

I want to come forward today and do Vidduy, the Jewish confession. I have something I would like to get off my chest especially today, on Rosh Hashana.

I avoided a topic over the years that I knew I should speak about. I avoided what I thought would be a difficult subject, even though I believed in my heart that it was my responsibility to find a way to talk about it.

The subject I want to discuss with you this Rosh Hashana, is ...kashrut.

I know the energy in the room at this point must be nearly electric. Wow! He is finally going to talk to us about the difference between glatt and non glatt meat. He is finally stepping down from his too tentative middle of the road stance and he is standing four-square against the eating of fish and meat at the same table. What a relief, finally a rabbi who is able to give a full throated endorsement of the kosher Dill pickle.

Well, if I have misread things a little I will confess that there are a number of rather significant issues in the world right now that might, at first glance, also deserve a little High Holiday attention. After all, a world financial meltdown, al Qaida's reconstitution in Pakistan, the most gripping political campaigns in my lifetime, the emergence of only the second woman as Prime Minister of Israel; Hamas, Hizbollah, Iran, Hillary, Sarah Palin, Joe Lieberman, Iraq, sub prime, Lehmans, Fannie, Freddie, AIG, Wa Mu, even the

nuclear collider in Switzerland. With the world's seemingly endless supply of material, I still choose to look at my failure to talk with you about Kashrut as nothing short of a sin.

When I discuss kashrut, of course, I do mean in a sense the narrow definition of which foods are permitted and prohibited. I do mean refraining from eating the meat of non kosher animals, only eating the meat of kosher ones which have been slaughtered in the method prescribed by our tradition, which commands the merciful, quick and hopefully less than excruciating killing of a creature that has done us no harm. I do in fact mean that the blood of this animal should be drained and the meat should be separated from dairy, so that we might develop the ability to control our bloodlust and we might learn to distinguish between the sanctity of life, especially new life (symbolized by milk) and the violence and brutality of which we are capable (symbolized by meat.)

I mean all of those things, but I mean so much more. When I speak of kashrut to you today and tomorrow I mean something so much more basic, more fundamental that is amiss in our world.

Today is the anniversary of the day that Kashrut first appeared in the world according to our tradition. It was not related to milk and meat, or to cheese with or without animal rennet- the first kashrut of the Torah was the command to the first human beings, Adam and Hava, in the Garden of Eden. We are taught in Pesikta deRav Kahana that:

In the first hour of the day, as the sun of the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation arose, G-d thought of creating Adam.

In the second hour there was a consultation with the ministering angels.

In the third, fourth and fifth hours God gathered, prepared and formed the dust from which man was made.

In the sixth hour, at noon, God stood Adam on his feet.

And in the seventh hour a soul was placed within the human being for the first time.

In the eighth hour he was brought into Gan Eden.

In the ninth hour, halfway through the afternoon of that day, God issued the first command, the first mitzvah, the first law of kashrut- not to partake of the tree of knowledge.

All of one hour later humanity violated this command.

In the eleventh hour they were judged, as we are today.

And in the twelfth hour, just before sunset and the onset of the first Shabbat, they were forgiven by God, as we hope to be as well.

This form of kashrut was about the simple yet profound possibility of mastering our desires, of limiting our need to consume everything we see, and thereby becoming more than eating and purchasing machines. God gave the first people, already created in God's image, the straightforward choice to live differently from the other animals, and to master our appetites. When they could not help themselves and they ate of the fruit, they began the process of merchandising and marketing the fruits of the Garden of Eden. The first people didn't actually acquire knowledge from the fruit they tasted; instead they discovered the unbridled force of the marketplace, the avarice and greed of our "needs," and they realized that by marrying the animal side of the human nature to our prodigious

intellectual gifts, there were to be no delights that would remain beyond our grasp. They saw the opportunity to use their knowledge in the pursuit of tastier fruits, cooler toys, larger TVs and faster cars. Hedonism and endless self-gratification was the frontier which lay before them. With this change in the basic experience of being human, our time in the Garden would be at an end. No longer would we ever feel satisfied, contented with the blessings we had. From now on we human beings would hunger for more and more fruits to taste. It is in this story that we begin to see the human race and human civilization we know, replete with jingles and slogans and slick packaging and, yes, even sub prime mortgages. You can have it all. You can have everything you ever desired. Just have a little nibble from the tree. It's delicious. I bet you can even imagine the ad campaign Adam put together. It must have been something given that the model had nothing more than a fig leaf to wear.

