A wooden honey dipper is shown dripping honey into a white ceramic honey pot. The honey is a thick, golden liquid. The background is a soft, light blue gradient. The text "Eat of the Good Things" is overlaid in a blue, serif font.

Eat of the Good Things

Understanding
the Reasons and Rules
of Jewish and Muslim Dietary Practices

a publication of
the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy

Everybody at the Table

Food is a basic human need. But it is also much more. People of different religious traditions tell different stories about food, have different rituals and practices related to food, and celebrate with food differently—but food is important to everyone. In this publication, we explore some of the ways that Jews and Muslims express their religious values and identity through the choices they make about what to eat.

Both Muslims and Jews have teachings that guide their diets by stating what foods are acceptable and unacceptable to eat. The names of these guidelines are **kosher**, or **kashrut**, in Judaism, and **halal** in Islam.

Jews who follow the rules of kashrut and Muslims who eat only halal foods do so for various reasons. Some motivations include: seeking connection to the current and historical religious community; a sense of obedience to God; concern for the treatment of animals; and a desire to sanctify, or bring holiness into, everyday life.

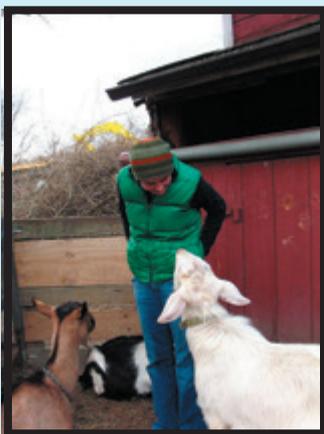
Kosher Definitions

Kosher food is divided into four different categories: **meat**, **dairy**, **parve**, and **traif**. Food that is parve is neither meat nor dairy; this includes fruits and vegetables. Traif is the category that refers to all foods that are unacceptable, such as pork. Kosher diets take care to not mix meat and dairy in the same meal. This teaching is taken from Exodus 23:19, which states, “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” This verse was interpreted by the Jewish sages to mean that meat and dairy cannot be eaten together, and there should be a separation of the dishes and utensils used for meat and dairy.

Halal Definitions

There are two major categories associated with dietary guidelines in Islam: **halal** and **haram**. Halal describes all foods that are acceptable. Haram is the category for all foods that are not acceptable, such as pork and alcohol. There are some foods which are not strictly forbidden, but which fall into the categories of **makrooh** (disapproved, with no explicit prohibition) and **mashbooh** (not known to be haram or halal).

A righteous man knows the soul of his animal - Proverbs 12:10



The Jewish and Muslim traditions have similar guidelines for how animals should be killed to be used for food. In both traditions, ritual slaughter is concerned with the treatment of the animal. Special attention is paid to ensure that the animal is healthy and conscious. The slaughter is done with a sharp blade in order to minimize time and pain for the animal. In order to shield them from unnecessary distress, the animals do not see the knife sharpened before them, and each animal is killed when no other animals are present. Both traditions include a blessing invoking God’s name over the animals. In Islam, the blessing must be said over each animal before it is slaughtered. The process of ritual slaughter in Judaism and Islam respects the animals that provide food for the community.

Another similarity between Jewish and Muslim dietary laws is the prohibition against eating blood. Following the ritual slaughter of an animal for food, its body is drained of blood. As the Jewish scriptures explain, “You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood” (Lev. 17:14). As the “life” of the animal, a creature’s blood is to be respected—it is to be poured out onto the ground and covered with earth (Lev. 17:13).

After the Ba'al Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, founder of Hasidic Judaism) passed, a new shochet took his place. He was well-learned in all the laws and followed them scrupulously. He sharpened his knife, knew just where to hold the neck, how to make the cut.*

He noticed, though, that a man would watch him as he slaughtered the chickens, and shake his head in disapproval. After several days, he asked the man what he was doing wrong. "I wet the blade, I sharpen it, I make the smallest, quickest cut, just as I learned from the Ba'al Shem Tov. What am I doing that's upsetting you?"

