

Shabbat Shmini 5786

We Know Not to Mix Milk and Meat. But What About Remilk?

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Shabbat Shalom.

There is a joke about a man, David, who was always very careful about keeping Kosher. When he passed away and ascended to heaven, G-d wanted to reward him for keeping this Mitzvah so carefully. G-d said, "David, you have passed up on so many delicious foods in the world. Thank you! As a reward, you may sample in heaven any delicacy that you like. In this world, everything is Kosher."

David hesitated: "G-d, keeping Kosher was important to me and I want to continue. May I ask: Who is the Mashgiach in *Olam HaBa*? Who is the Kosher supervisor in heaven?"

G-d responded, "Moses himself."

David paused. "I think I'll have the fruit plate."

Warning: The following sermon may make you hungry. This morning's Torah reading, Shmini, outlines the basic rules about how to keep Kosher. It names the animals Jews are not permitted to eat, which guides us literally through today. Though this ritual practice is ancient, the questions they generate are constantly new.

Consider this headline from a Times of Israel article last month: "New 'no-animal' milk has Kosher foodies salivating. Here's why you can have it with your steak." Intrigued?

Israeli company Remilk - or *Halav Hadash* - has produced a new milk beverage that has completely removed cows from the equation. Company laboratories utilize a yeast-based fermentation process to produce the liquid. "[This drink] contains proteins identical in structure to dairy proteins in cow-based milk. Since no cow or milk cells or particles were used, the product has received a parve Kosher certification under the supervision" of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate of Israel. "The result is something that, according to the company, looks like milk, tastes like milk, and behaves like milk when frothed or used in cooking, unlike any previous plant-based milk alternative." Oh yeah, it's lactose-free, too.

So, if you always dreamed of cooking up some Southern fried chicken bathed in buttermilk, now you can. It's Kosher because there is no mixing of meat and dairy

products. But I have to ask: is eating this in the *spirit* of keeping Kosher? Are we following the rules, or skirting them?

Let's take that question seriously.

First, maybe we should not be eating this. One concern is psychological: Perhaps the main issue is the *perceived* combined taste in our mouths. Another is behavioral: Might this blur boundaries and lead someone toward actual non-Kosher food? Finally, there is the classic Halachic concern of *Marit Ayin* - creating the *appearance* of wrongdoing. These imitation products taste and look like the real thing. They are so convincing we must consider if there is any deception here.

The Israeli rabbis who certify the Kashrut of Remilk take that concern seriously because the product is not yet generally recognizable to the public. They require clear package labeling. And they even suggest that the Remilk bottle be placed on the table when served with meat, so nobody is misled.

Yet, after considering these concerns, I agree with their conclusion: this is Kosher in law *and* in spirit.

First, the Talmud makes clear that Kashrut is about *ingredients*, not *impressions*.

It tells of Rabbi Nachman and his wife Yalta having a conversation: *"Yalta said to her husband: Now, as a rule, for any item that G-d prohibited to us, G-d permitted us a similar item. G-d prohibited us the consumption of blood, yet G-d permitted us consumption of liver, which is filled with blood and retains the taste of blood. Furthermore, the Torah prohibits the consumption of the forbidden fat of a domesticated animal, but permits the fat of an undomesticated animal, which has the same flavor. It is prohibited to eat pork, but one may eat the brain of a shibuta fish, which has a similar taste. One may not eat giruta, a non-Kosher fish, but one may eat the tongue of a fish, which tastes similar. Yalta concluded: The Torah prohibits the consumption of meat cooked in milk; I wish to eat a dish that tastes like meat cooked in milk. Upon hearing this, Rav Naḥman said to his cooks: 'Roast udders on a spit for her.'"*

Today, Rav Nachman might say to his wife, "Tonight-fried chicken with Remilk!"

This passage teaches that substitutions are perfectly fine. Jews have been seeking Kosher equivalents for non-Kosher experiences for 1500 years. It's not new - it's tradition.

Second, I don't really think that a Jew who keeps Kosher and is smitten by the taste of this new fried chicken will suddenly make a dash for KFC. Imitation products have been around for a few years now, and I have not heard of this ever occurring. People who keep Kosher do so out of commitment. A better imitation doesn't undo that commitment.

Third, *Marit Ayin* evolves with awareness. These days, everybody knows about imitation meat and dairy-free cheese, which completely changes the overall equation.

Even so, there are limits. The Times of Israel article reports: "Rabbi Moshe Elefant of the Orthodox Union Kosher division, says 'Today in the United States, [the OU] certifies a very popular product, called the "Impossible Burger." It's 100% Kosher, 100% parve. That same company has asked to certify the "Impossible Pork." It only has Kosher ingredients, but how does it look if we have the OU - the largest, most prestigious Kosher symbol in the world - next to the word "pork"? So right now, we haven't done it, but I really believe there will be a day we will do it.'"

It's so interesting that the OU is not certifying "Impossible Pork" because of a *feeling*, a *word*, even as they acknowledge the product is 100% Kosher. Kashrut is not just technical: it's cultural and even emotional.

But Remilk feels different: It fits within a trajectory we already recognize. After all, non-dairy creamer has been available for many years now.

There is another reason I think Remilk products are *Mutar Lehathila*, perfectly permissible. Which goes to the heart of keeping Kosher itself.

Keeping Kosher is a *daily* Jewish activity. Shabbat comes once a week. Daily prayers can be missed. But we all eat, every single day. And keeping Kosher is a Jewish way to do a universal activity. Each meal is a very active Jewish exercise in awareness: What are the ingredients? Is this food meat, dairy, or parve? What foods am I allowed to eat here? Does the food have a Heksher symbol? How many hours has it been since I ate meat?

Furthermore, keeping Kosher is not an *end*, but a *means of Jewish awareness*. Eating in a Jewish way actively reminds us every day that we are Jewish. Not that we would ever forget, but the more we practice keeping Kosher daily, the more being Jewish becomes top of mind. This is how we strengthen our Jewish muscles every single day. So when we face a temptation in the world - to copy someone's homework, to cheat on our taxes, to lie and take credit for another person's idea at work - we respond appropriately in the Jewish way: honestly and ethically every time.

When we eat an Impossible Burger with dairy cheese, the taste may be new for us, but we are completely aware of its Kosher status. Same with chicken fried in Remilk. We know exactly what we are eating. We're not escaping Kashrut - we are engaging it. The Jewish consciousness is still there. And ultimately, that's the point.

For the time being, this product is not yet available in the United States. Only in Israel. That feels appropriate. Perhaps today we can update the biblical phrase to: "*Eretz Zavat Halav Hadash UDvash* - a land flowing with Remilk and honey."

Shabbat Shalom.