



## Soul Food: Jewish Values from a Gastronomic Perspective

Developed by  
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For more information about the IJE Community Hebrew High Schools project and this curriculum development initiative, please visit our website:

[www.brandeis.edu/ije](http://www.brandeis.edu/ije)

### **Institute for Informal Jewish Education**

Brandeis University  
Community Hebrew High Schools Curriculum Development Initiative

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## Soul Food: Jewish Values from a Gastronomic Perspective

# OF SESSIONS/COURSE: 16

LENGTH OF EACH SESSION: 50 minutes

### **PURPOSES AND GOALS OF THIS COURSE:**

#### OVERALL ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

- The students will learn about and discuss food issues within the framework of both Jewish tradition and contemporary life.
- The students will gain an appreciation for and familiarity with Jewish values.
- The students will learn about Jewish traditions emphasis on combining spiritual and ethical meaning with the everyday aspects of life.
- The students will reflect on their own food choices and (social, environmental, ethical, health) implications of those choices.

#### INTENDED BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

- The students will be able to describe arguments based in biblical and rabbinic texts in favor and against eating meat.
- The students will be able to provide text-based Jewish arguments in favor of caring for the environment.
- The students will be able to articulate, based on texts, the importance of the Jewish value of caring for the poor and the needy.
- The students will be able to recall that our table serves in lieu of the Temple's altar to atone for sins.
- The students will be able to identify the essential value of life as a rationale underlying *kashrut* (the laws of keeping kosher).
- The students will be able to describe essential laws of *kashrut*.
- The students will be able to argue pros and cons relating to the debate on biotech food, including offering arguments based in *halachah* (Jewish law).
- The students will be able to identify the essential blessings of *birkat hamazon* (the blessing after the meal).

## UNDERSTANDINGS

- The students will have a deeper understanding of Jewish tradition's aim to sanctify all actions including daily, mundane activities such as eating.

## Up-to-date Resources

Since I first taught this course at Hebrew College's Prozdor program in 2005, the topic has blossomed and many new and interesting resources continue to become available on the intersection of Jewish life and contemporary food issues. To make the course not overly demanding to teach, yet dynamic and fresh, I suggest that you combine sessions that have been pre-written in this curriculum with new issues in the public eye. A fabulous resource for new related articles is the web-magazine, "The Jew and the Carrot" - <http://jcarrot.org> - which features articles on the intersection between Jews, food and contemporary life.

## Preparing to teach this course

1. Read through for each of the sessions' page(s) titled "I. Teacher Perpetration". This will give you the big idea of each session, what the needed materials are, and what the students will be learning and doing in the session.
2. Make a list for yourself of topics with which you feel a personal connection with in terms of content knowledge, personal interest or experience.
3. Scan current hot issues that relate to the topics of this course, for example browsing the web-magazine "The Jew and the Carrot", as well as by considering the Jewish calendar during the period you will be teaching. You may want to offer sessions tailored to certain holidays or you may want to reorder the sessions to align with upcoming holidays. For example, you may want to offer the sessions with themes of blessing and gratitude next to the American holiday of Thanksgiving, or to study the unit on poverty in proximity with Purim or Passover.
4. Give a thought to resources in your community which you could draw upon to enhance the course. For example, there may be experts in your community who you could invite into the class. Further, if there is a topic for which you lack content knowledge, consider inviting a guest speaker. For example, some teachers have suggested a guest speaker on the topic of eating disorders (session # 14), or on the topic of environment (session # 7).
5. Consider opportunities for "real work": opportunities for your students to present what they are learning and to apply it in the context of your school and community at large. For example, in 2007 when the food bill was being discussed, there were opportunities for students to write to the local newspaper of their school or synagogue. Holiday events can be used for the students to implement what they are learning and to share it with others. There are a variety of activities suggested in the curriculum (such as making food for a shelter in lesson #9 and writing a commission in lesson #6), but there is value in finding applications that are particularly relevant for your community and students.

6. Adapt the syllabus to fit the number of sessions you will be teaching and the topics you have selected from the above exploration. Sessions which could possibly be combined include the two *kashrut* sessions (lessons 4&5), two of the three hunger sessions (lessons 9, 10 &11), or the two sessions on blessings (lessons 12 &13). Sessions you may consider optional include lessons 6, 8, 13, 14, 15 – but clearly the choice is for you to be make based on you familiarity with the community and the students with whom you are working.

