

Food and the Jewish Tradition

April 11, 1996

R. Eleazar ben Azariah said:

If there is no meal
there is no Torah,
if there is no Torah
there is no meal.

Pirke Avoth III.21
Sayings of the Ancestors

QUESTION:

What is the kashrut practice at Congregation B'nai Israel?

ANSWER:

Judaism has always recognized a religious dimension to the consumption of food. Being a gift of God, food is never to be taken for granted. Kashrut--generally translated as "the dietary laws"—involves a number of rules concerning food. One of the most basic dietary laws is that no pork or shellfish may be eaten. The dietary laws are set out in the Torah in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:21.

In the Torah, the Jewish people are commanded to observe the dietary laws as a means of making them holy--kadosh. Holiness has the dual sense of inner hallowing and outer separateness.

In our personal and communal lives, Reform Jews have a range of options, from full observance of the dietary laws to nonobservance. The idea of sanctifying and imposing discipline on eating--a fundamental act of human conduct--may be a compelling reason to follow some form of kashrut. Some Jews observe kashrut because of a sense of identification with past generations of Jews. Others observe kashrut because of solidarity with the worldwide Jewish community. Even limited observance of kashrut may help other Jews feel more at ease eating in the synagogue.

Since 1987, Congregation B 'nai Israel has followed the kashrut principle of abstention from preparing or eating any shellfish and pork products at the Temple. We believe deeply that observing one of the most basic dietary rules--no pork or shellfish in the building--is an essential link with Jewish history. This observance is also an act of sanctification of our congregation and our communal lives.

As we together reaffirm our commitment to follow this one law of kashrut at the Temple, may it strengthen our Jewish identity and enhance the holiness of our lives.

Reaffirmed by the Temple Board on
April 11, 1996, based on
recommendation from the
Religious Practices Committee and the Rabbi