

Keeping Kosher

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It can get complicated to eat following kosher rules, as many Jews eat according to their religious tradition. To keep kosher according to the letter of rabbinical laws, a home needs to be outfitted with two separate but complete kitchens - including sinks, refrigerators, ovens and counter space - two sets of dishes, two sets of pots and pans, utensils, cups and cutting boards. Never should the two sets meet. One set is for preparing, cooking and eating dairy products, and the other set is for preparing, cooking and eating meat products.

"I know it sounds hard, but I was raised kosher, so it's what I'm used to and it's not hard at all," said Mel Weisblatt, a member of Congregation Emeth, a reform Jewish congregation that serves the South Valley and is based in Morgan Hill. "Orthodox, conservative and reform (Jews) each have a different approach to being kosher. Most people adapt the rules to certain degrees, none of which is right or wrong. It's all a matter of personal preference."

The basic rules of kosher eating say that meat, including chicken, beef, goat and lamb, cannot be mixed with dairy products, including cheese, milk, butter and cream. Certain foods are "pareve," which means they are neutral and can be eaten with either meat or dairy. Pareve foods include fish, fruit, vegetables, eggs, spices, coffee and margarines made from vegetable oil.

Overwhelmed yet? Well, additional laws state that shellfish and pork are not kosher and may not be eaten at all. If a person who keeps kosher eats meat at the noon meal, he or she must wait several hours before eating dairy. Then, during Passover, there is an entirely different set of rules to accompany regular kosher rules.

The rules are based on passages in the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy and Exodus and state, "Thou shalt not (cook) a kid in its mother's milk," and portions of Leviticus that say in detail which foods may be eaten and which may not.

In Weisblatt's home, he and his wife use two separate sets of dishes, one for meat and one for dairy meals. Though they don't have two ovens or refrigerators, Weisblatt said they are careful to make sure meat and dairy products don't touch in the fridge. They don't have shellfish or pork products in their home, and they check all the labels at the grocery store to make sure they're purchasing kosher products.

"Keeping kosher, for me, puts a certain sanctity on the home," Weisblatt explained. "It says, 'This is what our home is, this is what our home stands for, this is who we are.' Eating is something you do several times every day, and by following these laws, you have a reminder in your everyday life of who you are and what you are."

Angie Young, a member of the Family Worship Center, a Judeo-Christian bridge congregation in Morgan Hill, also follows a kosher diet. Members of the Family Worship Center consider themselves Jewish but believe Jesus was the Messiah.

"Jesus was Jewish, and he ate kosher," Young explained. "When he came, he didn't say we should stop following the old laws, and last fall the Lord told me that this is how I should be eating - eating kosher."

Young and her husband, Ken, do not mix red meat products with dairy products, but they will mix chicken with dairy. They also do not eat pork or shellfish, because the Hebrew Bible says they are "unclean," Young said.

The hardest part of keeping kosher, Weisblatt and Young said, is going out to eat. Weisblatt will try to keep kosher when dining out, but doesn't follow the rules strictly, he said.

"I make sure to stick to the rules at home, but when I go out to eat, it can be very difficult," he explained. "I won't eat pork, but I will occasionally eat shrimp. I don't go out of my way to be unkosher, but I will eat meat and dairy together occasionally. A lot of people stick to ordering fish when they go out because it's easier."

Young, however, does strictly maintain her kosher diet when eating out.

"When I go out to eat, I'll order a vegetarian dish because then I know it's safe," Young said. "It can be really hard. I love eating authentic Mexican food, but when they serve beans I have to make sure they haven't put pork in it. ... I also love tamales, but I have to be careful with those, too, because most of the time they use pig lard to hold the masa together. It's also hard because I love those killer cheeseburgers at In-N-Out, and I miss those."