7. Adapt the lessons to your students’ proficiency with studying Jewish texts. The students will likely benefit from weaving introductory explanations to the sources used - historical and social contexts to place the texts.

8. Adapt the syllabus to the required or normative assessment at your school.

9. Check the materials needed for the sessions you will be teaching. The following table can help you identify items need to be ordered in advance.

<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Materials to order well in advance of class</b>
1. Ice-cream and Ice Breakers	Binders for students
2. Eating as Tikkun	
3. Judaism, Vegetarianism, and Eating Meat	Highlighter for each student
4. <i>Kashrut</i> – What is it about?	If needed, reserve computer and projector for the Jeopardy game.
5. Why Keep Kosher?	
6. Ethical Treatment of Animals	Order DVD or download clip off internet
7. Environment	Optional: Order DVD Optional: Guest lecturer
8. Biotech Food	
9. Hunger in Our Midst	
10. Jewish Guidance for Caring for the Hungry & Poor	Order posters related to hunger. Make a plan for where the student-made posters will be displayed
11. Hungry Planet	Order Equal Exchange snack such as chocolate (if not available in local stores). Download clips off internet.
12. <i>Brakhot</i> – Connecting with Source	
13. Blessing Before Eating	
14. From Light to Darkness (Eating Disorders)	Optional – Guest lecturer to speak about eating disorders
15. Hospitality	Ushpizin DVD
16. Soul Food	Make-a –Plate materials

## Syllabus

Session	Title	Questions of Meaning	Selection of Texts and other Materials to be used/read	Exercise/Activity
1	Icebreakers & Ice-cream	How can Jewish perspectives about food and eating enhance life?	Post-it poster A list of clues related to the topics in the course for the Pictionary game	Introductions  Pictionary Game  Course schema and assessment
2	Eating as <i>Tikkun</i>	In what ways is eating more than “just lunch”?  How can eating and food nourish the soul and contribute to a better world?	Brachot 55a  Quote from The Omnivore’s Dilemma  Proverbs 13:25  The Garden of Eden story from Genesis chapter 2 (first Biblical sin)  Quote from Rav Nachman of Breslov  Genesis 3:19	Discussing what about food goes beyond being “just lunch” - what moral, spiritual, or global implications might there be to food and eating.  Creating and presenting original midrashim for an ending to the Garden of Eden story with a moral titled, “Eating as Tikkun” to link the biblical story to morals related to eating.
3	Judaism, Vegetarianism and Eating Meat	What we eat – does God care (does it have spiritual significance)?  What meaning can we draw from the existence of different perspectives within Jewish tradition about eating meat?	Sheet with texts  Highlighters	Study texts in groups, then present to each other a variety of Jewish texts representing different positions with regards to eating meat and a vegetarian diet.  Discussing what meaning we can draw from the existence of different perspectives.
4	<i>Kashrut</i> – What is it about?	Why keep kosher?  Noting that the meaning of the word ‘kosher’ is ‘fit’, what do you consider food that is fit?	Write up about the laws of <i>kashrut</i>  Power-point Jeopardy <i>kashrut</i> game	Studying in groups an aspect of the laws of <i>kashrut</i> and presenting them to the class.  Jeopardy game to review and learn the laws of <i>kashrut</i> .

5	<i>Kashrut</i> — Why keep kosher?	<p>Why keep kosher?</p> <p>Noting that the meaning of the word ‘kosher’ is ‘fit’, what do you consider food that is fit?</p>	<p>Colored paper</p> <p>Glue</p>	<p>Listen to reasons that have been proposed over the generations for an underlying rationale behind <i>kashrut</i> and discuss which they find most compelling.</p> <p>Creating a torn-paper <i>midrash</i> based on one of the rationales.</p> <p>Generating personal formulations for what is fit for eating.</p>
6	Ethics of how Animals are Treated and Kashrut	<p>What are our expectations regarding the treatment of animals that become kosher meat?</p> <p>What is the connection between human values and how our tradition directs us to treat animals?</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 22:10</p> <p>Deuteronomy 25:4</p> <p>Deuteronomy 11: 15</p> <p>Psalms 155:9</p> <p>Gitin 62a</p> <p>Bava Metzia 85a</p> <p>“If This is Kosher” video</p>	<p>Reading biblical and rabbinic texts about the ethical treatment of animals.</p> <p>Discussing personal expectations regarding the treatment of animals that will become food, in particular with regards to kosher meat.</p> <p>Watching a video and discussing what can be done about the challenges raised in the video.</p> <p>Brainstorming what each person can do to have what we eat represent our values.</p>

