

Yetzias Mitzrayim: Removing Egyptian Culture From Our Lives

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On 28 December 2018, the company Fair Insects BV submitted an application to the European Commission to recognise frozen, dried and powder forms of yellow mealworm larva (*Tenebrio Molitor*) as a novel food – the first insect ingredient processed for human consumption. This was followed in 2019 by a request of the French company called Nutri'Earth. In June 2021, the insect protein of the mealworm larva was approved by the EU.

Since then, a significant number of applications for approval of insect derived ingredients has been received for safety evaluation by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Most, if not all, have achieved positive recommendations by the EFSA, and this has led to their approval by the European Commission.

Insects have been touted as a potential food source both due to their sustainability, requiring fewer resources than traditional livestock, and to their nutritional value, being rich in protein. Some believe insects have the capacity to supply future global food demands.

From a purely scientific and practical perspective, there are several concerns that have been raised. To mention just three:

Allergens - Some individuals may have allergies to specific insects or their proteins. Examples include tropomyosin in crickets and arginine kinase in mealworms. Possible cross-reactivity with existing allergens in shellfish or dust mites is also a concern, as they may share similarities with some insect proteins.

Nutritional Composition - Whilst insects are rich in

protein, they may lack other essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids.

Environmental Impact - Although insect farming is generally considered to be more environmentally sustainable than traditional livestock farming, questions remain about the environmental impact of large-scale insect production, particularly in relation to the insect feed used, and to the management of waste.

From a spiritual perspective, the Torah explicitly proscribes the consumption of certain creatures and lists those which are forbidden, including rodents and various water based, creeping or flying insects, (see ויקרא יא, כ-כג).

The rationale for this prohibition is given at the end of Parshas Shemini, which concludes, “For I am Hashem the One who raised you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d: you shall be holy, for I am Holy”. Rashi, citing the Toras Cohanim, (also בבא מציעא סא), explains that the expression of ‘raising’ the Jewish People out of Egypt was chosen by Hashem to teach us that the entire episode of the Exodus from Egypt would have been worthwhile, even if it resulted in just this one improvement: namely, that the Jews would no longer defile themselves by consuming insects and reptiles, as did the Egyptians and other peoples.

It is interesting to note that among the plethora of deities of ancient Egypt, some were specifically associated with flies and insects. These included Serket the scorpion goddess, and Khepri who was depicted with the head of a scarab beetle. Bees were said to come from the tears of the sun god, Ra. Uatchit,



the goddess of papyrus and marshlands, was believed to control the many flies native to the area.

KLBD has made it abundantly clear to kosher certified companies that insect protein and other insect matter is strictly non-kosher. Were the companies to introduce these materials to their manufacturing sites, this would create significant challenges vis-à-vis kosher production, and potentially compromise their continued kosher certification.

For a product to qualify to be kosher certified, each ingredient, additive and processing aid used during production must be confirmed kosher. In addition, the production equipment that is used must be compliant with kosher regulations, as it too will affect the kosher status of the final product. This is not dissimilar to allergen control, whereby a detailed specification sheet will itemise all allergens which may come into contact with the production equipment, even though adequate cleaning procedures may be in place.

However, there remain crucial differences between HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) and kosher regulations, and it is true to say that kosher regulations often demand a higher level of segregation and more intense cleaning processes than those required by other accreditations, and all the more so when products are certified for Pesach.

Therefore, in the main, manufacturers will not be able to handle insect derived materials if they wish to produce kosher certified products.

Wishing you a bug-free Chag Kasher v'Sameach!