

Fish and meat

By: Rabbi Dovid Cohen

There's a well-known prohibition against eating meat and fish together (*Shulchan Aruch* 116:2), and in recent years this issue has presented itself in three new ways – Worcestershire sauce, fish oil and marshmallows.

Worcestershire sauce

Worcestershire sauce is a barbeque sauce that is traditionally made through a time consuming process that uses a number of ingredients including anchovies, a type of fish. Using fish as the sauce for meat is a classic case of the prohibition against eating meat and fish together, and is forbidden. For this reason, authentic Worcestershire sauce is labeled “Kosher –Fish”.

However, most companies don't have the patience or pride to make Worcestershire sauce in the slow traditional manner. So rather than make the sauce the “right way”, they create the fermented-fish taste with an appropriate chemical-flavor, and in deference to traditionalism they put a minimal amount of anchovies into the recipe. In these companies, the fish is typically used in tiny amounts that are merely sufficient to get them listed in the desired order in the ingredient panel.

Should this latter type of worcestershire sauce be labeled as “Kosher – Fish” and should consumers not use it with meat? The amount of fish in the recipe is usually minute enough as to be *batel b'shishim* (*halachically* nullified) and the fish contributes no noticeable taste to the sauce. Were the fish to be non-kosher it would be *batel* and, at least *b'dieved*, wouldn't affect the status of the sauce, but there's a *machlokes* as to whether the leniency of *bitul* applies to the restriction of eating fish with meat (see *Pischei Teshuvah* 116:3).

Some *hashgachos* have accepted the lenient opinion on this question, and they therefore allow such products to be labeled as “Kosher – Pareve” indicating that they hold this type of Worcestershire sauce can be used with meat. Others reject this approach – either on *halachic* or policy grounds – and do not allow any product that contains even the smallest amount of anchovies to be labeled “Kosher – Pareve”.

Fish oil

Many believe that it is healthful to consume the Omega-3 fatty acids found in specific fish oils (as well as flax seeds and some other foods), and companies have started enriching all types of foods including bread, orange juice, butter substitutes, dairy products, and breakfast cereal with these fatty acids. As with Worcestershire sauce discussed above, the oil is typically used in tiny amounts and is subject to the *machlokes* as to whether the halachos of *bitul* apply to the prohibition of eating fish and meat together.

However, the question of fish oil has an added wrinkle over worcestershire sauce, in that most consumers are aware that “anchovies” are a type of fish, but many aren’t aware that “Omega-3 fatty acids” comes from fish. As such, some feel that it is acceptable to label Worcestershire sauce as “Kosher – Pareve” because conscientious consumers will notice anchovies on the ingredient panel and make their own decision as to whether they feel it is acceptable to eat it with meat. But many of those same consumers won’t realize that the “Omega-3 fatty acids” in their bread or other food might be fish-based, and will therefore be unable to make an informed decision as to whether they should eat it with meat. As such, even some who accept the lenient opinion cited above will only allow such Omega-3-enriched foods, including bread, to be labeled “Kosher – Pareve” only if the package clearly indicates that the Omega-3 fatty acids are fish-based.

Marshmallows

Marshmallows are relatively new to the kosher palate, as their most crucial ingredient – gelatin – comes from pigskins, beef hides or fish skin, which are difficult or impossible to produce as kosher. Of course nowadays there are quite a few brands of kosher marshmallows that use reliable kosher gelatin to produce their sweet treats. [There is a well known opinion that gelatin produced from non-kosher beef hides can still be kosher and while there are those who do rely on this opinion - mainstream American hashgachos reject this lenient opinion. Consumers should be alert for products containing “kosher gelatin” which rely on the lenient opinion and therefore do not carry a reliable *hashgachah*].

Not only has this delighted many kids (and the kid in many of us), but it has also raised some new *shailos* that earlier generations didn’t have to consider. One of them is – can kosher marshmallows be eaten with meat?

Before answering, we must digress so as to focus the question. In recent history, the first type of truly acceptable kosher gelatin was made from fish skin, but in the past few years companies have also begun producing kosher gelatin from beef hides. One *halachic* difference between the two of them is that meat-based gelatin isn’t *fleishig* and can therefore, for example, be used in kosher yogurt, but fish-based gelatin is “fishy” and can’t be eaten with meat! [The explanation for the aforementioned difference is beyond the scope of this article]. Thus, marshmallows made with meat-based gelatin are pareve and can be eaten with either meat or milk, and the question we must answer is whether marshmallows made with fish-based gelatin can be eaten with meat.

In most foods, gelatin is used in tiny amounts, such that items made with fish-based gelatin would be subject to the *machlokes* noted above. However, a surprising fact is that in marshmallows, gelatin can comprise as much as 5% of the recipe! *Halachically*, that is considered too significant to be ignored, and therefore the marshmallows should have the status of being “fish” and not suitable for eating with meat. For some sophisticated chefs this raises an issue, as it means that they shouldn’t create dishes that call for marshmallows and meat.

To help consumers deal with this concern, some kosher marshmallow companies list “fish gelatin” in their ingredient panel rather than just “gelatin”; if “fish gelatin” isn’t listed, consumers should call the marshmallow company’s *Rav HaMachshir* to find out what type of gelatin is being used before consuming that product with meat.

Rabbi Dovid Cohen is the Administrative Rabbinical Coordinator of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.