

Two Sets of Silverware:  
Non-Orthodox Kashrut Observance in Israel and the United States  
by

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## A Note on Usage

All Hebrew and Yiddish terms used throughout this thesis, except for those commonly used in English, are, for the sake of clarity, italicized. The one exception is the word 'kashrut,' the noun form of the word kosher. Its use is so ubiquitous, I determined italicization would be distracting. Each non-English term is defined upon its first appearance, either parenthetically or in a footnote.

## Introduction

The fall of my junior year, when I told my father that my Hebrew class was not canceled for Rosh Hashanah, he was not surprised. “Israelis” he reminded me, “are either fully religious, or not at all.” In December 2016, when my family had Shabbat dinner in Jerusalem with a religious couple and their young son, they were surprised to learn that we kept Passover, went to synagogue, but were still willing to drive on Shabbat.

Religion in Israel is polarized. Forty-nine percent of Jewish Israelis identify as *Hiloni* (secular), 12 percent as *Dati* (religious, roughly equivalent to modern Orthodox in the United States), and nearly 10 percent as *Haredi* (ultra-orthodox). Only 28 percent choose a more middle-ground *Masorti* ‘traditional’ observance, and this share of the population is shrinking.<sup>1</sup> The differences between *Hilonim*, and *Haredim* and *Datim* are striking. While 85 percent of *Haredim* and 74 percent of *Datim* say they attend synagogue on a weekly basis, only one percent of *Hilonim* say that they do, while 60 percent say they never attend synagogue at all.<sup>2</sup> American Jews display a greater range of religious observance. A 2003 Pew research study found that 22 percent of American Jews say that they “have no religion,”<sup>3</sup> and only 10 percent identify as Orthodox. The majority of American Jews identify somewhere in the middle.<sup>4</sup> The Reform movement, with which 35 percent of American Jews identify, and the Conservative movement, with which 18

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<sup>1</sup> “Israel’s Religiously Divided Society,” *Pew Forum*, January 24, 2017, Accessed February 19,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> although they may identify as culturally or ethnically Jewish.

<sup>4</sup> “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” *Pew Forum*, October 1, 2013, Accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

percent identify, practice religious Judaism without strict observance of *halachah* (Jewish law).

Many Conservative and Reform Jews in the United States who pride themselves on pluralism and on their maintenance of the Jewish religion alongside modern, assimilated life feel increasingly alienated from Israel's religious establishment. In June 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reneged on his promise to expand the egalitarian prayer space at the *Kotel*, the Western Wall. The *Kotel* is a small segment of the ancient retaining wall of the Second Temple. It is the closest Jews can come to what was once the Temple Mount, considered the "Holy of Holies." The *Kotel* is considered the holiest place a Jew can pray. Israel's Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities have long opposed organized women's and egalitarian prayer services at the Wall, and in many cases they have violently dispersed such services. Although an egalitarian space already exists, that section is smaller and less accessible than the expanded section would have been.<sup>5</sup>

For many American Reform and Conservative Jews, Netanyahu's decision constitutes a form of betrayal. By October 2017, nearly 600 Conservative rabbis and congregational presidents, representing more than 400 institutions, signed a letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu expressing "dismay, anger and sense of betrayal" over his decision.<sup>6</sup> As my father, Bruce Alpert, the rabbi of Beth Israel Synagogue in Wallingford, Connecticut explains,

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<sup>5</sup> Herb Keinon and Tamara Zieve, "US Jews to PM: Clarify that Egalitarian Section of Kotel Being Expanded," *Jerusalem Post*, September 18, 2018, Accessed March 30, 2018, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/US-Jews-to-PM-Clarify-that-egalitarian-section-of-Kotel-being-expanded-505454>.

<sup>6</sup> Julie Schonfeld and Steven C. Wernick, "Israel-Diaspora ties are in Peril," *The Times of Israel*, September 12, 2017, Accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-diaspora-ties-are-in-peril/>.

For the majority of American Jews, the idea that Israel would recognize the Judaism they know and cling to as a genuine part of our collective history is crucial to their connection to the state. Sometimes you have to do things for no other reason than their being important to a loved one. Israel had to do this and failed. This is a failure of Prime Minister Netanyahu in his promise to be the leader of the Jewish world, and it is a failure of the Israeli people to hold him and his government accountable for this promise.<sup>7</sup>

Increasing numbers of American Jews feel as though their voices and their interests are foreign to Israelis. They feel their approach to Judaism is not one valued or protected by the Israeli government because, as some see it, Israelis cannot appreciate liberal religious practice. This thesis is an effort to test that claim.

I look primarily at Israel's *Masorti* community because most non-Orthodox but religious Israelis identify as *Masorti*. Thus, *Masorti* Israelis are those whose interests and ideologies likely align closest with those of American Jews. The *Masorti* Movement is sometimes referred to as the Conservative movement in Israel, and many *olim*<sup>8</sup> I interviewed referred to themselves interchangeably as either *Masorti* or as Conservative. A good portion of the Ashkenazi<sup>9</sup> members of the *Masorti* community are immigrants, many of whom have lived in countries like the United States, with a significant non-Orthodox but religious population. Still, many Israelis who identify as *Masorti* have no affiliation with the official *Masorti* movement, and identify as 'traditional' rather than as Conservative. These, the majority of Israel's *Masorti* population, are *Mizṛabi* Jews descended from Arab and other non-European countries. Nathan Guttman contends, and many of my interviewees confirm that "*Mizṛabi* rabbinic leaders have a tradition that has been generally less stringent and rule obsessed than the traditions of European Jews,

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Alpert, "The High Holiday Sermon I Did Not Give," *Jerusalem Post*, October 9, 2017, Accessed March 30, 2018, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/The-High-Holy-Day-sermon-I-did-not-give-507019>.

