

Of the hundreds of species of kosher animals Noach herded into the Ark, how many of them actually find their way onto our plates today? Locusts? Quail? Pheasant? Water buffalo? Commercially viable mass food production, together with the disappearance of old shochtim who remember the varied traditions from their native communities, are combining to erode the mesorah that validates the kashrus of many animals. What motivated two men to dedicate themselves to preserving these oral traditions? The story, and the adventure, behind the scenes of the most recent “Mesorah Dinner” would make Noach proud

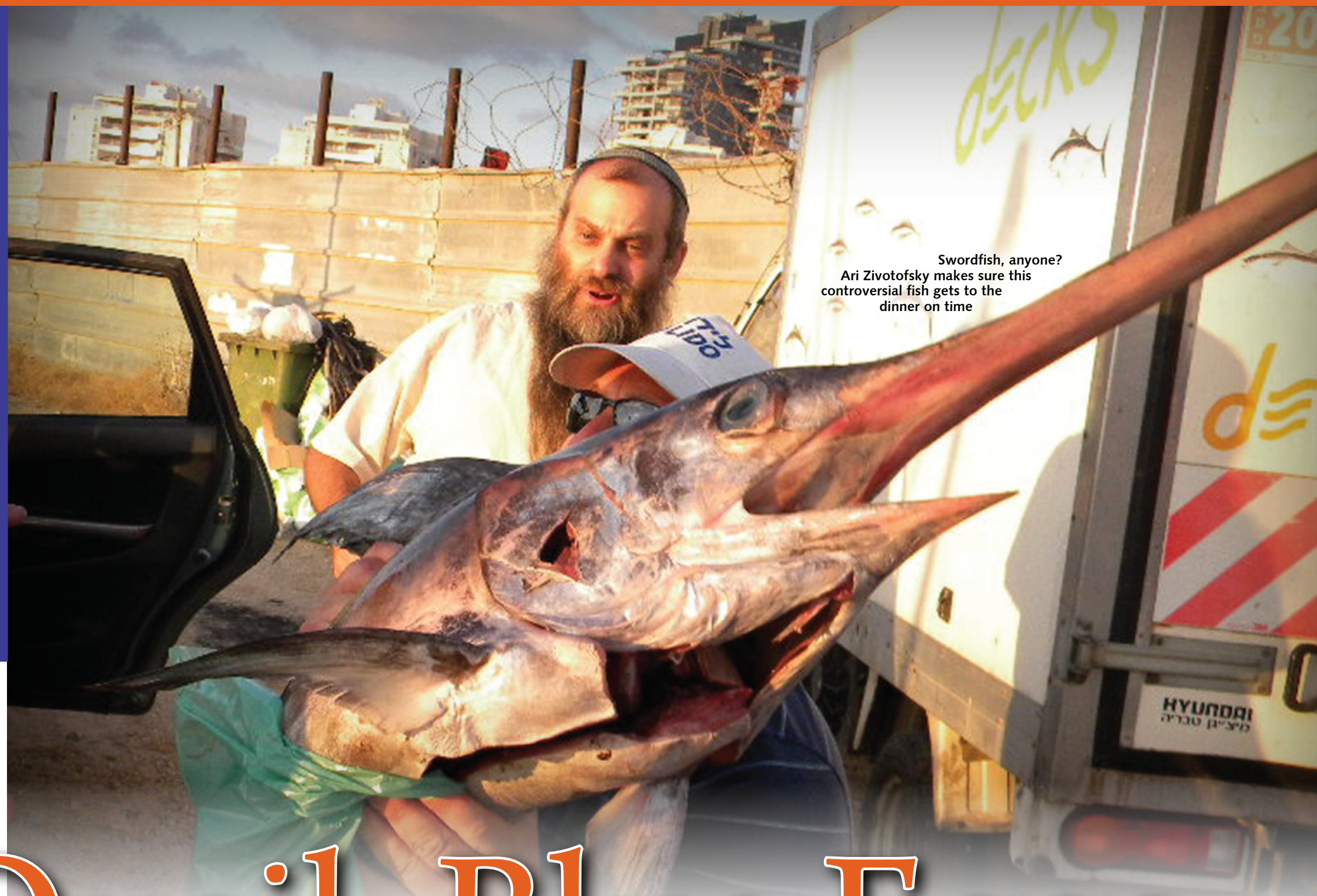
Ari Z. Zivotofsky and Ari Greenspan

Our most recent Mesorah Seudah this past summer — replete with such delicacies as sparrow broth, cow udder, water buffalo, and fried locusts — attracted a surprising amount of media attention (see **Mishpacha** Issue 321).