7	Environment	<p>What impact do we, as food consumers, have on the environment? And what do we want to do about it?</p> <p>How does the impact our food consumption has on the environment relate to ‘eating as <i>tikkun</i>’?</p>	<p>Genesis 20:19</p> <p>Deuteronomy 20:19</p> <p>Rambam, Hilkhos Melakhim 6:10</p> <p>Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb, on <i>bal tashchit</i></p> <p>Midrash Kohelet Rabba <i>parasha 7</i></p> <p>Pirkei Avot 2: 16</p> <p>Optional: Beyond Organic DVD (would require an adaptation to this lesson plan)</p>	<p>Making a plan for one different action during the coming week regarding the students’ individual consumption that will improve the environmental impact (if adapted as a new habit).</p>
8	Biotech Food— Are you in Favor or Against GMOs?	<p>What are the arguments for and against biotech food from a social, environmental, and <i>halachic</i> (Jewish law) perspective?</p>	<p>A Babaganewz article summarizing the debate.</p> <p>Genesis 1:28 on the role of humans in creation.</p> <p>Leviticus 19:19 law prohibiting mixing.</p> <p>Nachmanides’ explanation on the above text.</p> <p>Midrash Kohelet Rabbah that has God requesting that people not ruin God’s wonderful creation.</p> <p>Worksheet for preparing for the debate on GMOs</p> <p>An article which dovetails with the sessions’ learning</p>	<p>Reading and discussing Jewish texts that employ arguments in favor of and opposing biotech food.</p> <p>Debating the pros and cons of biotech foods from social, environmental, and <i>halachic</i> (Jewish law) perspectives.</p>

9	Hunger in our Midst	Considering what our tradition tells us about caring for the poor, and taking into account the current economical situation of a large segment of the population, what can be done about hunger and poverty?	Mazon quiz about hunger and poverty statistics in the US  A personal story	Taking a quiz about hunger in the US.  Grading your own quiz using the answer sheet and discussing what was surprising.  Making sandwiches for a homeless shelter or doing another activity to help the hunger and poor in your area.
10	Jewish Guidance for Caring for the Hungry and the Poor	Considering what our tradition tells us about caring for the poor, and taking into account the current economical situation of a large segment of the population, what can be done about hunger and poverty?	A selection of quotes from Jewish sources on caring for the hungry and needy, divided into sheets for seven different groups (make enough copies of the texts for the students to cut up for their posters).  Posters, glue sticks, colorful paper, markers or crayons, photos of hunger and poverty.	Reading and studying Jewish text sources on hunger.  Creating a poster presenting those texts for others to learn.
11	Hungry Planet	Considering what our tradition tells us about caring for the poor, and taking into account the current economical situation of a large segment of the population, what can be done about hunger and poverty?		Discussing strategies that can be effective in attending to hunger.  Looking at the book, "Hungry Planet", and learning what is the typical weekly food of families around the globe.

12	<i>Blessings—</i> Connecting with the Source	As we deepen our understanding of the meaning of the word <i>brakha</i> , what can we learn about the purpose and value of saying <i>brakhot</i> ?	Deuteronomy 8:10  Main sections of <i>birkat hamazon</i> —the grace after meals.	Generating ideas about how different words in Hebrew, which all have the same root as the word <i>brakha</i> , can give us insight into the meanings of the word <i>brakha</i> .  Reading the Biblical commandment: to bless after eating to one's satisfaction and proposing an outline for what should be included in such a blessing.  Looking for the central idea of one of the four main <i>brakhot</i> of <i>birkat hamazon</i> (one of the blessings of the grace after the meal) and presenting it to the class.
13	<i>Brakhot—On the Food we Eat</i>	Why do we say a <i>brakha</i> before eating food?	Deut. 8:3  Psachim 118a  Abraham Joshua Heschel  Gate of Discernment, chapter 5  Deut 8:10-18  Mishnah Brakhot 6:1  Psalms 24:1  Brakhot 35b	Working in groups to study texts that offer reasons for why we say a <i>brakha</i> on food.  Studying how food is blessed and blessing and eating a variety of foods.