<sup>8</sup> Those who have made *Aliyah*, literally to "go up," meaning to immigrate to Israel.

<sup>9</sup> 'Ashkenazi' generally defines Jews of European descent.



or Ashkenazim.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, although the *Masorti* movement is far from homogenous, its members generally take an approach to Jewish law more stringent than the secular, and more lenient than Israel’s Orthodox.

Although only 28 percent of Israel’s Jewish population is *Masorti* and their share is shrinking, Israel’s *Masorti* community is significant because whereas on average 90 percent of secular Israelis’ friends are secular, and 89 percent of an Orthodox Israelis’ friends are Orthodox, less than half of *Masorti* Jews’ close friends (48 percent) are also *Masorti*.<sup>11</sup> Thus, *Masorti* Israelis, unlike secular and Orthodox, should have influence and should *be* influenced by those outside their group. If any group might counteract Israel’s religious polarization, it is the *Masorti*.

In a period in which the American and Israeli Jewish communities seem particularly divided, this thesis is an attempt to understand whether manifest differences indicate a true ideological or spiritual divide. Does Israel’s religious, but non-Orthodox community approach religion in a manner similar to religious, but non-Orthodox American Jews? To examine this question I look specifically at observance of kashrut (dietary laws.) *Masorti* Israelis are more likely to observe dietary restrictions than Reform and Conservative American Jews, and they often take a more stringent approach to kashrut. Might these differences have more to do with location, peers, and exposure rather than ideology?

I examine observance of dietary laws specifically because kashrut is a ritual frequently ‘selectively observed.’ Whereas many Jews, approximately 70 percent of Israel’s Jewish population, observe either all the *mitzvot* (commandments) associated with

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan Guttman, “Pew Report: Meet the Masorti, Israel’s ‘Traditional’ Tribe,” *Forward*, March 9 2016, Accessed March 30, 2018, <https://forward.com/news/335410/pew-report-meet-the-masorti-israels-traditional-tribe/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Shabbat or none of them, the majority of Jewish Israelis take a ‘selective’ approach to kashrut, meaning they observe some but not all of the proscriptive *mitzvot*. Only 11 percent of Jewish Israelis observe no aspects of dietary laws at all.<sup>12</sup> Those who ‘selectively observe’ take a variety of approaches. Some eat *tref* (unkosher) foods such as bacon and shellfish but do not mix milk and meat, others mix but do not eat *tref* foods, while others eat only *hecksbered* (kosher certified) meats and eat only vegetarian or vegan foods from non-kosher restaurants. The range and selectivity of kashrut observance indicates that first, kashrut is a ritual practice with which Jews exercise particular agency. Rather than deferring to rabbis, observers determine for themselves what they will and will not eat. Second, the nuances of their decisions indicate that social and economic factors influence their choices. Determinations of what is and is not kosher are not all ideological. Instead, they may reflect observers’ attempts to balance religious obligations with the realities of their daily lives. Thus, examining the levels of and motivations for non-Orthodox kashrut observance should reveal the nuances of American and Israeli approaches to Jewish law.

I also focus on kashrut observance because across religions and across cultures, individuals identify themselves through their eating practices. In *The Immigrant Kitchen*, Vivian Nun Halloran contends that “cooking and eating are two related activities that allow immigrants and their families to embody and perform their sense of national and or cultural belonging.”<sup>13</sup> Citing various culinary memoirs, Halloran contends that identity “is neither static nor one-dimensional, but rather has to be personally claimed and performed through activities that can include, but are not limited to, food

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<sup>12</sup> Shlomit Levy, “Selective Observance as Component of Jewish Identity in Contemporary Israeli Society,” *Contemporary Jewry* 22, No. 1 (January 2001): 27.

<sup>13</sup> Vivian Nun Halloran, *The Immigrant Kitchen: Food, Ethnicity, and Diaspora*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2016), 7.

preparation and consumption.”<sup>14</sup> Halloran posits that culinary traditions need not necessarily be authentic to affirm identity. In some cases immigrants ‘invent’ traditions through repetition that forge a connection with the past.<sup>15</sup> Thus, kashrut observance may be a ritual particularly important for expressions of Jewish identity because, even when its observance is inconsistent with past practice, it can affirm identity.

Contemporary Jewish religious identities face challenges to which they have not before been exposed. Today most American Jews are fully integrated in American society. As traditional barriers erode, American Jews find their Jewish identities ‘optional,’ and often incompatible with life in contemporary America. In Israel, the ultra-Orthodox monopoly on religious life turns countless Jews against religious practice, and encourages them to identify as secular. In this context, it is important to examine how kashrut observance interacts with Jewish identity. How might American and Israeli Jews affirm, through their dietary choices, an identity otherwise under extreme challenge? Do their choices model a path to affirming and maintaining Jewish religion, Jewish continuity, and Jewish community in changing times?

In 1963, Miller defined identity as the “patterns and attributes which can be discerned or inferred, and which identify a human being in his or her own eyes or in the eyes of others.”<sup>16</sup> Miller’s definition breaks identity into two parts. The first is the components of identity: the “attributes which characterize an individual or a group.” The second is “the group who ascribe such identifying attributes to an individual or group.”<sup>17</sup> A “group identity,” according to Levita, is evident when “the group continues to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Levy, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 20.

manifest as constant attributes despite changing membership.”<sup>18</sup> Using this conception of identity, this thesis examines the following questions: what kind of identity does kashrut promote in Israel and in the United States? Is it a global and continuous identity, one which connects Jews throughout the world and throughout time? Or is it instead a particular identity connecting Jews only to their local or to their national communities? Does group perception influence identification through kashrut?

