

Ask the Rabbi

By Rabbi Yerachmiel D. Fried

Dear Rabbi,

We're getting married soon, and are debating whether to have a kosher home or not. It's a huge commitment, and we're not so sure if we're up to it at this point. On the other hand, there are definitely health and spiritual benefits to it; we're just not sure if they outweigh the difficulties of the commitment involved. Maybe you can help us with our decision.

Gabe L. & Megan W.

Dear Gabe and Megan,

Mazel tov on your upcoming wedding!

Keeping a kosher home certainly is a large commitment, as is your getting married to each other. The two commitments actually complement each other in a very profound way:

The commitment you are soon to make to each other is called kiddushin, the Hebrew term for betrothal or matrimony. The word "kiddushin" has two seemingly unrelated meanings: sanctity and separateness. Sanctity is the holiness of the Jewish marriage between a man and a woman. When the ring is passed from the groom to his bride, he recites, "Behold, you are sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." At that point, the Shechinah, or Divine Presence, rests between the bride and groom, and remains there throughout their lifetime together.

Kiddushin also means separate. At the point of the marriage, the couple separate themselves and their unique love for each other from the rest of the world, and become a separate, new unit of one. This entails a lifelong commitment to each other, one which enables and invites the Shechinah to be the "glue" which holds them together.

Both of these concepts of kedusha — holiness and separateness — are infused into a home in which the laws of kosher are observed. Firstly, the Torah refers to foods which are kosher as tahor, and those which are unkosher as tameh. The word "tahor," usually translated as "pure," actually means "transparent." The Kabbalists explain that this is referring to a spiritual transparency, one which allows the Shechinah to flow into it, and into the one who consumes this kind of food. A home in which the food is kosher is a home that the Shechinah is able to flow into and fill with light and joy. The word "tameh," normally translated as "unclean," really means "sealed." This means that the food has "sealed up" the heart of the one who

consumes it, from the flow of the Shechinah, and from the spiritual light which should illuminate the heart.

Just as a married couple has a separation of love from others, also the kosher home becomes separate to the Al-mighty, and creates a special bond of love to Him through that separateness. It's not a home like the rest of the homes on the block, but one that is built upon a commitment of love to the Creator. Every snack and meal becomes a service to G-d, and brings Him great pleasure.

The commitment a couple work on together to keep a kosher home helps them cement the commitment they have to each other. In addition, every time one abstains from consuming or bringing home some "forbidden fruit," they exercise and strengthen their "spiritual muscles" which help them stay away from "forbidden fruit" in other areas of life as well.

Lastly, it's hard to put into words the positive impact that a kosher home has upon children, in so many ways.

I applaud your consideration of starting your new home on the right foot, and wish you the best of luck in doing so. I invite you to join "Kosher Month," beginning this week, which will go far in informing you of the ins-and-outs of kosher observance, and will enable you to meet dozens of other couples who are contemplating exactly what you are for their homes. For more info, please call DATA at 214-987-3282 or contact Rabbi Robkin at yrobkin@gmail.com. Mazel tov again and best of luck and success!

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