

*A column devoted to researching commonly-held beliefs*

## *What's the Truth About... Glatt Kosher*

*By Rabbi Ari Z. Zivotofsky, Ph.D.*

**M**isconception: “Glatt Kosher” means something like “extra kosher” and applies to chicken and fish as well as meat.

**Fact:** *Glatt* is Yiddish for smooth, and in the context of *kashrut* it means that the lungs of the animal were smooth, without any adhesions that could potentially prohibit the animal as a *treifa*, an issue only applicable to animals, not fowl or non-meat products.

**Background:** In colloquial discourse *treif* refers to anything that is not kosher. The technical definition of *treifa* is based on Exodus 22:30 (“Do not eat meat from an animal torn [*treifa*] in the field”) and refers to an animal with any of a specific group of physical defects that are detailed in the Talmud (most of the third chapter of *Chullin*; 42a-59a) and codes (Rambam, *Maachalot Asurot* 4:6-9 and *Shechitah* ch. 5-11; *Shulchan Aruch*, *YD* 29-60). Examples of these “defects,” which often go far beyond the health inspection of the USDA, include certain lesions, lacerations, broken limbs, missing or punctured organs, or the result of an attack by a larger animal. Such defects can occur in and thereby render both animals and fowl *treif*. Because most of these defects are uncommon, it may be assumed that most animals are healthy (Shach, *YD* 39:1) and hence there is no requirement to inspect every

animal for them.<sup>1</sup> An exception is the lung of an animal, on which adhesions [*sirchoi*] and other problems may develop. While these problems are not common, they do occur more frequently than other *treifot*. Their relative prevalence led the rabbis to mandate that the lungs of every animal be examined, both manually while still in its natural position in the animal, and visually following its removal from the thoracic cavity (*YD* 39:1).<sup>2</sup> Because a hole in the lung renders the animal a *treifa*, adhesions, i.e. pathologically arising bands of collagen fibers, are problematic either because they indicate the presence of a perforation that has been insufficiently sealed (Rashi) or because they can become loosened, thereby causing a hole to develop (Tosfot). In the U.S., lung adhesions usually do not occur on fowl; hence the rest of this discussion concerns only meat, not chicken.<sup>3</sup>

The *Shulchan Aruch* describes many types of adhesions in intricate detail (*YD* 39:4-13), the overwhelming majority of which render the animal a *treifa*. The Ramah (*YD* 39:13) concludes the discussion about lung adhesions with a description of a method of peeling and testing many types of adhesions, thereby resulting in many more animals determined to be kosher. The Ramah himself expressed certain hesitations about aspects of this leniency, but because it had gained wide acceptance and did have a firm basis, he ruled that it could be followed. However, he cautions that the peeling and testing must be performed by an exceedingly God-fearing individual.

Because this peeling is mentioned and

approved by the Ramah but not by the Mechaber (Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*), Sephardim, who follow the Mechaber, are required to eat only *glatt* (*chalak*, in Hebrew) meat as defined by the Mechaber. The Mechaber is also the author of the *Beit Yosef*; therefore, such meat is termed “*glatt/chalak Beit Yosef*.” For Ashkenazim, there is a tradition that a small, easily removable adhesion is defined as a lower class of adhesion, known as *rir*, and that the presence of up to two such small, easily removable adhesions still qualifies the animal as *glatt* according to Ashkenazic tradition. Eating *glatt* is a worthy stringency that avoids potential problems raised by the Ramah’s controversial leniency.<sup>4</sup>

It should be emphasized that the Ramah’s ruling is certainly legitimate and, in theory, non-*glatt* meat, if inspected properly, is 100% kosher for Ashkenazim. Today, the OU (and most other *kashrut* organizations in the U.S.) will only certify meat that is *glatt*, albeit not necessarily *glatt Beit Yosef*. An important postscript is that the Ramah’s ruling is defined as non-applicable to young, tender animals such as lamb, kid and calf (Ramah, *YD* 39:13). Therefore, all lamb chops, veal or other meat from young animals must be *glatt Beit Yosef*, even for Ashkenazim.

From the above explanation, it is clear that referring to chicken, fish or dairy products as *glatt* is a misuse of the term. In addition, even when referring to meat, it only attests to the status of the lung, but makes no comment about the standards of, for example, the *shechitah*.

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Misconceptions about the meaning of *glatt* are so widespread that, for many, the term *glatt* has colloquially taken on the implication of a higher standard, similar to the term *mehadrin*. In addition, some caterers or stores may have only one *kashrut* sticker that they use on all products, and hence the sticker on the corned beef sandwich and on the omelette will both say “glatt kosher.” Although it is technically inaccurate to label chicken, fish, lamb, or dairy products as *glatt*, it is not uncommon to find such labeling. In the majority of cases, it is probably not being done to mislead; but in some instances it may be intended to imply that the product was processed under a superior *hashgachah*, as per the term’s informal usage. **JA**

*This material is for study purposes only and should not be relied upon for practical halachah. One should consult his own competent halachic authority for specific questions.*

#### Notes

1. This does not imply that a blind eye may be turned to their presence. For example, Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe YD 1:19*) in a response to Rabbi Moshe Melamed dated 5715 requires that fowl be opened by a Jew who is cognizant of *treifot*, although not necessarily an expert, and the presumption [*chazakah*] that the animal is healthy cannot be relied upon to permit a non-Jew to open the fowl and remove the innards.
2. Nowadays, another problem that occurs with relative frequency and is therefore also inspected for, is holes of the second stomach, the *beit ha-kosot* [reticulum], caused by animals eating nails and other sharp metal objects.
3. The lungs of fowl can have defects that render it *treifa*, but not the same kind of adhesions that occur in animals. There are those who feel that nowadays fowl lung problems are also becoming more prevalent and thus require a visual and tactile inspection of fowl lungs (Rav Moshe Sternbuch, *Tshuvot v’Hanhagot 2:369*).
4. The Chatam Sofer (*YD 39*) rules that if the peeling is done by an expert and God-fearing *shochet*, then “*yochlu anavim v’yisbau* — let the humble eat and be satisfied” (quoting Psalms 22:27). Nonetheless he advises that a *shomer nafscho* [a scrupulous person] should distance himself from this practice.