To answer these question I conducted interviews with 36 Israeli and American Jews, 35 of whom keep, or are in some way considering keeping kosher. I asked about the manner in which they observe and have observed kashrut, their motivations for observance, and their peers’ perception of their observance.<sup>19</sup> My sample is not representative. All Americans with whom I spoke and most Israelis are Ashkenazi<sup>20</sup>. Most Americans I interviewed live in the North East, and a substantial portion of Israelis I interviewed live either in Jerusalem or near Be’er Sheva, a city in Southern Israel. Because all interviews were conducted in English, I spoke only to Israelis with strong English skills, all of whom have lived, for at least some time, in the United States. Given this sample, my attempt is not to draw quantitative conclusions, but to instead make heuristic and qualitative comparisons of observance in both nations. Because practices and individual motivations are nuanced, my attempt is to preserve the voices and experiences of those I interviewed. To maintain anonymity, every interviewee is quoted under a pseudonym. Otherwise, their words and experiences are their own. In outlining individual motivations and experiences, my attempt is to illustrate the various manners in which non-Orthodox Americans and Israelis might approach Jewish law, and to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>19</sup> More detailed information on interviews is included before Chapter Three. The general script used for interviews is included as an appendix.

<sup>20</sup> Of Central or Eastern European ancestry

postulate what their decisions and their experiences might indicate for the future cohesion of the Jewish community.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter One traces the sources and evolution of Jewish dietary laws. In it I outline various interpretations of the law, but I posit that although no single interpretation is definitive, kashrut exists, in part, to separate Jews from non-Jews. I sketch the various manners in which Jews have observed dietary restrictions throughout time. I contend that since the biblical period, some sects of the Jewish community have added restrictions both to further separate themselves from non-Jews, and to distinguish themselves from those less observant. Others, throughout history, have taken more lenient approaches to the law which enable life more integrated with non-Jews. I outline a few of the ways that national policies and antisemitism have interfered with observance. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, whose most prominent figures argued that Judaism is strictly a religion, as understood in the Western, liberal tradition. This means that Jewish religious practice should be private, and the obligations of Jewish law voluntary, rather than compulsory. I explain that the *Haskalah* created a framework for liberal movements within Judaism, and provided a model for Jewish life in assimilated societies. The *Haskalah's* model, I contend, is, in general, embraced by American Jews and rejected by Israel's founders.

Chapter Two examines immigration both to the United States and to Israel. I rely primarily on secondary sources to outline who immigrated to both countries, for what reasons, and under what conditions. Israeli and American immigrants found their observance challenged in new and unique ways. In this chapter I attempt to outline the

nature of these challenges and the various manners in which American and Israeli Jews adapted or abandoned their observance in response. I argue that immigrants to Israel and the United States, at least prior to World War II, were not, for the most part, fundamentally or ideologically different from one other. Therefore, I posit, the differences in observance are largely a product of the cultural, political, sociological, and economic differences between Israel and the United States.

In Chapter Three, I use my interviews alongside theoretical and sociological literature to evaluate the reasons why American and Israeli Jews choose to keep kosher. I examine peer influence and contend that those most likely to keep kosher are those whose practices are reinforced by their peer groups, and those for whom keeping kosher can create a sense of belonging. I outline the culinary and social obstacles American and Israeli Jews face, and I postulate the part they may play in dissuading observance. I posit that some with no personal desire to keep kosher do so for their loved ones or to build relationships. I examine the ways in which kashrut observance interacts with modern dietary trends. I discuss the meaning Israeli and American Jews associate with observance, and how that meaning interacts with either the Israeli or the American context. I contend that kashrut is frequently a way for observers to express their Jewish identities. The identity expressed through kashrut, I argue, is a global Jewish identity, which connects Jews to other Jews across the world and throughout time. Lastly, I examine non-Orthodox Jews' religious motivations for observing dietary laws, and argue that although non-Orthodox observers are frequently less strict than their Orthodox counterparts, their motivations are sometimes equally religious in nature.

Chapter Four examines the factors which influence an individual's 'level' of observance in Israel and in the United States. These, I posit, include price, accessibility,

the economics of kosher certification, reference groups, politics, and social costs. The differences between American and Israeli non-Orthodox observance, I argue, might have more to do with these factors than with an ideological disconnect. I compare American and Israeli attitudes towards mistakes and exceptions in their observance. I contend that although Israeli and American attitudes differ, both attempt to balance the demands of kashrut with the realities of daily life.

In the conclusion I outline my most important findings. These include the agency exercised by non-Orthodox kashrut observers, the elasticity of kashrut observance in both Israel and the United States, the global identity maintained through kashrut observance, the conditions which promote non-Orthodox kashrut observance, and the religious nature of the practice. I discuss the significance of these findings and outline ways in which future research might contribute to a better understanding of observance in both countries.

