

SA YD 87:10.2024

Suzanne Brody

## **Gelatin Revisited<sup>1</sup>**

*Approved on November 21, 2024, by a vote of 17-0-0. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Jaymee Alpert, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Elliot Dorff, Joshua Heller, Barry Leff, Amy Levin, Matthew S. Nover, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Karen Reiss Medwed, Rachel Safman, and Robert Scheinberg. Voting Against: None. Abstaining: None.*

### **שאלה (Question)**

Do any of the new technologies used in the food science industry since Rabbi Klein's seminal teshuvah on the kashrut of gelatin in 1969<sup>2</sup>, impact our stance today regarding the kashrut of gelatin?

### **תשובה (Teshuvah)**

The question regarding the kashrut of gelatin was first discussed extensively by the Orthodox movement in 1952, when almost an entire year's worth of the halakhic journal, *Hapardes*, examined the subject. At that time, there were already poskim granting heksherim for products with gelatin as well as those declaring gelatin a forbidden substance. Our own Law Committee was also divided on this issue. Due to the nature of how it is produced, a large part of the argument regarding the status of gelatin rests on how one understands the concept of *dvar hadash*, which Rabbi Klein defined as "the principle in which a substance goes through a transformation that changes it into something completely new, such that it also loses its former status in regard to being a forbidden food."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. Individual rabbis, however, are authorized to interpret and apply halakhah for their communities.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Klein, "The Kashrut of Gelatin" *Responsa and Halakhic Studies*, second revised and expanded edition, 2005, Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Klein, "The Kashrut of Gelatin," *Responsa and Halakhic Studies* (KTAV Publishing House, 1975), pp. 71. Notably, Rabbi Kassel Abelson also relied on Rabbi Klein's definition of the term in his 1982 tshuvah, "The Kashrut of Mono- and Di-Glycerides"

When Rabbi Klein examined the kashrut of gelatin in 1969, he explained that gelatin is “produced from dry bones of animals (kosher and non-kosher) and also from the skins of these animals.” We are reminded that animal bones and hides are considered inedible even if they come from a non-kosher or non-slaughtered animal and therefore one is not liable for punishment for consuming them (see Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Forbidden Foods 4:18), and therefore they are only forbidden mid’rabannan. The challenge comes from the fact that just a few halakhot later, Rambam explains that there are exceptions to the aforementioned rule, wherein skin is considered like meat. In particular, the hides of domesticated pigs have the halakhic status of meat, which means they are considered edible and are most-definitely not kosher.<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Klein was well aware of these potentially contradictory sources and appreciated the stance of those who argued that gelatin made from the hides of beef or from bones is kosher, while gelatin made from pig hides is not. His arguments, however, center on the fact that even the pig hides and bones undergo a process which renders them inedible. Since they have become non-edible, they are now something entirely new, from which a kosher edible item may be produced.

Rav Moshe Feinstein<sup>5</sup> argued that even if there were a non-edible substance which became edible (which would be permitted), gelatin is different, as the stages are all intermediate within one process.<sup>6</sup> From the outset, the purpose of treating the gelatin is to produce a food in the end, and in such a case an intermediate stage is not significant. Part of the reason for his position came from the fact that Rav Moshe was concerned that the bones and skins used in the process may not have been completely dried. He therefore ruled that in order for the gelatin to be kosher certified, it must be made from kosher animals or fish.<sup>7</sup>

We, like Rabbi Klein and numerous food scientists, do not share this concern. The manufacture of food-grade products includes numerous checks to ensure both food safety and quality. Therefore, we are convinced that the bones and skins used are completely dried during the process. Furthermore, Rabbi Klein explained that in order to extract gelatin from the animal

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<sup>4</sup> Mishneh Torah, Forbidden Foods 4:21

<sup>5</sup> *Igros Moshe* YD 2:27

<sup>6</sup> In other words, the transformations from forbidden to non-edible to permitted constitute a single process, not two separate processes.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that while he held that gelatin made from bones of non-kosher animals is forbidden, when it comes to gelatin made from processed animal skins, he was more lenient see *Igros Moshe* YD 2:23

bone or skin, the material is soaked in acids, heated for a long period of time, and treated in other ways until finally resulting in a dry white powder with no particular taste. In other words, as Rabbi Klein states, “gelatin is the end-product of a process in which a substance is treated chemically and transformed into what seems ostensibly to be a *dvar hadash* (a new substance).” He reminds us that the Talmud (Pesachim 21a) states that a foodstuff which is not fit to be eaten is no longer prohibited. For these reasons and more, Rabbi Klein therefore declared all gelatins to be kosher, no matter whether the ingredients come from a kosher or non-kosher animal, precisely because of all the myriad ways that the initial ingredients, forbidden for consumption or not, are dramatically and significantly transformed.

Though we now have a more sophisticated scientific vocabulary to describe the process, the gelatin used in food products today is produced in much the same way as it has always been. This collection of peptides and proteins is produced by partial hydrolysis of collagen extracted from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of animals such as domesticated cattle, chicken, pigs, and fish. During processing, some of the bonds between and within component proteins are broken and acids and alkalines such as caustic lime or sodium carbonate are used to extract minerals and bacteria from the animal parts. For more information on the procedure for making gelatin today, one can go to the website for GROW (Gelatin Representatives of the World).<sup>8</sup> Through a thorough step-by-step explanation of the gelatin production in the present-day, it is further confirmed that not only has the procedure of making gelatin gone virtually unchanged since Rabbi Isaac Klein’s teshuvah was first published 55 years ago, but quality control and oversight by food scientists, governmental organizations and mashgichim (rabbis who certify food as kosher) all over the world has vastly improved and become even more stringent.

### **פסק דין (Ruling)**

The [psak by Rabbi Isaac Klein in 1969](#) that all gelatins are kosher is still valid today based on both halakhic argumentation and current food science processes. Those who hold by Rabbi Klein’s teshuvah may continue to do so.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gelatininfo.com/gelatin/manufacturing.html>