The real story, though, began long before the unusual meal. In fact, the idea of creating such a feast goes back to the time of the *Shulchan Aruch*, which discusses the kashrus status of various types of locusts. Their kashrus status depends on specific physical indicia mentioned in the Torah, in conjunction with a *mesorah* — an oral tradition. According to Rashi, identifying birds as kosher is also dependent upon oral tradition, in addition to anatomic signs described in the Mishnah. We may only eat species for which we have a *mesorah* of kashrus. Where would we be able to find these preserved traditions?

After learning *shechitah* together almost thirty years ago, and then researching the question of the kashrus of the pheasant, we realized that with the introduction of modern commercial food production, the only birds slaughtered today are those commercially viable to raise. That has severely curtailed the number of *mesoros*, traditions, that exist. The old *shochtim* and rabbis who recognized the wild birds living near their communities in Germany, Yemen, Kurdistan, North Africa, and other far-flung Jewish communities of old were fast disappearing. So we started collecting their testimonies on video and in writing, in an attempt to preserve these traditions.

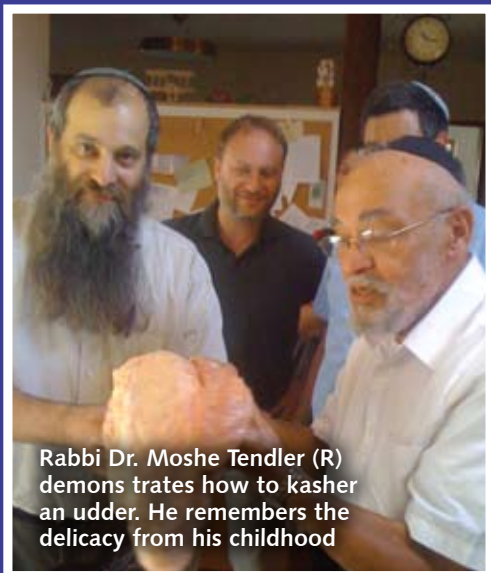
As a way to publicize these *mesoros*, in June 2002 we made what we termed a “*mesorah seudah*,” at which we served all of the birds for which we had found valid traditions. This past July we made our



Swordfish, anyone?
Ari Zivotofsky makes sure this controversial fish gets to the dinner on time

Quail, Blue Eggs, and Shibuta

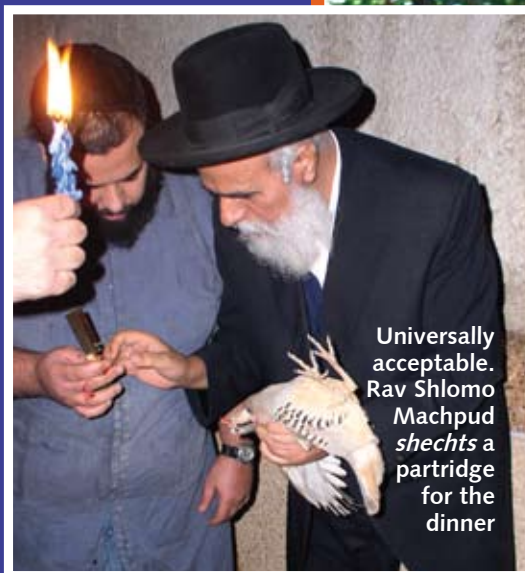
How to Gather a Menu for a Mesorah Dinner



Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler (R) demonstrates how to kasher an udder. He remembers the delicacy from his childhood



Halachic authority of the OU Rav Hershel Schachter (C) discusses the tradition of the guinea hen with Rav Yitzhak Benizri, ztz"l, rav of Moetzes Ezeri Gezer and rav of Moshav Yad Rambam



Universally acceptable. Rav Shlomo Machpud shechts a partridge for the dinner



On the day of the dinner we brought two buckets of the odiferous concoction to the restaurant. Looking for authenticity and expertise, we arranged for the same Ethiopian woman to bake the *injera*, first in the sweltering kitchen, and later, on a traditional Ethiopian *injera* stove

Do They Really Eat That? Granted, some of the items we served were difficult for people to swallow. Perhaps the most difficult was not the dessert — fried locusts — but rather the opening course. Our goal was to make sure every course had a halachic component: thus, to open the meal we wanted to serve, along with Western-style bread, the traditional Ethiopian “bread” known as *injera*. The issue here is whether it can be halachically considered bread — and if not, what brachah is recited on it.

