

Kosher
The Universal Judaism perspective

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The Association for Universal Judaism

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In my previous article, *Homosexuality. The Universal Judaism perspective*, I contend that the term *toevah*, usually translated *abomination* or *disgust*, is best translated *de-generate*.

By *de-generate*, instead of merely *degenerate*, this designates not merely some smug epithet hurled at someone, often self-righteously, for some kind of socially-disapproved moral or religious offense. Though sometimes related to that, *de-generate* signifies that which does not contribute to the *generative* nature of Life: that which does not foster vitality, vibrancy, potency and also (but not restricted to) propagation. ¹ but actually undermines Life-in-Creation, especially human and particularly Hebrew Life.

Since in the *Torah*, the separation between kosher and non-kosher foods is frequently framed as either *kasher*, fitting for the Hebrew human being ² or *abomination*, this definition – *de-generate* – must function for foodstuffs too, or it is non-functional. I maintain here that it does. However, it does open up a familiar can of modernist (unkosher?) worms:

Why, for example, if something is an *abomination*, such as a snake, would the Rabbis permit it to be eaten under severe life-and-death issues such as *starvation*? ³ Obviously, the meaning of abomination is not determined by the Torah *law*, nor, for that matter, the Rabbinic interpretation of it. Both the written law and its oral interpretations integrate together only *sub specie vitae*, and in the wider Creation, *sub specie natura* or *creationis*.

Placing the value of Life and Creation *prior to* (both in sequence and importance) to human moral enunciation and societal or religious legalisms, is the essence of *Universal Judaism's perspective*. Universal Judaism maintains that *Torah*, and scripture in general, is not a sudden *revelation* by God to some historical figure such as Moses, as justification for either the Jewish religious perspective or its authorities. ⁴ Instead, the *Torah*, the biblical narratives, as well as any real and valuable interpretations, are essentially *universal human understandings and recordings* of “how Life works” on earth, including how human beings, with their free-wills and technological-skills interact with nature on earth, of which they, bodily, are a “piece.”

Universal Judaism is universal because it is first and foremost about the relationship of people to “The Creator God”, and the universal laws of nature that we must be

cognizant of. Societal-laws, religious-laws, moral laws, are essentially variations on this theme.

Now over the centuries, there have been many attempts to fathom *kashrut* and make it “rational”:

The *religious* perspective, already addressed above, is that *kashrut* is simply part of the Sinaitic revelation, and therefore, it is simply God’s Will. While reasons for Torah Laws may be entertained ⁵, reasons are not the reason for them, but are sort of rational-adjuncts to help incline the will towards obedience.

The *philosophical* perspective, maintains that there are certain qualities or virtues which kosher animals or practices represent, and which non-kosher animals or idolatrous practices do not. These qualities, natures or virtues are necessary for the development of the human being, and particularly the Hebrew.

But obviously, this philosophical perspective implies some meta-physical or physiological explanation as well, since, these “virtues” must, in some fashion, through the process of eating, be assimilated mentally or spiritually and certainly bodily.

This is why the *hygienic* perspective always appears the most solid of Jewish rational interpretations, especially since Maimonides who was biased by virtue of being a physician. It maintains that *kashrut* is essentially a health proscription; after all, just a quick glance at biblical *kashrut*, with its forsaking pork and shellfish, promptly banishes two major sources of trichina and e-coli, let alone, in this era, cholesterol. Many other laws of *kashrut*, including laws against *terafah* (tearing off and eating of living limbs), and Sabbatical laws requiring periodic rest for the soil, also have obvious hygienic and Life-engendering purposes.

However, such a *hygienic* perspective implies a physiological perspective, and since physiology is inseparable from biology, and biology inseparable from planetary ecology, *kashrut* cannot be limited to “mere” hygiene. It simply makes no sense.

All these perspectives have value, as we shall discuss. But, I believe the perspective of Judaism is the only perspective by which *kashrut* makes any *complete* sense. I believe it is the core perspective underneath the religious, philosophical and hygienic interpretations– and by which they all come together, with all their dimensions, into a singular, intelligible understanding that makes both rational and spiritual sense simultaneously, indeed *common sense*. The Universal Judaism perspective accomplishes this without relying on the doctrine of the Torah’s Sinaitic origin. However, it makes obvious that there is some kind of higher-awareness or *revelational-experience* implicit in a human universal understanding and enunciation of “what’s fitting” to eat. For this reason, Universal Judaism’s understanding of *kashrut* can also serve, in a general way, to teach us how to put our modernist worms back into their rusty can, and perhaps help us

to unify our *klal*, still shredded by the conflict between so-called “reason” and “revelation”; the Universal Judaism perspective renders these inseparably-one.

