

Howard Blas New York

SOMETIME IN 1997, THE Muslim and Jewish chaplains at Mt. Holyoke College had to deal with an emergency. The tiny kitchen in Eliot House, which served kosher meals to Jewish students and *halal* food for Muslims, was taxed beyond capacity.

The emergency took three years and one anonymous donor to solve, but on September 13, 2000, a new \$250,000 dining hall serving certified kosher and *halal* meals opened at Mt. Holyoke, a liberal arts college in South Hadley, Massachusetts. "We are all sitting and eating three meals a day together," says Sister Shamshad Sheikh, the college's Muslim chaplain. It involved mutual concessions: the Jews agreed to avoid anything cooked in wine sauce, which would violate the Islamic prohibition on alcohol, and the Muslims accept what they call *al-kitab* meat, from animals slaughtered by "People of the Book," which Islam permits, although their own ritual slaughter is preferred. The program serves

best and brightest engineering students. When the school was about to lose an extremely promising grad student because it had no kosher food, an admissions officer raced to the office of Prof. Barry Simon, the Orthodox Jewish head of the math department for advice. The result was a \$70,000 kitchen, certified by the Rabbinical Council of California and the Islamic Center of Southern California, serving about a dozen students. One of its specialties is late-night suppers for Muslims who fast during daylight hours in the holy month of Ramadan.

Caltech and Mt. Holyoke represent part of a growing collaboration — and a parallel competition — between observers (and certifiers) of Jewish and Muslim dietary laws in the U.S. For one thing, Muslims account for 20 percent of all kosher food sales, paying \$1.15 billion to do so, accord-

committees, accept pork gelatins."

California rabbinical groups say no kashrut supervisors in their area currently certify pork gelatin as kosher. But such a certification is not impossible under certain interpretations of the dietary laws, says Joe Regenstein, professor of food sciences at Cornell University. "The most liberal view," he says, "holds that the gelatin, being made from bones and skin, is not from a food." This view holds that in processing, gelatin goes through a stage where it is "not edible by man nor dog, and as such becomes a new entity," says Regenstein.

Regenstein, whose column in *Kashrus* magazine states that he is a food scientist, not an authority on Jewish law, notes that rules on gelatin — which can also be derived from fish, beef bones or skin — may vary. That's not surprising, given the ex-



One Man's Meat...

Muslims account for about a fifth of the kosher food sales in the United States. But while Jewish dietary laws are similar to Islamic halal — there are some obstacles to full-scale cooperation.

as many as 200 students, including some who are neither Jewish nor Muslim, daily.

After the September 11 terror attacks and the subsequent wave of anti-Muslim sentiment, Sister Sheikh observes, "Jewish students were asking what they could do to help Muslim students and giving 100 percent support."

The joint dining program, says Melissa Simon, 19, of Brookline, Massachusetts, "opened a dialogue for theological discussions and explanations. Sometimes, though, we are just students wanting to eat."

Another joint kosher-*halal* program, at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in Pasadena, evolved out of the institution's competition with MIT for the

ing to Menachem Lubinsky, who produces the highly successful annual KasherFest trade show. Kosher food is a \$5.75 billion-a-year market, growing by 15 percent a year. The largest chunk comes from Jews, who spend \$2.5 billion and account for 45 percent of sales. But according to a recent survey, only 16-18 percent of America's 5.7 million Jews say they keep kosher. So who else is buying kosher? Oreo eaters, kosher hot-dog lovers, vegetarians and the food allergic (a category that buys \$570 million a year), Seventh-Day Adventists — and Muslims, to name a few.

Under Koranic *halal* law, Muslims are prohibited from consuming pork or pork products, also barred by kashrut, gelatins from pig bones, which may be a problem, and alcohol and alcohol derivatives.

"Kosher symbols are not enough," says Muhammad Munir Chaudry, an Illinois-based food scientist who in 1984 formed the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of North America. In a telephone interview, Chaudry told *The Report* that "some rabbis, including the California kashrut

istence of over 400 kashrut-supervising agencies and symbols worldwide.

Despite his misgivings on the gelatin issue, notes Chaudry, "Most Muslims purchase some kosher products ... Kosher is considered quality in the marketplace." Of course, Chaudry would prefer that Muslims consume only *halal* foods.

BEYOND THE DIVERGENCE ON alcohol, kashrut and *halal* dietary laws are far from identical: Another major difference is the list of restricted animals: Jews and Muslims agree that pork is banned — *treif* for Jews and *haram* for Muslims; but Jews can only eat ruminants with split hooves while Muslims are permitted to eat a wider range of animals and sea creatures, including shellfish. Species acceptable (*halal*) for consumption include not only goats, beef, sheep, deer, all acceptable for Jews, but also rabbits and camels, which are *treif*. Excluded (*haram*) are beasts of prey which have talons and fangs, including lions, wolves and foxes, as well as cats and dogs — and the milk and

eggs of prohibited species.

Each religion has its own method of slaughter: Jews must eat meat killed by a *shohet* who checks the *halef* (sharp knife) frequently to make sure the cutting edge is smooth. (Empire, a leading provider of kosher poultry, employs a "roving knife inspector" to check blades for nicks, which would make the slaughter unkosher.) The *shohet* also says a blessing asking forgiveness from God before the ritual killing. Meat must then be thoroughly checked for imperfections, then soaked and salted.

Under Muslim law, at the moment of slaughter, the *tasmiyah* and *takbir* blessings are said over each animal or bird by a trained, religiously observant Muslim slaughterer — and the name of Allah is uttered.