## Chapter One

### **Is that Kosher? Who Says?**

Jacob was secular until age 21. Before he became religious he ate anything and everything. Pork shrimp-fried rice used to be his favorite Chinese food dish. Although starting at age 21, Jacob identified as Orthodox for many years, over the past year or two he has become “more lenient and more open” in his perspective on religion and kashrut and no longer identifies as Orthodox. Jacob explains he

never waited six hours between meat and milk as is customary in most of the Orthodox world. I used to feel guilty about it, but eventually learned that this stringency didn't exist until the Rambam<sup>21</sup> and was not considered authoritative until Rabbi Yosef Karo put together the *Shulchan Aruch* about 500 years ago.<sup>22</sup> Before that time it was fine to just rinse one's mouth after meat, recite a blessing, and then consume dairy right away. As per the Rama,<sup>23</sup> some opted to wait one hour. I never mix meat and milk, and I wait two hours out of habit. Theoretically, I'd be fine with just rinsing my mouth and reciting the blessing, but waiting two hours is fine for me so I keep with it.<sup>24</sup>

Non-Orthodox kashrut observers, like Jacob, frequently examine the history and origins of dietary laws in determining their personal standards. This chapter is an attempt to outline that history, both to contextualize the choices that American and Israeli kashrut observers make, and to compare how their choices relate to those of other Jews throughout history.

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<sup>21</sup> Moses Maimonides, also known as the Rambam. Considered among the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. Maimonides, in the late 12th century wrote the *Mishneh Torah*, a nearly 1,000 chapter commentary on the Mishnah and the first comprehensive code of *halachah* (Jewish law). Danny Moss, “Maimonides (Rambam) and His Texts,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/maimonides-rambam/>.

<sup>22</sup> Today considered the most important codification of Jewish law, originally intended as a crutch for those not sufficiently learned. Rabbi Jill Jacobs, “The Shulchan Aruch,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shulhan-arukh/>.

<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Moshe Isserles, a sixteenth century rabbinic scholar.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with “Jacob,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.



## **Biblical Kashrut**

The Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, includes an intricate system of law, most of which is found in its books Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These laws regulate aspects of daily life, including what Jews can wear, how and when they can travel, and how, and for how long they should mourn. Although dietary laws are among the most conspicuous facets of Jewish law (*halachah*), only a few verses of Torah outline what Jews can and cannot eat.

The 'laws of kashrut,' as contemporary Jews understand them, have evolved since the biblical period, around the fourth century, BCE. Biblical dietary laws are, in comparison to today's standards, quite limited. They primarily outline those animals Jews can and cannot eat. Jews can eat "any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud," meaning cows and sheep are acceptable, but pigs, dogs, and horses are not. (Leviticus 11:3) Jews can only eat birds which fly through the air and do not spend too much time in another element, like water, and they cannot eat carnivorous birds. This means that while Jews can eat chicken, they cannot eat herons, swans, and eagles. (Leviticus 11:13-19) Jews may eat only fish with both fins *and* scales, (Leviticus 11:13-19) meaning that while salmon, tuna, and white fish are acceptable, swordfish, eel, and shellfish are not. (Deuteronomy 14:12). They can eat certain insects including locusts, katydids, crickets, and grasshoppers but no others. (Leviticus 11:20-24). They may not eat "creeping things that crawl on the earth" including caterpillars, snakes, snails, lizards, chameleon, and moles. (Leviticus 11:30, 41-43)

The second category of law, referenced three times throughout the Torah, explains that "at no time can a kid be boiled in its mother's milk." (Exodus 23:19; 34:26.) According to David Kraemer, until the rabbinic period began around 70 CE, Jews

practiced this prohibition at face value.<sup>25</sup> As early Jews understood, the law did not forbid boiling a kid in milk from another mother. Nor did it forbid them from eating dairy with meat so long as the two were not cooked together.<sup>26</sup> Today, Orthodox Jews generally wait six hours after consuming meat before again consuming dairy. Thus, this prohibition, central to modern kashrut observance, meant little in the biblical period and only became meaningful and prohibitive over time.

The Torah's last category of law relates to animal slaughter (*shechita*). Jews cannot eat any animal that has already been killed or attacked by beasts (Leviticus, 22:8).<sup>27</sup> In commemoration of Jacob's fight with the angel and his injury to his thigh, Jews "do not eat the sinews of the thigh [the sciatic nerve] to this very day." (Genesis 32:33).<sup>28</sup> Because of the difficulty in removing this nerve, almost half the meat on a given animal is simply ruled 'unkosher.' Jews are also prohibited from ingesting "the blood of any flesh for the life of all flesh is blood." (17:14.) Therefore, the *schochet*, the ritual slaughterer, cuts the animal's carotid arteries while the animal is turned upside down to maximize exsanguination. Regulations concerning animal slaughter were likely inconsequential for most in the biblical period because although the wealthy ate a varied diet, the poor ate primarily grain based gruels.<sup>29</sup>

Even though biblical Jews drew dietary laws directly from the Torah, they sometimes disagreed on their content. For example, although the Torah gives Jews explicit permission to eat locusts (Leviticus 11:20), Jewish authorities in certain communities banned their consumption because "the species of locust allowed by

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<sup>25</sup> David C. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 55-61.

<sup>27</sup> John Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied: a Social History of Jewish Food*, (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson inc, 1993), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Nathan, *King Solomon's Table: A Culinary Exploration of Jewish Cooking From Around the World*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), xvii.

biblical law could not be clearly distinguished.” Others, like the Yemenite Jews, placed great value on locusts and staged ceremonies around their hunt.<sup>30</sup> Biblical disagreements continue to characterize modern Jewish communities. To this day, Roger Horowitz’s family fights over whether sturgeon can be considered a kosher fish. Some argue that because sturgeon scales are removable only by damaging the skin, they cannot be counted as scales. In light of these disagreements, in most communities, local customs (*minhagim*), came to be more important than the letter of the law.<sup>31</sup> Arbiters of custom, often rabbis, were the interpreters of how rules ought to be applied.