There is, obviously, degeneration in nature. There is natural degeneration resulting from the decay of physical life, the dismantling of organic structures back into their earthly constituents. Whether plant or animal this takes place. It also happens, in a sense, geologically, though death is not its initiator.

However, as with all aspects or qualities of nature, human beings have a capacity called “free will”, to *concentrate, specify, and will* these into human *invention*. For example, we can readily observe nature’s capacity for flight; somehow, we concentrate this, specify its laws according to our understanding, and then will it materially into regularly scheduled flights around the world. There is “abortion” in nature, usually called “miscarriage”; yet, human beings have the capacity to concentrate this, specify it, and will it as medically-needed, or, more controversially, as we might simply want. All this is simply, in essence, “technology”: the concentration, specification and willing of aspects or qualities within nature, by humans, specified for human purpose.

But, this great gift of free-willed technology brings with it the potential for what has been glibly called “sin” or “evil.”⁶ We human beings can be willful in such a way as to violate the Creation of which we are a part, out of which our very technological gifts emerge. Since our bodies are actually individualizations of this Creation, when we violate Creation we violate our own selves, suffering these violations personally. For example: poison the air through an internal combustion engine, and the incidence of asthma rise. Then, we must re-think our will, act differently, and re-align our industrial design to God’s *Order or Commandment*, which is nature’s “design.”⁷ We *repent – retell* a different story for ourselves. We concentrate, specify and will again, better. We learn.

Similarly to above, degeneration, which is a property of nature can be also concentrated, specified and freely-willed through human invention. If the invention *aligns* human action and nature’s design, God’s Creation is not damaged and can actually be potentiated: I may accelerate decay and actually design compost which is unusually nutrient-rich, so it augments plant growth.

But, if the invention is *un-aligned or misaligned* to nature’s design, then, human beings will concentrate and increase the natural degeneration in Creation; through the human agent, degeneration becomes *de-generation*, and Creation can be damaged: I can hunt, just for sport, excessive numbers of animals, creating huge quantities of rotting carnage, leading towards de-speciation.

This is sin, evil, in the moral sense. And this is just a summary of the spirito-natural foundation of what is usually called *moral conscience*.

The *co-operation* of human will with God's *Order* or *Commandment* in nature, is therefore a spiritual, moral, intellectual and bodily necessity, for ourselves personally, as well as the nature, particularly upon earth, in which we find ourselves. The *alignment* of human free will with God's Will, is the spirito-natural foundation of what we call *covenant*. It is not fundamentally religious, through it may be expressed through religious terms.

While it has been a tendency of religion— especially as an artifact of the belief in scriptural *revelation*— to view *kashrut* as some kind of abstract system, plopped down upon Sinai *in toto*, interpreted it through an ecclesiastic elite, questioned to your own God-threatened peril, this is not the Universal Judaism perspective.

One cannot understand *kosher* unless one understands it in the context of the human spiritual and earthly natural; the “religious” is derived secondarily from these. The error of religion has been making “religion”, particularly the belief in a particular scriptural *revelation*, as primary, and the spiritual and natural secondary. This essentially inverted the *Order* of Creation, putting human understanding prior to God's “understanding”, so-to-speak: idolatry.

So, the written-down *Torah* laws of what is “fitting” to eat are not fathomable, unless we understand them spiritually and naturally, that is, in a *living* historical context, in which the Hebrew people, and such laws, arose. Such a *living history* not merely some “thought system” passed off as history, disconnected to real bodies and biology, i.e. Creation.

After all, the surrounding tribes, perhaps the very tribes from which we arose, were clearly participating in de-generate behavior. For instance: delivering new born calves out of their mothers and choosing— at the very moment the mother-child bond is deepening and the mother is longing to suckle her child— to artificially milk the mother, bring it to a boil, and seethe her calf in it, while she is present, sensing, smelling, groaning in maternal agony.⁸

This, and other examples, such as the eating of trichina-infested swine, predatory birds that feast on diseased carrion, and other de-generative food sources, often went hand-in-hand with child ritual sacrifice, usually by burning, cultic prostitution with orgiastic body-slashing worship, and other savory technologies.