Princeton University Islamic scholar Mark Cohen notes that "Sunni law took a

Syed? "I buy meat and say the blessing myself in my house. If a product says 'alcohol' in big letters, I won't buy it, but I won't go with a magnifying glass."

Right now, Chaudry says, there are about 60 *halal* certifying agencies in the U.S. alone — mostly dealing with products exported to Muslims in such countries as South Africa, Fiji, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan. "The domestic market," says Chaudry, "is still in its infancy."

If Chaudry is correct, the number of Muslims buying kosher groceries and meat may go down in the near future as more *halal*-certified products appear on the shelves of U.S. stores. Kosher butcher Weiner will deal with decreased sales if and when that day comes. "For now," he reports, "there is no one with *halal* certification in the Boston area."

interested in supporting local *halal* efforts, would take a similar stand.

Still, collaborations between Jews and Muslims in the food production and certification industry are not new. Avrom Pollack, president of Star-K, proudly describes the successful joint Jewish-Islamic campaign to get the steel industry in the United States to stop using a pork derivative as an industrial grease to coat the stainless steel from which food-storage cans are made.

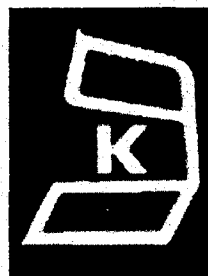
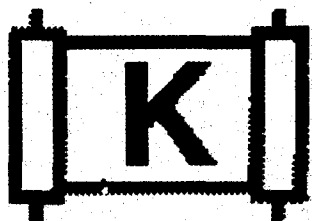
And cooperation now appears to be extending beyond Mt. Holyoke and Caltech to other campuses. A Dartmouth College delegation led by Yousef Haque of Al-Nur, the Muslim student organization, and Jason Spitalnick of Hillel recently traveled from the school's New Hampshire campus to see Mt. Holyoke's program, but has encountered difficulties raising the \$300,000 needed to set up a kitchen that meets both Muslim and Jewish dietary needs. There's also a joint kosher-*halal* kitchen at UCLA for dietary law-abiding students of both faiths. And Cornell, in Ithaca, New York, where Regenstein teaches Food 250, a course dealing with kosher and *halal* rules, says that its Multi-Cultural Kosher Food Program is designed "to meet the dietary needs of students who are kosher, *halal*, vegetarian, vegan, allergic, Hindu, Seventh-Day Adventist, alcohol avoidant, Catholic or simply curious."

Regenstein would like to take the cooperation at least one step farther. He feels kashrut-supervision agencies could add extra inspections to their certification process to deal with the needs of Muslims and other groups with special dietary needs. He's even proposed a new symbol, "Hook-R," which he says would "hook together" the needs of these consumers.

That revolutionary step does not seem to be on the cards quite yet, partly because of the skepticism present on both sides. Muslim certifiers want people to buy *halal* and support local Islamic marketers, while some hard-liners talk about "paying a Jewish tax" and supporting Jewish community institutions when they buy kosher food.

On the other hand, there are Jews who will, in private, speculate that scattered *halal* certifiers may be acting as fronts for radical Islamic groups, and kashrut organizations who quietly admit that their regular supporters would object to the idea of joint supervision.

Despite the need in both camps to shy away from cooperative efforts, the evidence points to increasing culinary collaboration. If the trend continues, some day we may see the first joint *halal* and kashrut-certified McDonald's — if not in Jerusalem, then perhaps in Brooklyn. ●



permissive position on the eating of animals slaughtered by People of the Book. Even the Prophet Muhammad was said to have 'eaten of their [the Jews'] food.'" Law of Shi'ite Muslims, Cohen says, "was stricter, as non-Muslims, meaning Jews and Christians, are held to be impure."

Chaudry accepts the Sunni view. "There is a provision in our religion that says if *halal* meat is not available, we can eat meat slaughtered by any God-fearing person. It can be a Jew or a Christian, but not a Communist," he says. Theoretically then, Muslims could eat kosher meat. But Chaudry feels that this leniency clause no longer applies since *halal* meat is readily available throughout the U.S.

In fact, many U.S. Muslims are not so strict about *halal*. Leon Weiner, since 1947 owner of the American Kosher butcher shop in Mattapan, a Boston suburb, reports that "Muslims do buy a lot of kosher meat and have been loyal customers for years."

Ali Syed, a Bangladeshi cab driver who has lived in Brooklyn, New York for more than 20 years notes that he doesn't look for *halal* certification on meat. He looks back fondly on life in his native country where people bought live chickens and slaughtered them themselves. "Here," says Syed, "people are making money off other people." What does following *halal* mean to

MARY ANNE JACKSON OF Chicago stands at the confluence of kashrut and *halal* in North America. Her "My Own Meals" line of all-natural, refrigeration-free pre-packaged meals has both kosher (since 1991) and *halal* (since 1995) certification. Her products are consumed by Jewish businessmen in China, North American Jewish Boy Scout troops on camping trips, Jewish members of the U.S. armed forces and will soon be eaten by Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut on the Space Station.

Jackson recently convened an all-day meeting for Jewish and Muslim leaders in search of one agreed-upon standard of meat slaughter and processing. While this concept is theoretically possible, it is more difficult in practice due to differences about blessings, salting, etc. The always creative Regenstein suggests the use of "Muslim-supervised *katabi* meat," where a Jew does the slaughter but a Muslim is present." (*Katabi* refers to non-Muslim "People of the Book," a class to which Jews belong under Muslim law). "Even Rabbi Moshe Heinemann [of the super-strict Star-K Kosher Certification Agency in Baltimore] accepts Muslims present and saying (the *tasmiyah* and *takbir*) prayers," says Regenstein. But if Jews might accept such a solution, it's not clear whether Muslims,