### **The Meaning and Purpose of Dietary Restrictions**

Jews have long disagreed over both the meaning and the purpose of biblical dietary laws. Early authorities regarded the dietary laws as “divine statutes that had to be obeyed and that were not open to human understanding.”<sup>32</sup> Others made explicit attempts to understand them. For Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (c. 30 BCE–40 BCE), and for Maimonides (1135–1204), dietary laws exist to “train us in the mastery of our appetites.”<sup>33</sup> Maimonides and other Jewish theorists insist that there is a valid, hygienic explanation for the rules: pigs are “very dirty and feed on dirty things,” and any blood left on an animal carcass spoils digestion and can compromise nourishment.<sup>34</sup> According to Isaac Klein, hygienic explanations are today cited by those who wish to discard dietary laws according to the argument that one can achieve the same health

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 20–21.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Horowitz, *Kosher USA*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 9–11.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 17–18.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

benefits by other means.<sup>35</sup> After many centuries of commentary and argument, there is still no consensus on why Jews are prohibited from eating certain foods.

Kashrut has, since biblical times, meant different things to different people. In some instances kashrut observance is coerced. In others it is abandoned. Many others have compromised and modified their practices. Deciding whether to keep kosher has never been a binary choice. As Kraemer argues, compromised observance does not indicate a rejection of one's Jewish identity. Rather, modifications are "attempts at re-imagining what it means to live and identify as a Jew in a gentile world."<sup>36</sup> This means that the varied standards of kashrut among individuals and communities reflect their different negotiations of the lines between Jews and gentiles.

The Torah hints that its laws exist, at least in part, to separate Jews from their non-Jewish neighbors. Jacob Milgrim observes that the Torah justifies dietary laws in reference to holiness. God commands the Jews not to contaminate their "throats with any swarming creature that moves upon the earth," and to "be holy for I am holy."<sup>37</sup> (Leviticus, 11) "Holiness implies separation" because what is holy is necessarily set apart from the rest. Later in Leviticus, this point is made explicit: "you shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and I have set you apart from other peoples to be mine."<sup>38</sup> Food is a social activity. If Jews cannot eat with their gentile neighbors, they are less likely to assimilate into gentile communities, and more likely to maintain a distinct, Jewish identity.

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<sup>35</sup> Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), 302.

<sup>36</sup> Kraemer, 125.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

## **Assimilation and Observance: *Halachah* in the Second Temple Period**

The closer Jews live to their gentile neighbors and the more they hope to assimilate, the more problematic dietary laws become. In 722 BCE, the Assyrian army destroyed the kingdom of Israel and in 586 BCE the Babylonians destroyed the kingdom of Judah. The Jewish people lost their independence and were forced to live under a foreign cultural power.<sup>39</sup> In the Second Temple period (530 BCE- 70 CE), the Jewish community fragmented into competing cultural groups including the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.<sup>40</sup> This means that Jewish communities had to both compete against one another and against a pervasive foreign culture. Archaeological evidence from the second century BCE demonstrates the prominence of Hellenistic culture in Jewish communities. In fact, literature testifies that Jewish elites frequently became “profoundly Hellenized.”<sup>41</sup> As Kraemer contends, during this period, “a ‘traditional’ Jewish identity was an increasingly vulnerable construct.” Thus, it is reasonable to assume that at least some Jews abandoned dietary laws to enable closer relationships with their neighbors.

But competing cultural influences cut both ways. While some abandon dietary laws, others tighten restrictions to highlight Jewish difference. In the Second Temple period, some ‘pious’ Jews refused to eat ‘gentile food’ that was otherwise kosher. For example, in the Book of Daniel we read of the king’s deputy attempting to feed Daniel and his three Jewish companions “drinking wine” and food “from the king’s portion.” This they refuse, asking not to be defiled.<sup>42</sup> As Kraemer argues, even if the “king’s portion” did include meat, it also likely included bread and non-meat items. There would

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 26.

have been at least something a Jew abiding by biblical standards could lawfully eat. In fact, Kraemer argues that the term translated as defiled is meant to convey a sense of disgust. Daniel and his companions were disgusted by the king's food, not because it was not kosher, but because it was gentile. A range of similar literature indicates that many others also avoided gentile food and did so explicitly because it was gentile.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the Second Temple period, evidence suggests that this practice was common, if only among the 'most pious' Jews.

These tendencies of Jewish communities in Second Temple period parallel similar tendencies of Jewish communities today. As the majority of Jews throughout the world 'assimilate' and abandon dietary laws, ultra-Orthodox adopt more stringent standards. One is *glatt*, which translates to 'smooth.' According to *halachah*, if an animal has adhesions on its lungs, the animal remains kosher so long as its adhesions are of a certain type. Nonetheless the ultra-Orthodox only accept meat as kosher if the animal's lungs are smooth, meaning they contain no adhesions.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the ultra-orthodox will only accept meat as kosher if it is slaughtered by a butcher who employs "the strictest interpretation of *halachah*," and who, himself observes Shabbat. Such standards do not simply separate one type of meat from another, they separate one type of Jew from another.<sup>45</sup> Throughout their history, while sects of Jews adopt more lenient attitudes towards *halachah*, others, perhaps in reaction, augment the traditional laws to reinforce a separatist Jewish identity.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Yehuda Shurpin, "What Does 'Glatt Kosher' Mean," *Chabad*, Accessed November 27, 2017 [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3234466/jewish/What-Does-Glatt-Kosher-Mean.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3234466/jewish/What-Does-Glatt-Kosher-Mean.htm).

<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, 151-152.

