

Public Restaurants, Kosher

Do Messianic people who keep kosher eat out at public restaurants?

Among kosher-friendly Messianic people, there is obviously a wide array of interpretation, application, and implementation of the dietary laws present. There are some who follow a Conservative to Orthodox Jewish approach to *kashrut*, and thusly would be inclined to either only eat at kosher-approved restaurants, vegetarian restaurants, or only eat cold salads at public restaurants that serve non-kosher meats. Yet, given the fact that the majority of kosher-friendly Messianic people mainly eat a kosher-style of diet, avoiding pork and shellfish and non-kosher fish, many of the same would eat at a (wide) variety of public restaurants, perhaps even including fast food. Such people would actually keep a level of kosher eating that is present in much of Conservative Judaism, where a more strict level of kosher is followed in the home than is followed in the world at large.

Lisè Stern offers the following broad summary of what is commonly witnessed in much of the Jewish community, regarding “eating out,” in her book *How to Keep Kosher*:

“[T]he concept of eating kosher ‘out,’ that is, outside of the home...is a topic that probably comes up more frequently in Conservative circles. You keep a kosher home, so how should you keep kosher outside your home, specifically, in a restaurant? Restaurants are an issue because most of them constantly violate lots of laws of *kashrut*. Meats are cooked in pots used for dairy, *treif* foods are cooked next to potentially acceptable foods, and so on.

“A strictly Orthodox observer of *kashrut* will eat only in restaurants with *kashrut* supervision. Some observant modern Orthodox might also eat in vegetarian restaurants, or they could order cold food such as a salad in a nonkosher restaurant, as transference of flavors from heat is not an issue with cold foods.

“Strictly observant Conservative Jews also follow this way of eating out. However, many Conservative Jews do eat hot foods in restaurants that do not have kosher supervision, and that do serve unkosher foods. Some simply do not keep kosher ‘out’ at all, and anything goes in restaurant land. Many, however, will observe certain restrictions when they go out, opting to eschew meat, poultry, and shellfish in favor of fish or vegetarian dishes. ‘It’s a common practice for many Conservative Jews to eat in nonkosher restaurants,’ says Rabbi [Paul] Plotkin. ‘But I’m hard-pressed to give a halachic foundation for that practice.’ Plotkin eats hot food only in kosher restaurants or cold food in a nonkosher restaurant. ‘My mantra is, if everybody was appropriately strict in the Conservative movement, we would have tons more kosher restaurants.’

“Other Conservative rabbis I {Stern} spoke with are more ambivalent about restaurant dining. Rabbi David Starr says, ‘I fall in a very inconsistent place. Practically, I don’t feel comfortable eating hot food in a nonkosher environment. I do it. I do it because I’m inconsistent, but don’t really believe it’s being kosher to do that. My practice has a geographic quality to it. In New York City, there’s no need to eat in a nonkosher restaurant. But in Boston I will eat in nonkosher restaurants. I don’t really believe in trying to find a halachic justification for it; I prefer to see it as halachically deviant behavior.’

“But Conservative Jews, such as Rabbi Starr, who do eat in nonkosher restaurants, do observe some level of personal *kashrut*, albeit one that might not be halachically correct. They do not order meat or shellfish, they check that no chicken stock was used for soups, and only order fish or vegetarian dishes. Rabbi Mark Robbins says, ‘Liberal Jews will incorporate *kashrut* into what they believe, into what they feel like they need to do as a fully participating member of American society. I am supportive of eating out in restaurants. I eat pasta and fish out, and whenever I go into a restaurant, I am cognizant I am Jewish because I have to make decisions about everything I eat. Many may argue that’s being hypocritical, but in our society, with *kashrut*, there’s always the next degree you can go to; everyone sets their own level that makes them feel integrity. But if you consider what we do as Conservative Jews as emanating both from the grassroots and from halacha, this is what we do. We do make compromises.’”¹

¹ Lisè Stern, *How to Keep Kosher: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding Jewish Dietary Laws* (New York: William Morrow, 2004), 108-109.

Sue Fishkoff offers the following statistics in her 2010 book *Kosher Nation*, regarding “eating out” among Orthodox and Conservative Jews:

“Today ‘eating out’ is more common among Conservative Jews, although some Orthodox Jews will do it. According to a 2006 Conservative movement survey, while 75 percent of Conservative professionals and 65 percent of lay leaders keep kosher homes, 94 percent of the professionals and 98 percent of the lay leaders eat in non-kosher restaurants. One-third of the professionals and more than half of the lay leaders will eat meat in those restaurants. The same survey showed that 87 percent of Conservative rabbis and cantors eat in non-kosher restaurants, although just 9 percent will order meat.”²

The statistics for Messianic Jewish leaders eating out at public restaurants, would be much higher than what Fishkoff has reported. This is mainly because the kosher level of the Messianic Jewish world, as well as the more independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots sector, is a kosher-style diet that avoids pork and shellfish, and in addition to this will widely mix meat and dairy. Such a kosher-style diet, as is noted, is what is followed among many Conservative Jewish laypeople. And to the world at large, simply avoiding pork and shellfish and non-kosher fish, is effectively keeping kosher.

Every Messianic congregation or fellowship is going to have most of its constituents eat out at public restaurants, which will serve non-kosher meats, even if these are not consumed by such Messianic people. Only you can make the best decision regarding what is right for you, and your family. Given the fact that there is a wide diversity of application present in today’s Conservative Jewish community regarding “eating out,” there is likely to be a similar diversity in today’s Messianic community.³

² Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America’s Food Answers to a Higher Authority* (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), 98.

³ Related to the issue of “eating out,” is the fact that many Messianic people will go out to a public restaurant after Saturday morning *Shabbat* services. This does not sit well with many, not necessarily over the issue of “eating out,” but because of buying and selling on the Sabbath. This is addressed in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.