The question arises because *injera* is made from a nutritionally rich type of grass called teff that is native to the Ethiopian highlands. It is characterized by its very small seeds and its ability to thrive at high altitudes. We purchased the teff, imported from Ethiopia, in the Machaneh Yehudah market, in one of a handful of tiny stores that cater to Ethiopian immigrants. These stores are themselves a piece of history, as the younger generation of Israeli Ethiopians is not fond of the traditional foods. When the parents disappear, so may these stores.

We brought the teff to Ari Greenspan’s dental office, where a patient who made aliyah from Ethiopia over twenty years ago showed us how to prepare it. It was mixed with water and left to “rot” — or ferment, to put it more politely — for several days. On the day of the dinner we brought two buckets of the odiferous concoction to the restaurant. Looking for authenticity and expertise, we arranged for the same Ethiopian woman to bake the *injera*, first in the sweltering kitchen and later, on a traditional Ethiopian *injera* stove in the entranceway of the restaurant.

As the brave souls tasted it, Professor Zohar Amar, an expert on grains, lectured on its halachic status. The report from the tables was that the taste of straight *injera* was almost inedible to the Western palate, but that with the dip provided by the chef, it was actually tasty.

As with every course, each of the fish served was to have halachic import. Since the goal of the evening was educational, we wanted to include kingklip from South Africa. This fish is unusual in that it’s kosher, cycloid scales are small, thin and covered by a very fine membrane. The South African Beis Din has allowed this fish for the last fifty years. Ask any South African and they will tell you it is delicious and a staple of their diet. In the last several years senior *poskim* in *Eretz Yisrael* have expressed doubts regarding its kashrus status, although the South African rabbinical authorities still list it as kosher. Serving it enabled us to discuss these issues.

We met with two large fish importers in an attempt to import

it for the dinner. One couldn’t figure out what our project was about, and didn’t seem to like religious people anyway, and we were out of his factory in under a minute. The other importer, a religious fellow, seemed to be someone who could help us. We called our friend, Rabbi Desmond Meisels, head of the Cape Town Beis Din, *shochet*, and kashrus expert, who told us he would send the fish. But the fish importer never came through. (We did eventually purchase from him our blue marlin, at full cost.)

We then considered importing the fish ourselves, but the tax authorities allow only up to two kilos for personal consumption to be shipped into Israel. Two kilos plus the cost of a customs agent is not the way to feed 250 people, so we resorted to a time-honored method: travelers bringing it in their suitcase. We started calling and e-mailing everyone we knew with connections to South Africa. We managed to find a few brave souls visiting South Africa willing to put a few kilos of frozen fish into their suitcases, so we got some fish back to Israel.

The *shibuta* fish has not been served in Israel for the last 2,500 years, and acquiring it was a far more complex operation. The Gemara tells us that the *shibuta* is unique in that it tastes like pig, and that it is special enough that Rava personally prepared it Erev Shabbos. We traced the fish through Jewish history and realized that the fish the Iraqi Arabs call *shabut* is the *shibuta* of the Gemara. One major problem though, is that it is found in the Euphrates River, which traverses Iraq, Syria, and Iran; not exactly the sort of place a nice Jewish boy can go and say, “Can I have some *shibuta* for Shabbos?”

However, not to be discouraged, we realized that the headwaters of the river originate in southern Turkey. Several years ago, a fish researcher from the University of Haran contacted us after reading our research paper about *shibuta*. In search of the fish, we made a “halachic adventure” journey to visit him in Haran, Turkey, a mere dozen or so kilometers north of Syria. Our fish expert, aptly named Dr. Dogu, took us to the Euphrates River and introduced us to the fish. The then-Turkish ambassador to Israel, a patient of Ari Greenspan, made sure we were treated royally and arranged for the governor of the

province to meet and dine with us.

In preparing for this most recent Mesorah Dinner, we reestablished contact with Dr. Dogu and explained to him that we needed some fish for a rabbinic “conference” on the kashrus and uniqueness of the *shabut*. He graciously agreed to help, rounded up seventeen kilos of *shibuta*, deep-froze it, and shipped it to a friend of ours in Istanbul. This friend then personally transported it to Ben-Gurion Airport, where we gladly met him, and whisked it off to a neighbor’s freezer for storage until the dinner.

