

Guide to Materials

KOACH Shabbat 5768/2007

Welcome to KOACH Shabbat! We are delighted to have you participating with us. You may find this guide helpful as you walk your way through the texts.

Hechsher Tzedek is an exciting new initiative being undertaken by the Conservative Movement. The text materials we have prepared take a two-pronged approach.

Kashrut: The sanctity of the food we eat starts not with *Hechsher Tzedek*, but with that which our tradition teaches regarding what foods are fit and unfit for consumption. Side One of the text sheet traces the laws of *kashrut* in their Biblical sources. In addition to learning about the origins of our dietary laws, this is an opportunity for students to explore how a framework for eating informs the holiness of our lives in a general way and elevates the meeting of a basic need to a sacred act. The ways in which *kashrut* serves both to elevate and unify the community are also part of the fabric of this discussion. Students may ask questions regarding personal practice and the minutiae of *kashrut*. You should answer these to the best of your ability and affirm that you will get back to them on those things you don't know. The passage at the bottom of Side One from Rabbi Harold Kushner is a good access point for a discussion on what it means to keep kosher.

Ethical Practice: Having established what Jewish tradition says about which foods and combinations of foods are permitted to eat, we can now look at a further level of elevating the practice of eating. Grounded in the biblical texts regarding the treatment of workers, we take this discussion further into the rabbinic tradition to gain an understanding of what constitutes the proper work environment. It is critical to note that the absence of appropriate working conditions does not render food unkosher, but that ensuring that the work environment is suitable adds yet more sanctity to the otherwise mundane act of eating. The texts on Side Two reinforce what qualifies as the Jewish notion of ethical practices in the workplace and are a jumping off point for discussion of how local standards influence our notion of the ideal.

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*Hechsher Tzedek*: The third text page is a statement from the *Hechsher Tzedek* Commission which sets forth the goals of the Commission and the ideals of the initiative. Note that no meat processing facility has yet to earn this endorsement. Work has begun with Empire Poultry and Agriprocessors; each of these companies has welcomed the Commission into their work environments and given them access to their employees.

*Additional Resources*: There is a brief bibliography of material on both *Kashrut* and *Hechsher Tzedek* on the reverse side of the page with the statement from the Commission. If time permits, you can compare and contrast the vision of the Commission with the traditional texts. Feel free to supplement with additional material as you see fit. You may also want to add a photocopied page of one of the *sugyot* referenced on Side Two, directly from the *gemara*, to enable students to see the text in its original context.

--Rabbi Elyse Winick