## Talmudic Developments: Separating Milk and Meat

In 70 CE the Romans re-captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Two generations later ‘Messianic’ Jewish troops fought back against the Romans and lost. To quash future resistance, the Romans invaded Jerusalem and banished those who survived to the Galilee, a multicultural territory with a mixed population.<sup>46</sup> Central roads from Syria and Persia ran through the Galilee and exposed its residents to a variety of cultures. Archaeological records from synagogues demonstrate that Jews adopted the cultural forms of their neighbors.<sup>47</sup> Michael Brenner argues that exile from Jerusalem spurred a reformulation of Jewish identity. Because Jews were now scattered from Babylonia to Egypt, they could no longer define themselves as an ethnic group within a specific territory. Instead, they maintained cohesion through the development of law and a distinct set of practices which would come to define the Jewish community across borders.<sup>48</sup>

It was in the Galilee that rabbinic Judaism emerged, and created the fundamental corpus of Jewish law: the Talmud, which translates literally to ‘study.’ The Talmud is composed of two parts: the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is the earlier of the two. The Mishnah presents rabbis’ conflicting interpretations of the Torah, but favors the final opinion as authoritative.<sup>49</sup> The Gemara refers to both the Palestinian and Babylonian texts. The Palestinian Gemara (200-500 CE) predates the Babylonian Gemara (200-600 CE), but the Babylonian is often considered the more complete and authoritative text. The Gemara comprises commentary on the Mishnah which further

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<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> MJL Staff, “Gemara: The Essence of the Talmud,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/gemara-the-essence-of-the-talmud/>.

explains how the Mishnah's laws relate to biblical texts. Although the Gemara attempts to facilitate clearer application of the text, like the Mishnah, it frequently presents competing opinions but does not offer resolution.<sup>50</sup> Talmudic texts are therefore meant to be 'studied' not 'read.' Learning to parse disagreements requires years of training, and Talmudic scholars find they often disagree.

The Mishnah was the first piece of Jewish law to command that Jews separate milk and dairy in both cooking and eating.<sup>51</sup> Although the Mishnah takes separation as a given, evidence from the Second Temple period and confusion in later texts reveal that the prohibition had only recently developed. For example, sections of the Gemara, the rabbis commentary on the Mishnah, express confusion over whether one can place milk and meat on the same table, and whether one can consume dairy with meat from an animal that does not produce milk.<sup>52</sup>

These texts do not make clear whether and under which conditions one must wait between consuming meat and dairy foods. In one section, Agra indicates that one need not take additional steps between consuming poultry and dairy, but he seems to indicate that such steps would be necessary between consuming red meat and dairy. By contrast, Rabbi Yitzhak explains that a Jew can eat one right after the other so long as she does so during the day when she can check to ensure her hands are clean. These texts indicate that the law, although confused, was in comparison to today, when many Orthodox Jews wait six hours to consume dairy after consuming meat, and many non-Orthodox Jews wait three, quite lenient.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kraemer, 40-41.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 42-43.



The Talmud does not provide a rationale for this prohibition. However, various scholars postulate a variety of explanations. Maimonides believes the laws separating milk and meat derive from disgust at pagan fertility rites, one of which involved literally cooking a kid in its mother's milk.<sup>54</sup> Louis Evan Grivetti observes that in this period a variety of tribes "world-wide (but particularly in Africa)" separated milk and meat.<sup>55</sup> The Massai people of East Africa interpret this practice in manners that Kaj Arhem suggests parallel those of Philo, a pre-rabbinic Jewish scholar, and his later counterparts. For the Massai people, milk represents what is alive, what is natural, and what is common. Meat, however, represents death, the cultural, and the sacred. Meat and dairy are separated because of the strength of these oppositions. Philo, and later Jacob Milgrom justify the separation in kashrut along similar lines. The separation of milk and meat marks a separation between life and death. Although no evidence can suggest whether a historical connection existed among the Jewish and the Massai people, it is possible their practices emerged in relation to one another.<sup>56</sup>

It is unlikely that early rabbinic texts substantially influenced initial practice. In early rabbinic times the rabbis were a select group of scholars with little influence beyond the Galilee. Therefore, rather than existing to separate Jews from non-Jews, early rulings would have separated the rabbis from the rest of the Jewish population.<sup>57</sup> This separation may have been intentional. At that time the rabbis were but one of myriad Jewish groups which, after the destruction of the Second Temple, vied "for the soul of the people." In this context, heightened observance could distinguish them as special.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Klein, 360.

<sup>55</sup> Kraemer, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Kraemer also points out that laws demanding the separation of meat and dairy had little pragmatic effect. Throughout the early rabbinic period, people consumed very little meat. In fact, in Palestine through the first century, those who mixed milk and meat were, according to the dominant Hellenistic culture, ‘barbarian.’ Most Jews would have wanted to avoid mixing, not because the rabbis demanded it, but instead because separating meat and milk was a demonstration of civility.

### **Testing the Boundaries: ‘Problematic’ Mixings**

At this time, rabbis also developed laws regulating ‘problematic’ mixings. These explain what Jews can do if a permitted food comes in contact with a prohibited food. No record indicates how most Jews dealt with mixing before the rabbinic period, so there is no way of knowing whether these laws were innovative, or whether they articulated existing practices.<sup>59</sup> However, one must assume that where the law is unclear many would have erred towards caution, meaning some must have discarded all food mixed with a prohibited substance. Thus, the development of these laws is significant because they created flexibility. Because those who interact with non-Jews risk mixing portions of problematic foods with their own, absolute laws encourage absolute avoidance. Therefore, the laws on mixing indicate that one can interact with non Jews and still keep kosher.