The Talmud Yerushalmi says that many fish and animals went into exile with the Jews after the first *churban* and they all returned, except for the *shibuta*. It was thus available only in Bavel and not in Israel during the Bayis Sheini and Talmudic periods. The Gemara says that it will return to the Land of Israel at the end of days. As far as we know, this was the first time in over 2,500 years that it has been served in Israel.

Where Are the Scales? Swordfish, the subject of great halachic debate in the twentieth century, has been, and still is, eaten by Jewish communities around the Mediterranean, for hundreds of years. The Knesses HaGedolah in seventeenth-century Turkey describes it by its Spanish and Italian name “*pescie espada*” and refers to it as the “*dag baal hacherev*” the “fish with the sword.” It has scales as a juvenile, but as it

Ultimately, he asked for three freshly shechted heads to be brought to his office to study the kosher signs. Imagine the scene: three huge, smelly heads, still dripping blood, shechted just hours before, on the finely polished table of the Chief Rabbi



How many types of kosher eggs have you ever tried?

matures these scales seem to disappear, and hence the recent debate about its kashrus status. The head of kashrus in Rome, Rabbi Arbib, has taken us to a fish store on three different occasions to teach us how to find the scales. And although no *mehadrin* agency certifies it, the Rabbanut in a southern Israeli city gives a *hechsher* on swordfish.

A deep-sea fisherman we have contact with called breathlessly one day: “Come quickly to Ashdod, we just came into port. I have not slept in two days and I have a young swordfish for you to show your rabbis.”

Who wouldn’t respond to such a halachic adventure emergency? We quickly finished what we were doing (Ari G. was with a patient and Ari Z. was in the middle of a lecture) and made our way to the port. Sure enough, waiting for us were two swordfish, one over five feet long. We needed to freeze them, but for this, a neighbor’s freezer would not do. Who has that much room? We persuaded a local supermarket to babysit them until we needed them.

Where the Buffalo Roam We must differentiate between the buffalo mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch* and what Americans call “buffalo” (as on the old nickel), which is really the New World bison. The buffalo was well-known in Europe during the time of the Rishonim, and Rav Yeshayah of Trani refers to it in the thirteenth century. Its milk is the source of real mozzarella cheese, and in Italy today it is still called “*mozzarella de bufo*.” The Hula Valley in the Upper Galilee, once a huge swamp drained by the early pioneers, had vast wild herds of these animals. Today just a few dozen of them remain there, tended by the nature authorities.

Several years ago, we took Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar there to see them, because he wanted to study them up close. In addition, we brought him to a farm in Israel that raises them for their milk. Ultimately, he asked for three freshly *shechted* heads to be brought to his office, so he could study the kosher signs. Imagine the scene: three huge, smelly heads, still dripping blood, *shechted* just hours before, on the



Locusts for dessert. Taking them straight, without chocolate

finely polished table of the Chief Rabbi. Additional evidence was supplied by the video testimony of Rabbi Gewirtz, an old *shochet* who had *shechted* thousands of them in Jerusalem in the 1930s and ’40s.

As part of his exam, Rav Amar wanted to determine if there were upper front teeth, something kosher species do not usually have. So we took one of the heads back to the dental office and X-rayed it to ascertain that point. Luckily, no patients were there — although it seems the buffalo did show signs of some decay.

For this year’s Mesorah Dinner we went back to the farm, and purchased two male buffalo. We met with Rav Vitman, head kashrus authority for Tnuva, to ask him to help us arrange for the buffalo *schechitah*, *nikkur*, and *kashering* in Tnuva’s modern, spectacularly clean, organized, and animal-sensitive plant in the Beit She’an area. He acquiesced (and was helpful in other areas as well), and for the dinner we had *mehadrin* Tnuva buffalo.

Oh, Deer! While kosher deer is commercially available in the US, it isn’t in Israel, and thus it was important to have some at the dinner. There are several important halachos related to deer: unlike buffalo and sheep, deer is a *chayah*, a non-domesticated animal. This means that, unlike a *beheimah*, its *cheilev* (certain fats) is permitted, its blood needs to be covered (*kisui hadam*), and there is no requirement to give its tongue (and certain other pieces) to a *kohein* (*matnos kehunah*).

We have a friend in the Golan who used to raise deer, but now he had only one spotted deer left. He was willing to let us *shecht* it for the dinner on the condition that we would take care of all of the arrangements. In addition, the European red deer, known as elk in the US, has been the subject of a halachic controversy in recent years. A wonderful tourist site in the Golan has red deer, originally imported from Australia, and the proprietor agreed to sell us one for the dinner. There, too, we needed to arrange all of the processing.