The kashrut I want to speak with you about today is the deepest level of fitness, the core meaning of the word kashrut, which we have abandoned in our lives. In the realm of finance and paying with everything on debt, it is clear how despite all we know to be true, we still cant help ourselves from taking another bite from the apple. In our approach to government, we still want a free lunch, paying for services and tax cuts with borrowed money we don't have while our infrastructure and the idea of our common good- the common wealth- is neglected. Interestingly, even little children can absorb this concept of kashrut. When my kids are out with us, even little 4 year old Nili- who, trust me, knows what she wants- even she can stop and ask, is this kosher? The awareness that there may be things which are desirable, there may be things which she wants, but even

so, she is capable of pausing and asking the question- is this for me? Would Lehman's (and the grownups who ran them) still be here if they could have done the same?

But even more ominously our lack of control as a culture today not only leads to financial disruptions and a soulless quest for more gratification. We all know that it is that world- whose creation and beauty we mark today- which stands in peril because of our shortsightedness and our insatiable hunger for more and more- more energy, more power, more things when, where and how we want them. I have been afraid to speak this truth I have known for some time. I am sure you know as well that the earth can't tolerate much more of our burning dinosaur remains to make our enormous vehicles go or make our cities and homes burn bright. I have been anxious about this subject because I thought it would sound too political, too partisan, not appropriate for a High Holiday sermon when there are so many less contentious issues to discuss. We can agree on the need for more Jewish education, more compassion to others, more support for Israel, more attendance at services- or at least we can all agree that these are the things that a rabbi should say. You can ignore them later, but there is no penalty for the rabbi saying what he is supposed to.

I have justified not speaking too much about the issues of the environment because I thought, well, there is no way to avoid having any impact on the environment. Am I really suggesting that we really stop using our cars? Or that we stop heating our homes? We don't really have a plan for Kiddush without disposable plates. And there is a very high environmental cost to the washing and storing dishes, as well, not to mention the extra hours of labor which are involved. If we are we serious about the true costs of the

lifestyle we have come to expect, what are we to do? Simply disconnect from everything that sustains us and live off the land? Is that the only moral choice which is left us?

But, of course, the choices we face are not that stark. They are demanding, however, and we can no longer afford to ignore the real costs of the way we live. During the course of the past year we have seen in undeniable ways what those costs are: The price of oil sky rocketing to nearly \$150 per barrel. The polar icecaps nearly entirely melted away this past summer, potentially setting in motion an irreversible course for our environment. More frequent and more powerful storms, with greater instances of both draught and flooding around the world. We have seen the enormous sums we spend on petroleum go almost directly from our wallets when we fill our tanks to the coffers of the world's worst dictators and anti-Semites: from Ahmadinajad and the House of Saud, to Putin and Chavez and the genocide in Darfur. There is no denying it any longer. It is simply impossible for us to live this way, especially when the many technologies that are necessary for an alternative exist, if we only develop the self discipline to avoid the easy fruit of oil. From wind and solar to nuclear power, from natural gas to geo-thermal to hydro-electric and tidal power- we can do this.

And what's more, Israel is leading the way. Starting next year an Israeli company will begin mass marketing the first totally electric cars and support system in the world.

Automaker Renault-Nissan will manufacture the cars and Better Place, a California start-up founded by Israeli Shai Agassi, will build the infrastructure, which may eventually consist of 500,000 charging points and up to 200 battery-exchange stations. A pilot

involving a few dozen cars will start later this year in Tel Aviv. A few hundred vehicles are expected to be on the road by 2009, with production scaled to the mass market by 2011. In Israel, where cars normally are taxed at a rate of 100%, the tax on these emissions free vehicles has been slashed to only 10 in order to encourage consumers to make this change. The way it will work is that, thanks to these enormous government investments in the future, the cars themselves will be among the most affordable in Israel. The system of battery changing stations, which will look like a drive through car-wash, will entirely replace the large batteries as they are drained, so that drivers avoid the longer recharging problems previously associated with this approach. You will sign up for a “recharging plan” that will reflect the real cost of driving. Think of it like a cell phone. You don’t really spend money on the phone; it is the support plan you pay for.