According to the Mishnah, if foods are not of the same kind, a ‘bad mixing’ can be annulled so long as the prohibited substance does not change the taste of the permitted substance. The Mishnah does not indicate whether a Jew can try the food to ascertain whether the prohibited substance has imparted a taste. The law therefore

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 56.

implies a level of flexibility. Presumably, the mixture is acceptable until one can determine its taste. It is not a violation to try a bad mixture; it is a violation to continue to eat a bad mixture, knowing it tastes *trif*. Intentionality, then, must be fundamental to the law's observance. Moreover, because taste is inherently subjective, this law ensures that the decision of what is kosher is intimate and personal.<sup>60</sup> As I will discuss in the Chapter Four, non-Orthodox kashrut observers value intentionality, and employ individual agency in their observance. Their approach, I argue, is consistent with these early Mishnaic rulings.

In the Gemara, later rabbis attempt to create a standard measure. Drawing a tenuous connection to the Nazirite offering, performed by 'consecrated' men who took the vow prescribed in Numbers 6:2-21, these rabbis claim that a prohibited substance can be acceptable only if its quantity is "overwhelmingly" smaller than the permitted substance. Eventually they agree that this ratio should be 60 to 1.<sup>61</sup> Although this measure is more restrictive than 'taste,' few who cook at home can measure their mistakes. Ultimately, the individual is still responsible for making a private judgement.<sup>62</sup>

Even though the Gemara's standard is more strict, it is not absolute. If Jews live close to their gentile neighbors, shop at the same stores, and occasionally stop into one another's homes, 'bad mixings' are inevitable. An absolute prohibition could create intense anxiety around gentile food. As Kraemer argues, "the anxiety which leads to the avoidance of the food will ultimately teach avoidance of the person."<sup>63</sup> Thus, these laws are significant because they assure Jews it is fine to interact with gentiles. What is

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 60.

prohibited is only dangerous in large quantities.<sup>64</sup> Jews *can* maintain relationships with non-Jews, so long as they are not overwhelmed and consumed by those relationships. This is significant because almost all of today's American Jews maintain close relationships with non-Jews. Only five percent say that "all" of their close friends are Jewish, and only 27 percent say that "most" are.<sup>65</sup> As I will discuss in Chapter Four, many American Jews adapt *halachah* to enable these relationships. Laws on mixing indicate that by combining elements from the Jewish and the Gentile world, American Jews do not necessarily defy the spirit of the law.

## Gentile Foods

The Mishnah also expressly prohibits a number of foods made by gentiles including bread, wine, olive oil, and cheese. The reasoning for cheese is relatively straightforward: gentiles "curdle it using rennet taken from an animal that was not properly slaughtered."<sup>66</sup> Meaning Jews should not eat gentile cheese because they have no way of knowing whether or not it is kosher. Wine, the rabbis worried, may have been used for pagan offerings. There is no such risk with bread and olive oil, and the two are foundational to most meals meaning these laws discourage Jews from eating at a gentile table. Because "meals are central to establishing and maintaining social connections," the effect and intent of this prohibition must be to prevent the formation of social relationships among Jews and non-Jews.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, although the Talmudic rabbis did not intend to strictly separate Jews from gentiles, they did intend to prevent close and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>65</sup> *Pew*, "Twin Portraits."

<sup>66</sup> Kraemer, 66.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 66-68.

personal relationships among them. In that sense, American non-Orthodox observance is discontinuous from Talmudic prohibitions.

The law, in this period, was politically authoritative. Hillel's supporters believed the prohibitions of gentile food were too extreme but they were forced by religious militants to observe them.<sup>68</sup> Although local *minbagim* dictated different standards of observance in different communities, within a *single* community observance was often not a matter of individual choice. A community's rabbi would be considered "*mareb di atra*," literally, "the master of the place." He would define the law for his community, and anyone who rejected his definition would be isolated.

On the laws prohibiting gentile foods, rabbis made certain allowances. For example, third century opinions in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Gemaras explain that if the only local baker is gentile, it is acceptable for a Jew to eat gentile bread.<sup>69</sup> Most rabbis also agree that 'cooking' wine protects it from gentile contact. If wine is *mevushal* -- literally 'cooked' for a certain time at a certain temperature, it will remain kosher no matter who handles it.<sup>70</sup> Although the laws against consuming gentile foods are meant to be limiting, their elasticity demonstrates an attempt to balance separatist intentions with the realities of life in a gentile world.

Some communities skirted these laws entirely. For example, the Babylonian Jewish community, whose observance was generally more lenient than the Jewish community in Palestine, created 'legal fictions' which enabled Jews to eat gentile products.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, even though an oven used for gentile food is not technically

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<sup>68</sup> Cooper, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Kraemer, 71.

<sup>70</sup> MJL Staff, "Ask the Expert: Kosher Wine and Kosher Mevushal Wine," *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-mevushal-wine/>.

<sup>71</sup> Kraemer, 126-127.

kosher, Jews in Babylonia shared the ovens of gentiles instead of constructing their own.<sup>72</sup>

## Medieval Developments

Rabbi Hisda writes in the Gemara that “if one ate meat he is forbidden to eat cheese.” Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (1135-1103) concluded from this text that regardless of whether or not you wash your hands after eating meat, you must wait until the next meal to eat dairy.<sup>73</sup> Alfasi does not identify a specific amount of time one must wait, so Maimonides (1135-1204) clarifies the law. He asserts that if one first eat dairy, she need only wash or wipe the food from her hands before eating meat. However, if one first eats meat, she must wait “approximately six hours” before eating dairy because meat sticks between one’s teeth.<sup>74</sup> For some time, Sephardic Jews required no waiting period after eating poultry because the Talmud indicates that since poultry cannot produce dairy, it is not counted as meat.<sup>75</sup> Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri (1249 -1306) ended this practice by insisting that after fowl or meat, one must also wait until the next meal, approximately five or six hours. Meiri’s ruling stresses absolutism. A five to six hour waiting time is necessary because in no circumstances can meat and dairy particles mix. By demanding maximum separation, this law further separates Jews from Gentiles by rendering Jews unable to share in otherwise kosher, dairy food for a considerable amount of time after eating meat.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 91.