With this, like with almost everything else we served, we had to deal with a slew of halachos that most people don’t ever get exposed to. First, we needed *shechitah* that was acceptable to a wide range of invitees, from *yeshivish* to Mizrachi, *chassidish* to

Sephardic. The person who made that possible is Rav Shlomo Machpud, *shlita*. He is universally accepted as one of the finest *shochtim* in the country, and widely seen as the kosher world’s expert *menaker* (removal of *cheilev* and *gid hanasheh*).

We met Rav Machpud at a shofar factory in the Golan, and drove with him along the Syrian border to the deer farm to *shecht*, *menaker*, and butcher the red deer, which he did with his own hands.

At the end of that long day we still had the unkashered deer in the car and it was getting late. The issue of what to do with it was pressing. We temporarily stored it in one of our community refrigerators overnight. The next day we set about *kashering* it in a small bird slaughterhouse (where we had previously *shechted* the muscovy duck and several other birds) with a team of dedicated children. Other than the floating lung problem, it was uneventful — until we started looking for a freezer large enough to hold an entire deer. And time was of the essence because it was a sweltering day.

We finally found a neighbor with a spare freezer who was willing to deer-sit until the dinner. All told, we kept frozen birds, meat, fish, and locusts in freezers variously located in a yeshivah, a *makoleit*, and a slew of friends’ homes. Imagine the scene on the day we rounded it all up and arrived at the restaurant with a loaded car that contained: a deer and a half, seventeen kilos of *shibuta*, seven kilos of kingklip, 350 quail, two swordfish, and assorted other birds, *esrogim* and unusual eggs.”

Many people cannot tell one mammal from another, and the morning of the dinner, the unreliable Israeli press erroneously announced that we had slaughtered a wild gazelle and an ibex (*yael*) for the dinner. We had the nature rangers knocking on the restaurant door to check each of our food items, to make sure we had not violated Israeli law, and they left satisfied.

Udderly Ridiculous One issue that most of us don’t think about is the kashrus of the udder. The halachah is clear: once an animal is slaughtered, if it is kosher, so is the udder. In days past, not one bit of your cow was wasted, and every Jew who *shechted* an animal would eat this gland as well. From a Biblical perspective, any milk found in the udder is permitted to be cooked with meat, but the Sages required that the milk be removed. The *Shulchan Aruch* describes that before soaking and salting, it must be cut and then “smacked against the wall” to remove the milk.

Every bewildered *smichah* student realizes that this is a perfect example of a situation where tradition and experience is critical. Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler was visiting Israel, and we asked him if he would be willing to demonstrate the process for us. He fondly remembered his mother preparing it when he was a child (over seventy years ago) and reminisced about its taste. He said that his mother regularly prepared it for special guests.

The concept mentioned by the *Shulchan Aruch*, he explained, was to squeeze it vertically, to cause the excess milk to flow out before soaking and salting. If one were to simply press it on the floor, the udder would be sitting in its own milk. But, he explained, with our sinks today, the udder can simply be squeezed in the sink and the milk left to flow down the drain. We did as he showed us, and now we can pass that on to our own children.

However, we could not find commercially available *glatt* udder. We wanted everything at the dinner to be acceptable to as many people as possible. All attendees received a letter a week before the dinner explaining the halachic pedigree of each item

so that they could decide (with their rabbinic authority) what they felt comfortable eating and what not. There was absolute transparency about all items.

Every cow has an udder; so why are there no *glatt* udders to be had? Even with cows *shechted* under *mehadrin hashgachos*, all udders — whether from *glatt* cows or non-*glatt* cows — are sold under non-*mehadrin* labels. For some reason, *mehadrin* agencies won’t deal with udder. We contacted the non-Jewish owner of a major kosher slaughterhouse, who convinced the *mehadrin* organization to set aside a *glatt* udder for us. We were overjoyed when we learned, just two days before the dinner, that a *glatt* udder was on its way to a butcher shop in Jerusalem for us.

Eggs To Go Eggs are only kosher if they are from a kosher species. Hence, the *mesorah* on a bird permits its eggs, and the *mesorah* on a particular egg attests to the acceptability of the bird. We thought a platter of interesting eggs would add color to the dinner, and thus set about finding some variety. White and brown were easy; a few chicken eggs from the market. Small, spotted quail eggs are not (yet) common on Shabbos tables, but are commercially available if one knows where to look.

