



# Bishul Akum-Salmon and Sushi

Our Sages instituted a prohibition against eating kosher food that was cooked by non-Jews, a decree known as *Bishul Akum*. One of the determining factors in this prohibition is whether the food in question is commonly eaten raw. This qualification is subject to change based on evolving culinary practices and societal norms. As such, it is not unusual for certain foods that were once included in the prohibition to later be excluded, as their consumption raw becomes widespread.

A particularly interesting question that has arisen in recent years concerns sushi and sashimi. For generations, large fish such as salmon required *Bishul Yisrael* (cooking performed by a Jew) for them to be permitted. However, with the increasing global consumption of raw fish, especially in the form of sushi

and other East Asian dishes, the question is raised: Has this shift in culinary trends affected the halachic status of cooked salmon prepared by a non-Jew?

## THE HALACHIC SOURCE

It is clear from the *Gemara (Avodah Zara 38:a)* and early authorities that large fish fall under the decree of *Bishul Akum*. Historically, these fish were associated with formal meals and were not eaten raw. This ruling is codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 113:12) and upheld by later halachic authorities (*Pesakim U'teshuvot* 113:8).

Sushi is a traditional Japanese dish that includes raw fish, rice, vegetables and vinegar, often wrapped in nori (seaweed) sheets. Sashimi, on the other hand, consists solely of raw fish, such as salmon or other seafood. Today, sushi and sashimi have become global culinary staples, with thousands of restaurants serving them across all continents.

Despite their popularity, contemporary halachic authorities, including prominent OU *Poskim*, Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Yisroel Belsky, have ruled unequivocally that the widespread consumption of sushi and sashimi does not alter the halachic status of fish in the context of *Bishul Akum*.

## REASONING OF THE POSKIM

These *Poskim* provide several reasons for their stringent position. First, raw fish in sushi is rarely eaten in isolation; it is typically combined with other ingredients such as rice, vegetables, and seaweed. While there is halachic precedent (see *Magen Avraham* OC 203:4)

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suggesting that a food can be considered “eaten raw” even when consumed in combination—as with ginger mixed with sugar—the situation with sushi differs significantly. In the case of ginger, the sugar merely enhances the ginger. In contrast, sushi is appreciated as a composite dish in which the rice, vegetables, and other ingredients are as central as the fish itself.

In addition, in many sushi preparations, fish constitutes a minority of the dish—often less than 40%. As such, sushi does not provide sufficient halachic evidence that fish is commonly eaten raw. Consequently, this does not permit the consumption of cooked fish that was not prepared by a Jew.

Another reason for stringency is that most fish used in sushi are still more commonly consumed cooked, baked, fried, or grilled—rather than raw. The halachic qualification of “*Ne’echal Chai*” (eaten raw) is based on how the majority of the world consumes the food (see *Pri Chadash* Y.D. 113:3). Even in countries where sushi is widely available, raw fish remains a minority preparation compared to cooked methods. Therefore, these types of fish still fall under the decree of *Bishul Akum*.

### WHAT ABOUT SASHIMI?

Sashimi, raw salmon or other seafood served without rice or vegetables might seem to present a stronger case for reclassifying fish as “commonly eaten raw.” However, the halachic argument for stringency remains even stronger here. According to both OU *Poskim* and other major authorities (ResponSA *Shevet HaLevi* 9:163), the limited popularity of sashimi

does not meet the threshold needed to consider salmon or other fish as “commonly eaten raw” in the context of *Bishul Akum*.

An important proof supporting this view is the halachic treatment of eggs. While some individuals do consume raw eggs, all early authorities and the *Shulchan Aruch* (113:14) rule that eggs are subject to *Bishul Akum*, since raw egg consumption is limited to a small minority. The same logic applies to fish such as salmon. ■

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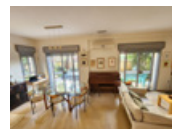


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