14	Eating Disorders— When Light Turns to Darkness	How does food, a source of nourishment, turn into a damaging substance and what can we do when we see signs of such a problem in ourselves or others?	Jerusalem Talmud, Sotah 114  Talmud Eruvin 54a  Talmud Brachot, 57b  Yevamot 20a  Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:1  Talmud - Ketubot 104a  Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot 1:4  Proverbs 26:16	Sharing what each person knows about the most common eating disorders and what observable signs might indicate such a condition.  Observing a collaborative art piece, created from reflections written by people who are recovering from eating disorders, discussing the piece, hearing about the artist's intentions, and discussing what they learned from the art piece.  Reflecting, discussing, and writing about individual experiences with food—in terms of both light and darkness.
15	Hospitality	What is the meaning of hospitality?  Why is hospitality important?  What helps hosting go well and what makes it challenging?  What can we do to be better hosts?	Ethics of our Fathers 1  Talmud Shabbat 127a  The Midrash in Avot D'Rabbi Natan  Rambam in Hilkhot Evel 14:2  DVD of the movie <i>Ushpizin</i>	Describing the students' experiences with hospitality by sharing anecdotes about hosting and being hosted.  Reading quotes from Jewish texts related to hospitality.  Discussing the value of hosting as demonstrated in the story of Abram and the three messengers and in a text in the Talmud.  Watching a clip from the movie, <i>Ushpizin</i> (guests), and discussing based on the clip what is involved in hosting well.

16	Soul Food	<p>Soul Food – how can eating and food nourish the soul?</p> <p>Eating as <i>tikkun</i> – how can eating and food contribute to a better world?</p>	<p>Make a plate” sheets and mailing envelope (see <a href="http://www.makit.com">www.makit.com</a> for instructions)</p> <p>Student binders with texts and their notes from the entire course</p> <p>Markers</p>	<p>Sharing what the students have learned in this course.</p> <p>Making “Soul Food” plates that offer affirmations and reminders of essential Jewish values related to eating.</p>
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### About the Curriculum Developer

**Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger** is an educator passionate about Jewish learning that builds meaningful bridges between contemporary life and Jewish wisdom.

She teaches middle and high school students at Hebrew College’s Prozdor program and is the Judaic Studies and Family Education Consultant to the MetroWest Jewish Day School. Ronit is on the faculty of Ikkarim and Me’ah, adult education programs of Boston’s CJP and Hebrew College.

Dr. Ziv-Kreger is a teacher for ADAMAH, a three month leadership training program for Jewish young adults that integrates organic farming, sustainable living, Jewish learning, and spiritual practice at Isabella Freedman Retreat Center.

In Israel, Dr. Ziv-Kreger served as founding director of a program in 50 middle and high schools that supports religious, secular, Arab and Jewish students to create their own environmental solutions and present them at an annual conference of environmental professionals, in partnership with the Israel Ministries of Education and Environment and the Israel Ecology Society. She also co-authored *Ourselves and Our Environment: Daily Reflections on the Environment for Elul, Lent, and Ramadan* which was widely distributed by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel.

Dr. Ziv-Kreger is a graduate of the Pardes Educator’s Program. She earned a Ph.D. from M.I.T.’s Sloan School of Management, writing a thesis on motivation and identity. She is the mother of three children. She lives in Sharon, MA with her husband and children, and can be reached at [zivkreger@aol.com](mailto:zivkreger@aol.com).

## Session 1, Soul Food

Icebreakers & Ice Cream

### I. Teacher's Preparation

#### UNIT QUESTION OF MEANING:

- How can Jewish perspectives about food and eating enhance life?

#### SELECTION OF TEXTS:

- A list of food words that represent topics we will study this class – clues for a Pictionary game (appendix 1B).

