional *HaMotzi* and/or *Birkat HaMazon*, or a creative liturgical expression of thanks.

The B'nai Chaim Ritual Committee, April 8, 2013

Credit: Union for Reform Judaism

¹⁰ See section 5.