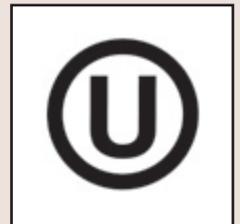
The man, who remembered watching the Ba'al Shem Tov prepare for and slaughter animals, shook his head.

"It is true, you wet the blade and sharpen it. But where you use water to sharpen your blade, the Ba'al Shem Tov used his own tears." -Hasidic folktale

**Shochet: a Jew licensed to slaughter animals in accordance with the rules of kashrut*

Certification and Labeling

Kosher and halal foods are readily available at grocery stores. Some of the food can be identified by a symbol on the package. Kosher certification is well established in the United States; in 2010, there were 85 American kashrut organizations. These organizations are responsible for supervising the manufacturing and production of food products in order to ensure that there are no traif ingredients or mixing of meat and dairy. Jews who follow kosher laws are able to look for kosher symbols on the packages to determine whether the product is kosher, and whether it is meat, dairy or parve.



"O Messengers, eat from the pure foods and work righteousness." Holy Qur'an 23:51



Halal certification is a much smaller and younger enterprise but is growing rapidly. Halal certification began developing in the 1990s in the United States. The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America is based in Chicago and has the symbol of a crescent M. Although halal certification has not reached the same magnitude as kosher certification, in 2010, there were 50-60 U.S. organizations involved in halal certification.

The choice of whether or not to eat kosher or halal is a personal choice of each Jew and Muslim. The decision to keep the dietary laws of Judaism or Islam is not about being told what to eat but about walking in tradition with the sacred and the community.

Qur' an: Surah 2:172-173

O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is Him ye Worship. He has only forbidden you dead meat, and blood. And the flesh of swine and that on which any other name has been invoked besides that of The One God. Whoever is compelled by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, there is no blame on him/her; for Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Texas-Style Matzo Brei

Ingredients

- 2 egg matzos, coarsely broken
- 4 large eggs
- 1/2 cup diced seeded tomato (1 small)
- 2 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large fresh poblano chile, seeded, diced
- 1/2 cup (lightly packed) fresh cilantro leaves
- 2 green onions, coarsely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano

Directions

1. Place matzo pieces in medium bowl. Cover with hot water; soak 15 seconds. Drain well in sieve. Add eggs to same bowl and whisk to blend. Mix in drained matzo and tomato, then sprinkle with salt and pepper.
2. Heat oil in medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add chile. Sauté until beginning to soften, about 3 minutes. Spoon half of chile and most of oil into mini processor. Add cilantro, green onions, lime juice, and oregano to processor; blend to coarse paste. Season salsa generously with salt and pepper.
3. Place skillet with remaining oil and chile over medium-high heat. Add egg-matzo mixture and 2 tablespoons salsa. Stir gently until cooked to desired doneness. Spoon matzo brei onto plates. Top with dollops of salsa and serve.



“This day are all things good and pure made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them.”



Poblano Pepper Hummus

Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked, drained garbanzo beans
- 1 large roasted poblano pepper, skinned, seeded and roughly chopped
- 3 tablespoons tahini (available in the ethnic foods aisle in your grocery store, or in a pinch substitute natural, unsweetened peanut butter)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

Directions

1. Blend chickpeas in food processor until coarse
2. Add remaining ingredients and blend until smooth



The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy is a faith-based, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing theologically grounded public policy analysis to people of faith and other Texans. The Center is the research and education partner of Texas Impact, the state's oldest and largest interfaith legislative network. Texas Impact was established by Texas religious leaders in 1973 to be a voice in the Texas legislative process for the shared religious social concerns of Texas' faith communities. Texas Impact is supported by more than two dozen Christian, Jewish and Muslim denominational bodies, as well as hundreds of local congregations, ministerial alliances and interfaith networks, and thousands of people of faith throughout Texas.