This is where things became more interesting.

Eggs from turkeys (probably the most halachically troubling species served that evening) are large, brown, and spotted. In order to acquire some of these, we turned to one of the

The much-anticipated finale of the meal was the dessert of kosher locusts (*chagavim*). Our locust man — who grows them for research on the roof of a well-known girl’s seminary in Jerusalem (to the total ignorance of the girls learning there) — told us a month before the dinner that the thirty adults were laying hundreds of eggs, and we would have swarms of locusts to feed the ravenous masses



Rav Shlomo Machpud and Rav Hershel Schachter discuss the *mesorah* of the pheasant, while Dr. Ari Greenspan anticipates the gastronomical experience



Five-hundred freshly *shechted* quail had to be hand-flicked and koshered

A giraffe is obviously not cheap, but we were confident that if we got one, we could find a sponsor to cover the costs. Our first attempt was with a Jewish man who happened to be the confidant of the president of an African country. He investigated the possibilities and reported back that there are absolutely no exceptions: killing of game animals is strictly prohibited

leading fowl veterinarians in the country, Dr. Eli Berman, who succeeded in procuring about six dozen of them from a turkey farm. At the dinner, he also gave a fascinating talk explaining where the blood in an egg blood spot comes from. (It is not from a tiny chick.)

We next went after the elusive bluish-greenish chicken egg laid by the Ameraucana chicken. On a visit to the US, Ari G. searched within a ten-hour radius around St. Louis, and came up empty. We finally honed in on New York and discovered that they are sometimes available in some farmers' markets on selected days. Four dozen were purchased, hard-boiled by Ari Z.'s parents, and sent with a neighbor back to Israel for the dinner. Some questions were raised about their kashrus, but most *poskim* agree that the color of the egg does not invalidate the chicken, and that the Ameraucana is kosher like every other chicken.

Not all of the eggs were included in the egg salad basket. In each bowl of the "*shiluach hakein*" soup was included a small nest of pasta that contained *feishig* eggs. When *shechitah* was a local phenomenon, individuals brought a chicken to the *shochet*, and then cleaned it themselves. Often, partially formed eggs without a hard shell were found inside. Such eggs, once standard fare, are considered *feishig* and need to be *kashered* just like meat. Today they are a rarity and most people have never even heard of them. Rabbi Menashe Reisman, a leading

maggid shiur in Belz, explained the details of this law to the assembled.

Sticking Our Necks Out Ever since the first Mesorah Dinner in 2002, we are regularly asked about giraffe. There is absolutely no halachic impediment to *shechting* giraffe. The only problems are technical. The first of those problems is acquiring a young giraffe, which minimizes the possibility of it being a *treifa*. (Another benefit of a young giraffe in particular is that the meat will be less tough.) For this dinner we decided to really try and make it happen.

A giraffe is obviously not cheap, but we were confident that if we got one, we could find a sponsor to cover the costs. Our first attempt was with a Jewish man who happened to be the confidant of the president of an African country. He investigated the possibilities and reported back that there are absolutely no exceptions: killing of game animals is strictly prohibited in the entire country. And even though giraffe is not endangered, it is included in the blanket prohibition.

We made inquiries in another African country, where we were assured that it is permitted to kill certain wild animals, giraffe included. Unfortunately, despite our repeated nudging, our man on the ground was not successful in procuring a young giraffe. That will have to wait for the next dinner.

One of our biggest challenges was collecting enough of the birds for which we have a *mesorah*, and that was a crucial aspect of the dinner. In a small country like Israel, there are a fair number of people who keep birds — or as we like to call them, "bird *meshugenehs*," as they may spend an inordinate amount of their lives with birds. Unfortunately for us, they often either don't have a lot of just one kind, or don't want to part with the birds they do have.

The first thing we did was to put the word out to the Arabs we know in eastern Jerusalem and the Judean Hills. Some local villagers went to the live-bird market in Hebron to check the cost of guinea hens. We stopped in some Arab villages and did manage to find four Muscovy ducks in the back of one house, but that was all. We needed a serious bird *meshugeneh*, and we found one who also has a deer farm. He procured for us forty pigeons and doves, a handful of guineas, and some wild turkey.

