

You may want to divide the text material for your *Hechsher Tzedek* discussion into two sessions. The outline below will offer suggestions for how to break the material down into coherent parts. Should you only be scheduling one session with this material, we offer some pointers on how to do that as well.

Model I Two Sessions

Session One

The goal of this session is to develop a basic understanding of the practice and theology behind the laws of keeping kosher. The session concludes with an introduction to the *Hechsher Tzedek* program.

You will use the texts on Side One of the Hebrew/English text page. Depending on the size of the group, you might try breaking into *hevrotot*, pairs or triads for small group study. Encourage each mini-group to read the first two texts in Hebrew and English and discuss them for roughly ten minutes. Bring the entire group back together to consider the following questions:

- 1 What do these two texts imply about the food that we eat (and in what ways are they explicit!)?
- 2 How do we see these ideas play out in contemporary *kashrut* practice? Ask the group to think of examples of foods which are permitted and foods which are forbidden. Is there something to be learned from that which is allowed and that which is prohibited (note: ultimately, tradition considers these rules to be *hukkim*, ie, laws which are impenetrable to reason)?
- 3 What is the impact on Jewish identity and Jewish community of having these rules regarding food?

Send your *hevrotot* back to work on the second set of passages on Side One (from Deuteronomy and Leviticus) for another ten minutes. Return again to the full group and ask:

- 1 How do these texts amplify the first two texts? What is their practical implication in the observance of the laws of *kashrut*?
- 2 What new lessons are taught by adding these limitations to our dietary habits?

Have someone read the final passage, from Rabbi Harold Kushner, to the entire group. Invite people to reflect on the passage itself. If you need them, here are some questions to keep the discussion moving:

- 1 How do we get from the biblical texts to Rabbi Kushner's vision of *kashrut*?
- 2 When do we consider these rules to be binding upon us (at home, in a restaurant, at a Jewish celebration)? If *kashrut* is not a guiding principle in our lives, why not? Are there steps we might take to bring the sacred expectations of *kashrut* to bear on our daily lives?
- 3 What is the difference between reciting a blessing over food and eating it without that ritual acknowledgement? Should we say a blessing over food which isn't kosher? Why or why not?

At this point it makes sense to segue into a discussion of the ethical quality of eating. Note that the rules of *Hechsher Tzedek* do not stand apart from traditional *kashrut* practice, but rather, amplify them to increase the sanctity of the otherwise basic and mundane act of eating.

1 Ask participants what other considerations might be taken into account when determining whether or not food is fit or appropriate for consumption from a Jewish perspective. In what ways does commercial food production affect the food they eat?

2 Do we have an obligation Jewishly to answer these questions? (if it should come up, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement is currently reviewing a paper on the question of eating veal) What categories would we consider to be relevant in this kind of assessment and why?

Now is a good time to eat the chocolate treats from **KOACH** and plan to resume the discussion tomorrow or at another time!

Session Two

This session will focus on what Judaism says about the fair and equitable treatment of laborers and how we know what ethical standards to apply.

Return to the *hevruta* model, but encourage people to select different study partners. Have them read and translate the first text on Side Two, from Deuteronomy. Encourage them to explore both the broad and narrow implications of the text.

When you return to the larger group, invite participants to share their thoughts on the text.

- 1 What does this have to do with keeping kosher? To whom does it apply?
- 2 How would you define oppression of laborers? Does the text leave room for considering more than timely compensation?
- 3 What is the implication of this text for how you feel about the food you eat?

Back in *hevruta*, consider the three rabbinic texts on the page (the next three texts), allowing about fifteen minutes. When the group comes back together, remind them that the Mishnah is the first legal code of our tradition, edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince in the 3rd century of the common era, in Israel. The Gemara is the recording of the discourse and debate which surrounded the Mishnah for generations and dates to the 6th century. Together, the Mishnah and Gemara make up what we know as the Talmud or Oral Law (by contrast to the Torah which is the Written Law). The Talmud was passed down orally for centuries, before it was printed in book form. The Talmud is the core of our legal tradition, though the *halakhic* or Jewish legal system has not been static since the 6th century. The Jewish legal system has continued to develop and unfold in a dynamic way up to and including today.

- 1 What do we learn about the treatment of laborers and ethical workplace standards from these texts?
- 2 What degree of importance does tradition place on the fulfillment of this mandate?
- 3 In what ways do we see the Jewish community striving to meet these goals?