While such behaviors, when seen through an intellectually sanitized theological lens, are often carelessly labeled “pagan”,⁹ and they are viewed as violations of *religious* laws, it is obvious that although the violation may be described in religious *terms* appropriate to a certain tendency of a religious-speculative era – that the violation is, foundationally, creational: the excess of human free-willed technology is used to concentrate, specify and will into invention a human-engineered de-generation of nature. The degeneration naturally occurring is artificially concentrated, specified, and willed into de-generation.

The result? Human health and propagative vitality are threatened. The possibility of a stable, enduring civilization and *history*, in the theological sense, is undermined. Earthly-

nature, what we might today call “ecology”, is threatened. Agriculture and productivity diminishes due to degeneracy. And although back in “bible-times”, the consequences of such de-generation were fairly localized to the Near East, these days, one can readily imagine the global-consequence of de-generation should it become excessive and widespread.

Under such a pressingly urgent and de-generative assault, both to human life and earthly Life, it should not be surprising that God or Nature ¹⁰ might raise up a contending group of tribes, with a saner more Life-Centered, more naturally-respectful approach to God’s Creation, in order to contain and condemn the behavior which had reached dangerous, critical mass, bringing re-balancing and re-flourishing to both human civilization and earthy-nature.

Such a tribe would have to be designed to concentrate, specify and will into this unseemly mess, another aspect of nature: the *lines, boundaries, fixed-relationships* or *laws*, the “moral laws” that are necessary to re-generate Life.

Such a group, commonly called the *Hebrews*, becoming aware of their own *distinction* from their de-generate relatives, noticing that they seem uniquely impelled-by-nature, *chosen* ¹¹ as an instrument to correct this de-generative imbalance, might eventually record their understanding of the workings of God’s *Order* or *Commandment* in nature, as follows: ¹²

Take heed to yourselves lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and He shall shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.

Leaving aside the confusions and complications of rabbinic *kashrut*– the separate plates and cookware, *shechittah* (ritual slaughter), the rabbinic *heckshers*, etc.– and paying only attention to the proscriptions of *Torah kashrut*, it is clear that every proscription aims to concentrate, specify and will a decrease of de-generation, and an increase in generation. It achieves this by diminishing and avoiding all the “components” that are involved in natural degeneration: *dirt, dung, decay, death, disease, destruction and desecration*.

At first glance, we may not notice why it is forbidden to eat *rabbits* and, at the same time, most insects (The exceptions are discussed below). But, they both burrow in the dirt. There is no permitted creature that is a burrower. Dirt is the issue. Not rabbits and insects *per se*.

At first glance, even without knowledge of trichina, we might not understand why a pig would not be permitted, and why only fish with scales and fins, are. But, we must

remember that pigs can be readily observed to eat their own excrement. Fish with scales and fins, differently than let's say scale-less catfish, do not eat excrement from the water's bottom-floor; moreover, they possess a easily gut-able alimentary canal, so the dung is removed. This is quite contrary to the euphemistic "de-veining" of a shrimp; removing shrimp excrement before devouring it in cocktail sauce. *Dung* is the issue; not pigs or seafood *per se*.

At first glance, we may not notice why eating of blood is forbidden, when a blood-drenched filet mignon can be very tempting. But, when we realize the literal blood-thirstiness of these de-generative tribes, towards each other, and other creatures, with the ripping out of living limbs for food (*terefah*), then, diminishing death through blood-lust becomes critical to civilization and nature alike. *Death, destruction, desecration* is the issue; not "juicy meat" *per se*.

At first glance, we may not understand why a mother bird must be shoo-ed away, should a Hebrew desire to eat an egg; but, then we should remind ourselves of the de-speciation that has taken place on our planet by those who follow the more common, more Roman, more Western, and now becoming, with 18,000 proposed *McDonald's* in China, the global dietary proscriptions, which permit, basically, anything that tastes good.

It should also make perfect sense why such food proscriptions went hand in hand with the forbidding of rapacious homosexual relations that undermine conjugal rights and reproduction, the forbidding of bestiality, as well as why there is the proscription of a generative, prospective *incest taboo*, which would guarantee a generate, propagative, flourishing and evolving biogenetic, historical continuity.

Clearly, the earlier-mentioned hygienic perspective of these laws are completely inseparable from the physiological, the biological, the ecological and also the civilizational and historical, which are all secondary to the spiritual and the natural: *sub specie vitae*, or *sub specie natura*. Dare we say "God?"

