

There is no doubt that the current bug-hunt has gotten out of hand. In my Pesah series I have already explained that the practice at the time of the Mishnah was to dip worm-infested vegetables in strong vinegar to kill the worms, but they would then be eaten without further cleaning. [i]

The Shulhan Arukh writes that one in certain cases one is allowed to eat worms and bugs, for example, those found in the shells of peas and beans. [ii] He also allows to eat the worms which are found in cheese or meat, while Rabbi Iserels adds that it is customary to eat those worms even if they are "hopping here and there on the cheese". [iii]

I believe that most modern orthodox Jews would have refused politely to eat at the home of Rabbi Yosef Karo or Rabbi Iserels, not because of Kashrut, God forbid, but because of discomfort.

Why then are orthodox people so concerned about involuntary digestion of bugs?

The answer is multilayered. It has to do with natural disgust, of course, but that disgust is largely dictated by social norms. In the past, there were no refrigeration or pesticides, and it was understood that some of the foods on your table will be infested. To not eat foods which may contain bugs or worms would be not to eat at all.

Today western society is so obsessed with the detection and elimination of bugs that we would probably deploy drones if necessary. Add that to the mentality of "if I can get it, why not?" and you can understand why the kashrut organizations took a wild ride on this development.

I know many orthodox people who even after the Kahrut craze and the ubiquitous certificates assuring that a qualified supervisor examined each and every leaf of parsley and lettuce, will not touch in a restaurant or at an event, what they call questionable foods, such as rice and salads.

Rabbi Messas was once asked if rice in which bugs were found can be checked and cleaned in order to be eaten? He cites Rabbi Avraham Alkalai (1750-1811) who writes that the infested rice can be checked, like any other fruits and vegetables. The method of checking according to Rabbi Alkalai is in sunlight with the naked eye or a magnifying glass.

Rabbi Alkalai adds that the only vegetables in which bugs were never found are black-eyed-peas, so that if we avoid eating "problematic" foods we will have to live on a black-eyed peas diet. He says that those who want to be stringent should do so for themselves but not for others.

Rabbi Messas adds that the suggestion of Rabbi Alkalai to use a magnifying glass is in itself exaggerated and unnecessary stringency. He says that one should only look for what can be seen with the naked eye, since the Torah was not given to angels. [iv]

## Conclusion:

When preparing food and vegetables one should only look for what is easily seen to the naked eye. Leafy vegetables should be washed under a strong stream to get rid of flying bugs. There is no concern when being served fruits and vegetables, including greens, at a restaurant or at a friend's house.

Ah, and the strawberries? Of course you can eat them, as a great poet once said: Let me take you down, strawberry fields forever! Enjoy!

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[i] תלמוד בבלי, פסחים, קט"ב: אמר רב פפא: שמע מינה האי חסא צריך לשקועיה בחרוסת, משום קפא [i]  
[ii] שולחן ערוך יורה דעה, פד"ו: תולעים הנמצאים בפולין ואפונים תחת הקליפה, והקליפה משחרת עליהם מבחוץ [ii]  
וכשמסירים הקליפה מוצאים היבחושים תחתיהם, מותרים  
[iii] שם, פד"ט: תולעים... הגדילים בבשר אחר שחיטה, או בדגים וגבינה, מותרים... הגה: נוהגים בתולעים של [iii]  
גבינה לאכלן, אף על פי שקופצין הנה והנה על הגבינה  
[iv] רבי יוסף משאש, אוצר המכתבים, ג, א' תלב [For the original text in Hebrew click HERE](#) [iv]