

הקשר היהודי שלך

Your Jewish Connection

Brought to you by the Lifelong Learning Committee – *Written by Linda S Trapasso*

The Jewish Diet

This topic came to me as we were approaching Pesach. This is a holiday where we change our way of eating, stop eating bread and associated foods, and eat matzah.

Have you noticed that most Jewish holidays are about food? We mark the fall harvest with Sukkot, and the spring harvest is marked by Pesach and Shavuot. We enjoy fried foods at Chanukkah. Food is important – without it, many things fail, such as reproduction. Food affects survival.

Let me share this description of the Jewish dietary laws:



“It is by no mere coincidence that our deepest and most profound religious attachments are to celebrations that center on eating. The Seder remains the most popular Jewish event in North America. Sharing food goes back to the earliest memories of family and community.

“All cultures regulate eating. Some, like the Anglo-Saxon, do so informally, without explicit legislation; Anglo-Saxons simply do not eat dogs, cats, or horses. Others, like Jews, do it formally with much fanfare and with very specific laws in sacred documents.

“But why these prohibitions?

“All cultures view certain foods as dangerous. The dangers may come from a variety of circumstances. The food may belong to the gods and not to humans. It may be prepared

in the wrong way. It maybe eaten at the



wrong time. It may be restricted to social groups other than your own.

“In Jewish culture, which was a meat eating culture, the danger lay in blood. Blood was a food that belonged to G-d alone. To drink blood was to steal the food of G-d and to risk the punishment that would almost certainly ensue. Blood-eating carnivorous animals were not considered proper (kosher) for eating. Kosher vegetarian animals, like cows, sheep, and goats, had to be killed in a kosher way allowing for the maximum bleeding of the slain animal. And, as an extra precaution, the meat had to be salted to draw out the last vestiges of the blood. (Ironically, humans could eat meat or fowl, but the beasts or birds they chose to eat could not. Even pigs, which are on the edge of vegetarianism, were excluded because of their piggish habit of eating any blood-soaked refuse in sight.)

“In time these dietary restrictions became an intimate part of Jewish identity. Long after most Jews had ceased to believe that blood was the food of G-d, long

after they had stopped believing that eating blood was dangerous, they



continued to obey the laws and observe the prohibitions. Eating habits begin in childhood and are reinforced by community approval and disapproval. As long as Jews lived in closed, tight-knit communities, the dietary laws retained their power. Jews obeyed them because they were Jews, and because there was some vague unconscious fear that if they failed to obey something terrible would happen.”

This description by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine made me think about food and how we, as Jews, approach it. It also made me think of what it means today to observe the dietary laws. Society and food production have changed significantly since the Jews began following this dietary code. Food for thought, don't you think?

Alan J Green, MD

Certified Mohel

מוהל מוסמך



22 Chester Street, Nashua NH 03064

603-440-3444

www.mohelnh.com