What about the *philosophical* perspective? Interesting, isn't it, that animals with cloven feet and that chew their cud, are mostly *vegetarian*, i.e. they "represent" a "virtue" of being less prone to blood-violence, more "peaceful." Such a "virtue" that the cow "represents", is due to the fact that these animals are *ruminants*, with four-compartment stomachs that hyper-digest foods, leaving far less contaminants that might otherwise be internalized by human stock. These intellectually-discerned "virtues" go hand-in-hand with the fact that these cows can be easily domesticated. The symbolic-meaning of *kashrut* is a *true* symbol- from the Greek *symballein*: all these components are *thrown together*, by God's design in nature. The actual nature of the cow is intimately-tied to its "symbol" of being "peaceful." The "virtue" is not the reason, but, is the result of how this creature was designed.

The same goes for the permissibility of certain insects, such as grasshoppers and crickets. These, members of the *orthoptera* family, do not bite human beings, suck blood, further decreasing disease and death. In this sense, they too may be considered to have a “virtue” of “peaceful” not unlike the cow. While they may lay their eggs sometimes in the dirt, they, as adults, do not burrow; they are green-leaf grazers like cows. Moreover, they are natural agricultural predators to human crops, so, in eating them, there is a kind of a natural-balance to any required bloodshed towards these insects. Once again, the so-called philosophical “virtues” are inseparable from their created natures, and secondary to them.

The Universal Judaism perspective sees *kashrut* not as a religious system, which is to be cultically enforced, with the promise of either blessing or curse, salvation or perdition, for those who uphold or break it. *Kashut* is simply a specification of a universal law of nature, fitting not merely for the human being, but also, specifically, for the Hebrew people who are seeking *real transcendence*, i.e. *dominion* over the earth, as well as a universal-history of which we are a herald. Depreciating the de-generative, augmenting the generative, in food, in culture, in thought, in law, in all human invention, in a way that also abides with the specific ecological demands and species indigenous to our Near East origin, is an essential expression of our particular God-inspired culture.

There may be many kinds of *kashrut*, for different cultures. But, all of them will have to, in some fashion, contend with the fact that the human capacity to concentrate, specify and will de-generation into nature, through eating, can cause destruction both to human civilization and to the earth. They will all have to find different ways to handle this human challenge.

As you study the *Torah kashut* proscriptions for yourself, you will notice that each one, by avoiding some “d”– *dirt, dung, decay, death, disease, destruction and desecration* – corrects the de-generation willed into invention by de-generate tribes such as the Canaanite, Amelkite and Hittite. You’ll also notice that these *Torah kashut* proscriptions ensure the re-generation of the generative nature of earthly life. Their intention is to restore a cooperation between human dominion and God’s dominion-in-nature, an *alignment, a covenant*. They have value beyond mere correction, therefore; they have enduring value, which is why they have served for so long.

Human beings evolve from the earth. We are, in Hebrew, *adam*, from the same root as *adamah*, earth/ground, from which we spring. Our spiritual growth from the earth, requires our distinction, and separation, from the degenerative aspects within Nature, so that we can evolve to express other aspects of Creation, other than earth, which inhere within our psychic (soul) structure. *Kashrut* is hardly, merely, a religious system. It is hardly, merely, a philosophical system. It is hardly, merely, a hygienic system.

It is not a “system.”

Kosher is an expression of God's Laws-in-Creation. Essential kosher is universal, therefore!

In this era, in our particular "modern" culture, we cannot fail to notice:

People are eating huge quantities of red (blood-infused) meat and simultaneously, there is presence of aggression and violence in the world. People are consuming non-kosher seafood and pork, and their triglycerides and cholesterol are damaging their hearts.

By shirking these, doctors, without realizing it, are suggesting people be more "kosher."

These days, there is a sizeable movement now to counter the unrestricted, Roman food habits of this world. The de-generation to human health and to the planet has reached such a point, that now we are legislating a kind of "koshering" of how industry farms, processes and distributes food. We notice people banishing destructive ingredients (destruction). We notice organic farming, with sabbatical years– periods of fallow–required for fields (desecration). We notice government crackdown of *e-coli* (dung) contamination in meats. We notice legislation that demands animals be treated correctly (destruction). However we, in this so-called "modern" era approach the basic template behind biblical kosher, we are still approaching it. It is unavoidable. It is a universal law of nature. The Hebrews were aware of this 3500 years ago!

