



An Introduction to Beef Shechitah in Israel

Meat is one of the most complex, yet highly sought-after, foods in the kosher kitchen. Red meat, in particular, is served not only on Shabbat and Yom Tov, but also forms a regular part of the daily diet for many Jewish families in Israel and throughout the world.

Proper *shechitah* of cattle requires exceptional expertise and attention to detail. In today's global food industry, kosher beef production presents numerous technical and logistical challenges. One of the most significant is location. Israel produces less than 30% of the beef consumed domestically, with more than 70% imported from animals slaughtered overseas. Maintaining kosher standards across such an extensive international supply chain requires modern slaughterhouses, highly trained *shochtim* and *bodkim*, and sophisticated tracking systems capable of monitoring every animal from the moment of *shechitah* until the finished

product is packaged, sealed, and distributed. Likewise, much of the kosher beef supplied to the North American market is now produced in South America under the supervision of leading kosher certification agencies.

Although the subject of kosher beef production is both broad and intricate, this article will introduce some of the fundamental principles of beef *shechitah* and discuss their practical application in Israel today.

THE BASICS

Every kosher slaughter operation requires meticulous planning and supervision. This includes the qualifications and expertise of the *shochtim*, the health and suitability of the animals, properly maintained *chalafim* (shechitah knives), and approved restraining equipment. The actual act of *shechitah* is only one stage in the overall process.

Following slaughter, additional procedures must be carefully supervised. These include the inspection of the animal's organs to determine its kosher status, the removal of prohibited fats and the koshering process of soaking, salting, and washing the meat.

Each of these stages requires experienced kashrut professionals and trained rabbinic supervisors. All procedures must be performed with precision while operating within modern facilities that process hundreds of



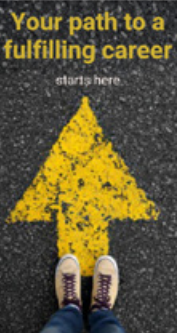
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animals each day. Kashrut certification agencies invest tremendous resources to ensure that kosher beef reaches consumers in full compliance with halachic requirements.

HINDQUARTERS

One of the unique aspects of kosher beef production is the prohibition against consuming certain portions of an otherwise kosher animal. Even after a cow has been properly slaughtered, the Torah prohibits the consumption of specific forbidden fats (*cheilev*) as well as certain blood vessels, all of which must be removed.

Additionally, the Torah prohibits consumption of the *Gid HaNasheh* (the sciatic nerve). *Chazal* further prohibited certain surrounding tissues associated with the nerve. The removal of these prohibited portions is a highly specialized process, since not all fats are forbidden. Permitted fats (*shuman*) remain allowed, as do many muscles and tissues surrounding the sciatic nerve. Distinguishing between these permitted and prohibited areas requires extensive knowledge and practical experience.

The individual trained to perform this work is known as a *Menaker*. The process, called *Nikkur*, is known in Yiddish as *treibering* and in English as *porging*. Unlike many other areas of *halachah*, the techniques of *nikkur* are based largely upon practical tradition. The *Shulchan Aruch* explains that because this expertise is acquired through hands-on training rather than written instruction, it must be transmitted from one generation of experts to the next.

Although different customs and methods of

nikkur developed over the centuries, the process was successfully practiced for generations, allowing the consumption of the hindquarters of the animal, including premium cuts such as the *Sheitel*, *Filet*, *Sinta*, and others.

Over time, however, many Ashkenazic communities gradually discontinued the practice of *nikkur*. This eventually became the accepted custom throughout much of the Ashkenazic world. There remains considerable discussion among halachic authorities whether limiting consumption to the forequarters—where virtually no *cheilev* is present—is based on a binding halachic tradition or developed primarily for practical reasons. Regardless, today there is relatively little continuous Ashkenazic tradition regarding the detailed practice of *nikkur*.

THE MODERN CUSTOM

As a result, OU Kosher and virtually all major kosher certification agencies outside Israel do not perform *nikkur* and therefore certify only the forequarters of the animal (more precisely, the portion forward of the twelfth rib). Consequently, the issue of kosher hindquarters is largely absent from kosher meat production outside Israel.



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In Israel, however, the situation is markedly different. *Nikkur* has continued to be practiced for many decades. Although Ashkenazic communities originally performed *nikkur* even after the establishment of the State of Israel, as kosher meat became more readily available and the economic necessity diminished. Sephardic and Yemenite communities, by contrast, have maintained a tradition of *nikkur*.

Today, several Mehadrin kosher certification agencies in Israel continue to perform *nikkur*, maintaining that their methods preserve the accepted traditions, including those historically practiced by Ashkenazic authorities. Consequently, Israeli consumers regularly encounter both forequarter and hindquarter cuts. Hindquarter meat is commonly served in restaurants, hotels, and catering establishments throughout the country and includes many of the most desirable premium cuts.

Although, as noted above, the widespread Ashkenazic custom has been to refrain from consuming hindquarters, practical questions may arise when one is served such meat as a guest or when it has been prepared in shared utensils. In such circumstances, one should consult a competent halachic authority who is familiar with the relevant customs and halachic considerations. ■

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