Have someone read the final passage, from Rabbi Saul Berman, to the group. What standards of practice would we require to ensure an ethical work environment? What is the relationship between these standards and the laws of *kashrut*?

While tradition does not make this link for us directly, we can readily see the ways in which the fulfillment of proper treatment of laborers plays a direct role in the spiritual quality of the food we eat, whether it is kosher or not. Together, *kashrut* and justice make a powerful and sacred team.

Refer to the *Hechsher Tzedek* handout. How does *Hechsher Tzedek* synthesize *kashrut* and the ethical imperative? How does the plan of the *Hechsher Tzedek* Commission build upon the texts you have studied together over the two sessions? What are some practical steps your community might take to help fulfill this obligation?

Model Two If You're Only Doing One Session

The goal of the first half of this session is to develop a basic understanding of the practice and theology behind the laws of keeping kosher. The session concludes with an introduction to the philosophy behind *Hechsher Tzedek* program.

Plan to focus on texts two, four and five on Side One of the text sheet and one, three and five on Side Two.

Allow your group to divide into *hevrotot*, partnered study, which is the traditional model in Jewish life. Instruct the pairs to read, translate and discuss texts two and four on side one, for roughly ten minutes.

Bring the pairs back to the larger group and invite them to consider the following questions:

- 1 What do these two texts imply about the food that we eat (and in what ways are they explicit)?
 - 2 How do we see these ideas play out in contemporary *kashrut* practice? Ask the group to think of examples of foods which are permitted and foods which are forbidden. Is there something to be learned from that which is allowed and that which is prohibited (note: ultimately, tradition considers these rules to be *hukkim*, ie, laws which are impenetrable to reason)?
 - 3 What is the impact on Jewish identity and Jewish community of having these rules regarding food?

Have someone read the final passage on the page, from Rabbi Harold Kushner, to the entire group. Invite people to reflect on the passage itself. If you need them, here are some questions to keep the discussion moving:

- 1 How do we get from the biblical texts to Rabbi Kushner's vision of *kashrut*?
- 2 When do we consider these rules to be binding upon us (at home, in a restaurant, at a Jewish celebration)? If *kashrut* is not a guiding principle in our lives, why not? Are there steps we might take to bring the sacred expectations of *kashrut* to bear on our daily lives?
- 3 What is the difference between reciting a blessing over food and eating it without that ritual acknowledgement? Should we say a blessing over food which isn't kosher? Why or why not?

At this point it makes sense to segue into a discussion of the ethical quality of eating. Note that the rules of *Hechsher Tzedek* do not stand apart from traditional *kashrut* practice, but rather, amplify them to increase the sanctity of the otherwise basic and mundane act of eating.

- 1 Ask participants what other considerations might be taken into account when determining whether or not food is fit or appropriate for consumption from a Jewish perspective. In what ways does commercial food production affect the food they eat?

2 Do we have an obligation Jewishly to answer these questions? (if it should come up, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement is currently reviewing a paper on the question of eating veal) What categories would we consider to be relevant in this kind of assessment and why?

Return to the *Levruta* model and have them read, translate and discuss the first text and third texts on Side Two. Encourage them to explore both the broad and narrow implications of the texts.

When you return to the larger group, invite participants to share their thoughts on the texts. Remind them that the Mishnah is the first legal code of our tradition, edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince in the 3rd century of the common era, in Israel. The Gemara is the recording of the discourse and debate which surrounded the Mishnah for generations and dates to the 6th century. Together, the Mishnah and Gemara make up what we know as the Talmud or Oral Law (by contrast to the Torah which is the Written Law). The Talmud was passed down orally for centuries, before it was printed in book form. The Talmud is the core of our legal tradition, though the *halakhic* or Jewish legal system has not been static since the 6th century. The Jewish legal system has continued to develop and unfold in a dynamic way up to and including today.

- 1 What does this have to do with keeping kosher? To whom does it apply?
- 2 -- What do we learn about the treatment of laborers and ethical workplace standards from these texts?
- 3 How would you define oppression of laborers? Does the text leave room for considering more than timely compensation?
- 4 What is the implication of this text for how you feel about the food you eat?

Have someone read the final passage, from Rabbi Saul Berman, to the group. What standards of practice would we require to ensure an ethical work environment? What is the relationship between these standards and the laws of *kashrut*?

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Distribute the chocolate treats supplied by **KOACH** and call it a day!