While forty pigeons and doves is enough to make Chef Moshe Basson's famous "*shiluach hakein*" soup for 250 people, we were also going to need more than forty quail. Purchasing them was not a problem; some Russian entrepreneurs are raising quail for eggs, a delicacy among the Russian population. They had no problem selling us 500 males and old females. The issue was *shechting* and flicking (de-feathering) them. That process needed to be done (or so we thought) by machine for such a large number of birds, but the machines are usually made for chickens or larger birds, and would not work with the tiny quail. One of our contacts found a slaughterhouse that processes small chickens.

The plan was hatched: have the quail delivered to this slaughterhouse at the end of their workday (around noon in a typical slaughterhouse); have one of their Badatz Agudah *shochtim* stick around and do the *shechting*; hang the birds on the line that flicks the small chickens; the plant would do the *kashering*, and we would not even need to show up.

Oh, how wrong we were!

It was a good thing we showed up. For future reference, be aware that quail have tiny feet that do not hang on *any* chicken line. We tried numerous creative solutions, but each clever idea resulted in only one thing; more and more of the employees disappearing. We finally were alone with a

peevish *shochet*, who also really wanted to leave. He ultimately *shechted* the quail, and we wisely decided to clean the birds manually. We feverishly worked long after the *shochet* finished his job.

That day we had the film crew of David Willner and David Lewis with us, and we explained to them that the day would be even longer if they stood to the side and kept filming. So they too rolled up their sleeves and got to work. We then *kashered* the birds in the slaughterhouse, and took the quail to a large commercial freezer in a local yeshivah to store until the dinner.

An interesting lesson in kashrus: the very professional *shochet* did a great job on the quail, but was unable to successfully *shecht* the pigeons we brought, and rendered them *neveilah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* describes pigeons as having a slightly different neck anatomy, and stresses the need for a *shochet* to have special training on them.

The one thing we could not find in our search, from the north to the south of Israel, were adult pheasants. Our source eight years ago was an ostrich farmer who also raised pheasants. When we called him this time, he said we were just a few days too late. The previous week, a fox had gotten into his pheasant coop and massacred every last one of the hundreds that he had in his possession. Because pheasants are one of the pivotal birds regarding *mesoros*, we decided we had to have some. We found ten for sale on the Israel "secondhand auction" website, but when we went to meet this bird *meshugeneh*, they turned out to be baby pheasants. Ari G. was going to St. Louis and was sure he would find some there. But it turned out that it was too early in the season, and the only ones he found were all too immature.

So, although we pride ourselves on thinking out of the box, now we really had to extend our brainwaves. We called up our friend in charge of kashrus in Rome, where pheasants are raised for the nonkosher market. He ordered ten birds. He received nine of them, but one was *treif* with a broken wing, and another one escaped and flew the coop. The rest were *shechted*, *kashered*, and frozen.

Now, how were we going to get the seven kosher birds to Israel? We called contacts in El Al, travel agents, and some rabbis in Rome, and even the new chief rabbi of Turin. Our chef, Moshe Basson, knighted by the Italian government for his cooking, even tried the Italian embassy in Israel, but to no avail. We had the birds, but they were stuck in Rome. The solution



Rav Machpud shows Rav Shachter how to look for signs of a kosher locust

was yet to come.

Locusts for Dessert The much-anticipated finale of the meal was the dessert of kosher locusts (*chagavim*). Our locust man — who grows them for research on the roof of a well-known girl's seminary in Jerusalem (to the total ignorance of the girls learning there) — told us a month before the dinner that all was

in order. The thirty adults were laying hundreds of eggs, and we would have swarms of locusts to feed the ravenous masses.

When we called a week before "D-day" to confirm, he announced, "We have a problem." Evidently the heat wave two weeks earlier had killed all of the juveniles. What were we to do? We started calling up anybody we could think of in Israel. The Jerusalem Zoo had ten they could lend, the Ministry of Agriculture another few. The neuroscientist at Tel Aviv University had none to offer.

We then went online and found a company near London that grows insects for zoos and research. They had the kosher species, and we knew we were in luck when the woman asked, "Do you want them in the ten-pack or the money-saving fifty-pack?" After quickly setting up a bug account with the company, Ari G.'s cousin Josh made a beeline to pick up 250 insects. He put them in his freezer — and let's just say that Josh's mom wasn't thrilled to find 250 locusts in her freezer on Erev Shabbos.

With bugs in London and birds in Rome, and only two days until dinner time, we told Josh to grab the locusts, hop on a plane to Rome, pick up the pheasants, and head over to Israel. When Josh arrived at four in the morning on the day of the dinner, all of our food was now in the country and ready to cook.