#### MATERIALS:

- Binders for the students + stickers for names
- Sheet with introduction prompts (appendix 1A)
- Pictionary clues glued onto dark colored index cards (appendix 1B)
- Blank sheets of paper
- Pens
- Course schema for each student
- Post-it poster for recording the students' answers about their values
- Reflection details and rubric for each student
- A sign-up sheet for bringing in snacks (appendix 1E)
- Ice cream, bowls, spoons, scoop

## Teacher's Guide

### I. Teacher's Preparation

This is really the question of meaning for the entire course – more so than for this class.

This class is predominantly a playful introduction to who is in the class and to some themes we will study.

#### SELECTION OF TEXTS:

There is a list of proposed words to use for the Pictionary game in appendix 1B – clearly you may add your own words.

The students will keep the texts handed out in each session in their binders. Encourage the students to take notes in their binders. The binders will be used in the final session where students will be using what they learned to create a plate. On the plate they will write actions and thought patterns they want to live with regarding food and eating.

**OBJECTIVES/INTENDED OUTCOMES:****1. What will the students *do*?**

- The students will introduce themselves and will become familiar with each other.
- The students will ask any questions they have regarding the course and syllabus.
- The students will play Pictionary with words related to the topics we will be studying.
- The students will sign up to bring in snack once during the course.

**2. The students *will be able to*:**

- Identify topics that will be studied in this course.

**3. The students *will understand*:**

- How their learning will be assessed and what will determine their grade.

**ASSESSMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES:**

1. You should continually monitor the students' questions and comments, and assess:
  - If the students understand the scope and goals of the course;
  - If the students are comfortable with the subject of the class.
2. You will not see the written statements of the students, but can assess if the students are comfortable writing their statements.

**OBJECTIVES/INTENDED OUTCOMES:**

Introductions help to set a nice feeling in the group. Pay attention to who does and who does not know other people in the class.

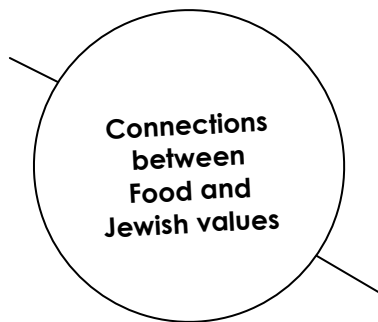
One of the goals of this class is to have fun (hence the Pictionary) and to complete all of the business of setting up structures that will support the learning beginning next session.

Business should include how the student materials will be gathered, how assessment will happen and (of course) how food and snacks will happen.

## II. The Lesson Plan

### A. INTRODUCTION (5 min.):

1. Tell the students: When it comes to food we all have plenty of experience. As we will see next week and over the course of this course, our tradition sees food and eating as one of the primary entry points for expressing Jewish values and living Jewishly.
2. Ask: What links do you see between food, Jewish life, and Jewish values?
3. Write the student answers onto a web diagram (write responses in circles and connect them to other circles with lines) – adding each response to the web close to related responses.



4. Comment on the diversity of the answers and how each person relates to food and Jewish values differently.
5. Give an overview of the course:  
In this course – through sharing food, studying texts, playing games, and debating – we will explore these and other topics to deepen our understanding of how food serves to connect everyday life with Jewish values, to connect the mundane and the spiritual. Our learning will span issues of:
  - growing food;
  - distributing it;
  - cooking it;
  - sharing it;
  - eating it;
  - giving thanks for it.

## II. The Lesson Plan

### INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this short introduction is to give a quick overview of what the course is about. The brainstorming activity is not crucial. You can substitute it for your preferred introduction; for example, you could share something from the current news, you could share why you are passionate about this topic, or you could share other personal stories to create an environment of sharing.

By the end of this course you will have a deeper understanding of how Jewish perspectives about food and eating can enhance life.

Today's class is an introduction to who is in the room, to the topics we will study, and to how you will be assessed.

## B. SET INDUCTION/MOTIVATION (15 min.):

1. Invite each student to introduce him or herself with the following information (appendix 1A). You can go first to offer an example.
  - Name;
  - Grade;
  - School;
  - Favorite food;
  - A value important to you that has a connection to food or eating (try to innovate beyond values other have already connected with food and eating).

