

## The Kosher Cow



A few weeks ago, our *Torah* reading began with Pharaoh's dream of seven healthy, fat cows emerging from the Nile river, the finest he had ever seen. But then seven lean, emaciated, sickly cows climbed up onto the riverbank, the worst he had ever seen. And the sick cows devoured the fat ones, and it was as though they had never been.

That same week, we learned of the first case of "Mad Cow Disease" in the United States, and the possibility of tainted meat raised our level of anxiety about all the presumably healthy meat that was available in our land.

But that week, what interested me most was not the fat cow or the lean cow or the mad cow, but the Kosher Cow! Indeed, in a matter of days, the newspaper had run two articles on the "Kosher Cow." One recounted the first known instance of "Kosher Tailgating" at an Eagles game. This family, who kept kosher, was frustrated by being left out, unable to enjoy the full experience of tailgating because it was all made with non-kosher food. So they began "Kosher Tailgating."

They started small with hot dogs and hamburgers, and quickly, as the closet kosher clientele came forward, they expanded to "lamb chops marinated in sherry and wine, and hand-trimmed beef short ribs in a barbecue sauce." Makes even a non-football fan want to come out to the pre-game festivities! Then, later in the week, came the announcement that, for the first time in its 134-year history, Campbell's was finally starting a line of kosher-certified soups. The first is "Vegetarian Vegetable." Can "Chicken Noodle" be far behind?

What caught my eye was how this move was explained. The company spokesman said that "the kosher initiative is part of our overall effort to reconnect with consumers." It seems that many consumers have been appealing to Campbell's for years to start a kosher line, and the article described this as part of a phenomenon that has kosher eating becoming "mainstream."

*Kashrut*. Mainstream. Now here are two words I would never expect to see together.

What it means is that there are a growing number of consumers looking for kosher products — enough to make Campbell's decision profitable.

But I wondered. The newly released statistics of the National Jewish Population Study records that only 21% of American Jews keep kosher at home. At home! Presumably fewer keep it outside of the home — like at tailgating parties at the Linc.

So where is this demand coming from? Part is the growing Orthodox movement that has been increasing exponentially, even as Conservative Judaism has been declining, and Reform has been making modest gains. But there is also a market for kosher products from other religious and ethnic communities that do not eat pork, those that do not eat beef, and need certification that *kashrut*, with its meat, dairy and *pareve* categories, is able to reliably provide.

As I reflected on all this, I thought about how wonderful it would be for more Jews, more of our congregation, to begin to demonstrate their dedication to their faith and their heritage by making *kashrut* a part of their daily lives, at least at home; and then the additional commitment of keeping kosher outside of the home. This ancient practice, rooted in the Bible and the *Talmud*, has always defined the Jewish community, and been a way of focusing ourselves on God and our people, even at the time of the most basic of human needs, eating.

We have begun a new secular year. It is not too late to make a New Year's resolution — to make *kashrut* part of your Jewish living. You won't have to give up tailgating, or Campbell's soup. And it is a special way of sanctifying the everyday and linking ourselves to our heritage. More, it helps to secure our future.

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