These were not the only locusts invited to the dinner. One of the primary objectives is the transmission of *mesoros*, and that cannot be done with cooked items. We needed live birds and *chagavim*. For the birds, we turned to some of our bird *meshugenehs*; and for the *chagavim*, we turned to the Ministry of Agriculture, where an extremely helpful researcher loaned us about a dozen bugs of various ages. We were not to eat them; we were to feed them the grass she provided so that we could



Rav Bachbut remembers these yummy locusts from Morocco



Rav Gevirtz tells Drs. Ari Greenspan and Ari Zivotofsky how he remembers *shechting* thousands of water buffalo in the 1940s and 1950s

return them all (she counted them) live after the weekend.

The planned dessert for the faint of heart was to be *chagavim*-shaped chocolates. Not chocolate-covered; those who wanted locusts would have them straight. But the chef was unable to get the chocolate to adhere to the mold we created by casting a locust, and we were thus left with only the real items and no chocolate fakes.

The business of collecting the *mesoros*, a process we have been engaged in for decades, was demonstrated with the aid of video testimony. Our video editing team of David Willner and Yosef Zivotofsky prepared clips of Rabbi S.Z. Zweigenhaft, z"l, testifying at home and at an OU conference about quail; three *shochtim* testifying about guinea fowl; Rabbi Nosson Refael Auerbach talking about the pre-Holocaust custom in Halberstadt, Germany, of *shechting* sparrow yearly to preserve the tradition; Rabbi Gewirtz reminiscing about *shechting* thousands of water buffalo in Jerusalem; and Rav Shabtai Rappaport (who spoke at the dinner about technology and *mesorah*) examining a swordfish. We were privileged to have one new live testimony, provided by the Yemenite Rav Chaim Giat, who vividly described trapping sparrows by the hundreds when he was a child in Yemen.

Was It Worth It? The Mesorah Dinner included food items from South Africa, Turkey, the US, the UK, and Italy, as well as from places all around the State of Israel. There were fifteen speakers, ranging from *roshei kollel* to the chef, professors and *rabbanim*, veterinarians, a neuroscientist, and even a dentist. There was a huge sourcebook as well as a six-page menu. Over 250 people sat for over six hours listening to *shiurim* and eating up the Torah being offered together with the food.

The Rambam lists as a specific mitzvah the obligation to actually examine animals, fish, birds, and locusts for their kosher signs. So, if a recognized halachic authority who has expertise in this field examines the animal and tells you it is kosher, you have not violated any prohibition of eating something nonkosher. But according to the Rambam, you have not fulfilled the positive mitzvah of examining the signs of a kosher species as detailed in the Torah. How often do people actually get to observe this mitzvah? At the dinner we had a display set up at which people could examine hooves and skulls of kosher and nonkosher mammals, view live and stuffed birds, scrape scales off swordfish, examine a preserved *shibuta*, and study the signs on live locusts.



Rav Machpud and Dr. Greenspan *shecht* a wild turkey — the most halachically complicated bird

Was it worth it? Absolutely.

Professor Avy Susswein was at the *seudah* with his wife, and two weeks later they were in New York visiting her elderly mother. They excitedly told her about the dinner, and her response was astounding. Unlike many people who say, “Wow, is this or that really kosher?” this octogenarian retrieved a seventy-year-old memory.

She said that her father, a second-generation Eastern European Jew living in pre-World War II Berlin, had a slaughterhouse (because the “*ost Yuden*” didn’t trust the “modern” German Jews), and she vividly recalled that when a wealthy person had a special occasion, pheasant was *shechted* and served. Her family also served the delicacy on Yom Tov. She was not surprised that her daughter and son-in-law in Israel had just eaten pheasant; she had a tradition from her father that it is kosher.

Would her testimony be enough to permit pheasant? Probably not. It is unlikely she could identify the bird from all those years ago. After all, she only saw it on the plate. But it is one more piece of supporting evidence that the pheasant is a kosher bird. And it is one more piece of evidence that if not for events like the Mesorah Dinner, these traditions would be lost until Elihayu comes. That is what makes it all worthwhile. ■

Dr. Ari Greenspan is a dentist in Yerushalayim as well as a mohel, sofer, and shochet. Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivotofsky is a professor of brain sciences in Bar-Ilan University and a shochet and mohel. The two have been chavrusos for twenty-five years and have been going on halachic adventures around the globe to discover and record Jewish traditions.

Dr. Dagu takes the team to the Euphrates River in search of the *shibuta* (left picture), which managed to pass through the airport’s X-ray machine (right)