(Record these values on the Post-it poster and save it for the next session of the class.)
2. Ask the students: What draws you to this course on **Jewish Values from a Gastronomic Perspective**? What are you hoping to learn?

## INDUCTION/MOTIVATION:

Displaying a copy of the list or handing out pieces of paper with the list (appendix 1A) will help the students remember what they need to answer as they introduce themselves.

Introductions facilitate the following: the students becoming familiar with each other, creating a context for learning, and hearing what the students hope to learn in this course.

Questions on values have a double purpose here. First, they are a good way for people to say something meaningful about themselves without being too vulnerable in introducing themselves. Second, since the course is about values, it is information that can inform you of who is in the class and what values matter to them. You can continue during the sessions to draw connections to the values the students mentioned.

I like putting some of the values the students mention on my attendance sheet so that I come across them again and again.

Often the first few students who share a value set the tone on level of meaning and vulnerability for the rest of the class. If you are able, you may want to “stack the deck” by going first and then choosing who will go next.

## C. ACTIVITY (15 min.):

1. Ask: Who has never played Pictionary?
2. As needed, explain the game (see appendix 1C) or let the students explain the game and then clarify. Let the students know that the “category” for all rounds of our game will be ‘topics we will learn about in this class’ since the purpose is to introduce some of the topics we will learn. See appendix 1B for the clues.
3. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students.
4. Have each group select a ‘picturist’ who will draw the clue first for their group.
5. Draw a clue from the pile and show it only to the picturists from each group.
6. Let the game begin...
7. Play as many rounds as time allows.

## D. OVERVIEW OF COURSE (10 min.):

1. Briefly review the syllabus and distribute a copy to each student.
2. Discuss the **assessment methods** for this course: The students’ grades will be guided by the following formula:
  - a. Class participation (oral and written) 50%
  - b. Typed reflection after 5 of the 15 classes (not including today’s session) emailed to teacher. 50%
3. Distribute the information on these reflections (appendix 1D) and carefully review them by reading aloud the full document. Give time for the students to ask questions.
4. Tell the students: You are each expected to bring in a snack for one of the sessions. Following through on this will be reflected in extra credit.

## ACTIVITY:

Your tone and way of presentation will help set the degree of competitiveness of the game.

Give some thought to your preferences for the high energy of fiercer competition with its “winners and losers” consequence verses the alternatives. I usually seek some balance that downplays the competitive side of the game while still reasonably sticking with the rules.

After each round of the game you have a teachable moment in which you can plan to say a few words on the topic of the clue or give the students an opportunity to ask questions about that topic and what we will be learning.

## OVERVIEW OF COURSE:

Make sure that you have an updated syllabus. Consider including a column with dates for each session.

Consider adapting the assessment methods to your personal style as well as to the norms of the institution in which you are teaching. Alternatives I have used over the years include:

- Reflections (as set in the lesson)
- Choose one of the topics to create a presentation (taking the form of an essay, poster, poem, skit, etc.)
- Students writing questions for a quiz after each session, and me selecting from those questions (and occasionally adding to them) for one or two quizzes.
- After each session, the students select several affirmations – things

5. Have the students sign up for bringing snack; make a handout with appropriate dates and seasonal suggestions of what to bring (see appendix 1E for an example)
  1. Distribute sign up sheet.
  2. Ask about food allergies.
  3. Explain issues of *kashrut*.

#### E. CLOSURE (5 min.):

1. Tell the students: In our session today we were introduced to each other, to our course and its topics and to how I will assess the learning. Let the students know some things you are looking forward to based on what you learned from today's class.
2. Eat ice cream.

they personally plan to implement in their lives – which were related to or inspired by the session (see lesson #16 – Soul Food, where these affirmations are written onto the plates that the students make). In institutions where there is no formal assessment, these affirmations can offer an assessment tool beyond those already included in the lesson plans.

I suggest telling the students that at times you will give an extra assignment or an alternative to writing a reflection.

Some students may have severe food allergies, in which case the idea of the students bringing in snacks may need to be significantly modified or dismissed all together.

Inquire in advance about the *kashrut* guidelines of the institution you are in, so that those can be followed.

#### CLOSURE:

To set your expectations correctly, you may want to let the students know that today's class was an introduction and that subsequently, the classes will be more content rich.