However, let us also be clear. While these laws of the *Torah* remain purposeful, a lot has changed in our world since they were first put forth. There has been an evolution of human culture and life. There has been massive technological innovations that allow us to farm globally and not merely locally. There have been genetic-modification that can alter the nature of species and food supplies with even greater speed and plasticity. There are new kinds of pork, from quite peaceful, non-predatory, animals, which are strictly vegetarian and have evolved "virtues" their own.

Life evolves. So *kashrut* must, always, evolve.

Kashut is never a fixed system, proscribed once and for all eternity. It is not religious *revelation*. It is a living system that depends upon the state-of-human spirituality, physiology, culture etc., as well as the state of the earth, all its geologic formations and all the creatures upon it.

Kashrut is an intimate expression of the Divine Impulse by which both Nature and human spirit, are coordinated together through history. The rules or laws in our scriptures are valuable *guidelines* but they cannot account for every contingency and exigency. When you take these guidelines and make them "godlines", you create the obsession-compulsion around diet which plagues many religious communities.

True *kashrut* requires requires human beings to learn how to integrate spiritually, with the laws of God in nature. True *kashrut* requires us to regain our intuitive-integration

with the natural Laws of Life, so that we instinctually know, sense, smell, intuit– not unlike some of the so-called “lower” creatures– what is correct and fitting for us to eat.

True *kashrut* requires us to find our way back to the Garden of Eden again: where nature’s intricate design and our new technological skills (more advanced now than mere hands for fruit-picking), cooperate in mutual-benefit and integrity, where we are One within God’s *Order* in nature, obeying His Living Commandments, built into the structure of nature, yet not limited to them.

Alas, we human beings are still waiting for this messianic promise. It’s been quite a long time. And it will take more time still.

In the meantime, the *Torah* still stands as a superb guideline, particularly for the Jew and universally, with others.

It’s critical thought for food.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ The emphasis on procreation as the “final end” of any sexuality, has tended to deny that any non-procreative sexuality is generative. This has produced a terrible anti-naturalist bias in Western theology, with an austere separation between so-called “covenanted” and so-called “pagan”, the latter which has been demonized wholesale. There are generative nature cultures. There are, as the Israelites experienced, de-generative nature cultures. But, not all nature cultures are anti-God.

² See *Leviticus*, Chapter 11: 1-47.

It is interesting that the laws for *kashrut* appear in *Leviticus*, a priestly book; the prevention of de-generation in the Israelitic cult, would have made it particularly purposeful.

³ *B. Yoma* 84a

⁴ Universal Judaism employs a different concept of “natural law”. See naturallawjudaism.org, my previous stage in the development of Universal Judaism. The term “Natural Law” usually applies to laws that can be understood on the bases of Reason. The natural law in Universal Judaism is far more biological, indeed, organic, more natural. That’s why I decided to use the name Universal Judaism to avoid some difficult philosophical confusions. Besides, the very purpose of natural law theology is

to universalize it, and remove some of the problems of a particular revelation. See also footnote 8.

⁵ For instance see, *Guide*, 3:48

⁶ The words “sin” and “evil” have been greatly distorted by the religionist perspective. I am attempting here to put it on a solid, rational foundation, which does not rely on scriptural revelation or tradition as the criterion of moral correctness, but to give it an ontology based in the reality of nature design. See footnote 8 below.

⁷ By “design,” I do not mean that Creation was exactly architected by God, and that there is only a fixed, autocratic, design, which does not change. Today, we might say that God supplied “design parameters”, so-to-speak, and not the design *per se*.

⁸ *Exodus* 23:19.

⁹ We must, in this era, distinguish, shall we say, the “Hindu” from the Canaanite. Not all nature-cultures are de-generate. This is an excess of the idealist, religionist, catholic viewpoint.

¹⁰ There continues to be confusion as to whether God is Nature or not; this has particularly been problematic since the scientific perspective, which, more or less, assumes Spinoza’s belief that God *is* Nature. We cannot know the scale of Existence, and whether or not God and Nature are the same, is an issue of scale. Nevertheless, we must be careful about glibly confusing the two. This is not easy in practice.

¹¹ See my article, *The Evolution of Covenant*, universaljudaism.org, “publications”

¹² *Deuteronomy* 11:17ff.

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