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Kosher in Space

Kosher food now is boldly going where no kosher food has gone before.

In NASA's forty years of making space flights, there have been a few Jewish astronauts. But the first to request kosher food in space is Colonel Ian Ramon.

Col. Ramon, 47, from Tel Aviv, who is training for a US space shuttle mission devoted to an international research project, will be the first astronaut to eat a kosher meal in space.

"I told them I wanted kosher food, and they told me they'd have to check it out because nobody until today has asked them for kosher food," Ramon said in Houston, where he has been training at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center since 1998.

Ramon, not completely observant, realizes that, as Israel's first astronaut, he represents the entire Jewish community. A member of the Israeli Air Force, Ramon is the son of a German immigrant and a woman who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Astronauts select their food from a wide menu. In addition, they are also allowed special requests, such as vegetarian meals, or a favorite kind of candy or cracker.

To accommodate their first kosher traveler into space, Vickie Kloeris, system manager for food, said NASA contacted My Own Meals, a company in Deerfield, Ill. that sells certified kosher food (Rabbis Aharon & Moshe Soloveitchik) in "thermostabilized" sealed pouches actually meant to accommodate campers. But the food, which comes in 8 ounce foil pouches and has a shelf life of more than three years, is also perfect for space flight.

Of ten kosher choices, Ramon picked five: Florentine lasagna, beef stew, chicken Mediterranean, My Kind of Chicken (which the company describes as chunks of light and dark chicken with brown rice, peas and carrots), and Old World Stew (beef with brown rice, zucchini, pinto beans and flavors of the Middle East).