Of course the electricity has to come from somewhere, and in Israel right now that means less than green coal. But this is a significant step. And we here, with the incalculable human costs of fighting wars in part to protect the world’s access to oil combined with the economic costs of living in desperate need of a resource we simply don’t have, with the knowledge that the delicate and extraordinary gift of a world that sustains our lives being truly endangered- the time has come for us to begin, in earnest, to keep kosher. We can do this, as individuals, as a shul, as a community, as a nation and as a world. We here at Beth El have already begun to work with CL&P on the process of changing over all of our light bulbs to be the high efficiency kind. Look up. The lights in the dome above your heads is already lit with high efficiency bulbs that use 75% less energy. We have also applied to be part of a program in which the electric company pays a portion of the cost of the switch over for all the rest of our lighting needs, about \$30,000, and we

pay the rest over time. In truth, the cost to our bills will not be noticeable thanks to the immediate savings we will realize. After the loan is paid off, our budget will feel the impact, with savings in the thousands of dollars per year. But it can't end with symbolic steps from the synagogue, just as this notion doesn't end with speeches from politicians. We must each live out the value of this kind of kashrut, and we must demand of our political leaders that they become "Kosher Candidates." There is simply no more time to waste.

And it is time for you to start keeping kosher as well. You, and I, we can pursue some very do-able steps to begin making a difference:

1. Stop buying cars that are inefficient in the extreme. No one here needs a Sherman tank to get around the wilds of Westport. And when it is possible, try to put together a carpool for trips to Hebrew school and other activities.
2. The homes we build can take into consideration the true kashrut of living within our means, both financial and energy. Make sure that our homes are properly insulated, and they are heated and cooled reasonably. Also, change your lighting systems to bring them up to modern standards of efficiency. With today's compact florescent bulbs you can save 75% on your lighting bills too.
3. Meat-While meat can still be a responsible part of a kosher diet, less meat means less harmful methane, less land dedicated to raising cattle, less waste, fewer antibiotic resistant bacteria, and more respect for the sanctity of life.

4. Reduce-Reuse-Recycle- We can all eat and shop and discard more thoughtfully, more consciously.

We don't have to abandon everything we have come to know in our world, but we can do much, much better- all of us. We can start to bring ourselves back to a better sense of balance in our lives, where every attractive product, every enticing manufactured good, every fruit which dangles before us is not something we simply must have. You and I can make a thousand small differences add up. Here is another idea. Maybe you could even leave your car at home and walk from time to time. How about once a week we turn off TVs and computers and disconnect from our virtual world and rejoin the one real one we celebrate today. I know- we can call it Shabbat!

I encourage you all to go to the website of COEJL, the coalition on the environment and Jewish life, to learn more about the ways in which all the Jewish movements have expressed their commitment to this basic Jewish value of living with self control and balance. This kashrut-centered focus for our lives will not need to be a drag, denying us what we crave. It can be a source of meaning, relief, and even pleasure as we wean ourselves from the compulsive tendency to be swayed by the latest 'need' we never knew we had. We may not be able to return to Eden entirely, but we can live with the kind of enriching self discipline which will give our children and grandchildren the chance to know the world which we have been fortunate enough to have inherited.

According to Kohelet Rabbah, the great compellation of ancient midrashim on the Bible, when God ended that first Rosh Hashanah day 5769 years ago, He turned to Adam and Hava and said, “Reflect on this, and **do not** corrupt or desolate **my world**; for if you **do**, **there** will be **no one** to repair it after you.”

May we find the inner strength this year to begin truly being the kind of stewards of this world that we are capable of being. May we in so doing discover the kashrut, the fitness of our better natures, a fitness of body, soul and earth. So that we might rediscover the self we left behind in Eden 5769 years ago today.