Different Jewish communities came to practice different waiting times. As Kraemer put it, “if you knew how long a Jew waits between meat and dairy, you could more-or-less tell where she came from and the community with which she identifies.”<sup>77</sup> These differences persisted even after the invention and proliferation of the printing press enabled standardization.<sup>78</sup> This demonstrates the power and influence of the local Jewish community over the global. Some Jews explicitly rejected Maimonides's standard. For example, the Tosafists, medieval French commentators, insisted that it is acceptable to eat dairy so long as you have terminated the meat meal and recited the after-meal prayers.<sup>79</sup> Others, like Rabbi Moses Isserles of Poland, accepted but did not endorse such practices.<sup>80</sup> Thus, waiting times came to “divide Jews between those who are pious and those who are not.”<sup>81</sup>

Variant standards not only divide Jews, they reinforce the differences among them. A strict dietary rule can become a force of social grouping. Social divisions encourage different customs, and different customs again reinforce social divisions.<sup>82</sup> Today, Orthodox Jews often avoid contact with non-Orthodox kashrut observers for fear that looser standards might corrupt their own. In so doing, Orthodox observers divide, rather than unite themselves with a portion of the Jewish community.

Kraemer suggests that Jews may have adopted ‘waiting laws’ in response to the “increase in the consumption of meat in Europe in late Middle Ages.”<sup>83</sup> Before the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Jews, and Europeans in general, ate very little meat. In fact, throughout the Talmudic Age, the Jewish diet consisted primarily of bread, beans,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>79</sup> Cooper, 198.

<sup>80</sup> Kraemer, 91.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

fruits, cheese, and vegetables. Megan Broshi estimated that at this time, bread alone comprised 53 to 55 percent of females' caloric intakes.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, early Jews rarely needed to think about separating meat and dairy.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, although on a day to day basis, medieval Spanish Jews ate a diet of mostly fish, bread, cheese, eggs, and soup, Rabbi Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona (1235-1310) insisted that meat formed an important part of the diet.<sup>86</sup> Although separation was not a daily concern, it was a concern of which medieval Jews were conscious.

Increased meat consumption led to the professionalization of ritual slaughter. Previously, any Jew who was versed in the law could slaughter his or her own meat. Now the *schochet*, the ritual slaughterer, became a communal official who also determined the animal's health.<sup>87</sup> As a result, Jews became dependent upon their communities to supply kosher meat. If a town lacks a *schochet*, its Jews lack kosher meat. This development made it more difficult for Jews who do not live among other Jews to observe dietary restrictions. The professionalization of slaughter also subjected it to political and economic influences, which could frequently create barriers to consumption. For example, in 1809 in the Duchy of Warsaw, a kosher meat tax made kosher meat twice as expensive as non-kosher alternatives.<sup>88</sup>

According to Kraemer, medieval Jewish communities in Poland enforced a stricter standards of *halachah* because, beginning in the early sixteenth century, Polish Jews were economically prosperous and religiously tolerated. Although the Polish government occasionally passed exclusionary decrees, many Jews owned land and were

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<sup>84</sup> Cooper, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Kraemer, 93.

<sup>86</sup> Cooper, 127.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 167-168.



successful in a variety of occupations.<sup>89</sup> This meant both that the ‘pious’ had more freedom to study and to observe religious traditions as they chose, and that Jews everywhere had more opportunities to work with and to socialize with non-Jews.<sup>90</sup> The heightened rigor of the law then, was likely reactionary. As the Polish government broke barriers separating Jews from gentiles, rabbinic authorities erected new ones which also, ultimately, separated Jew from Jew.<sup>91</sup>

### **Separate Dishes**

In the late Middle Ages Jews also began the practice of separating the dishes on which they ate meat and dairy products. The development is significant because even though there is no talmudic basis for the practice,<sup>92</sup> ‘separate dishes’ have come to define the modern, kosher kitchen. A few early rabbis, including Rashi and Maimonides, suggest that dishes and utensils may take the ‘quality’ of the thing last cooked within them, but their concern is only that dishes and utensils not be used for meat and dairy in the same day.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, in the second half of the thirteenth century, Jews began to separate the pots and pans they used for meat from those they used for dairy.<sup>94</sup> ‘Pious’ German Jews were the first to also separate their knives and their bowls.<sup>95</sup> In 1522, Antonius Margaritha, a Jewish convert to Christianity released a book entitled “The Entire Jewish Faith,” which provides the earliest account of a seemingly modern kosher kitchen. Separation of meat and dairy dishes, he seems to argue, was the general practice among all Jews. Although we need not take Margaritha’s assertion at face value, because

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<sup>89</sup> Kraemer, 95.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 96-97.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 100-103.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 106-107.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 107.

his language in this section is neutral and straightforward, he likely describes a reality for at least some of the Jewish population.<sup>96</sup> In fact, Kraemer argues that by the middle of the eighteenth century, the practice of separating dishes was well-established among the whole of European Jewry.<sup>97</sup> Rabbis, however, did not release a comprehensive rabbinic statement on the practice until 1894, by which point the practice had been widespread for a century.<sup>98</sup> Presumably earlier rabbis did not believe that separate dishes were necessary, meaning practice, in this case, preceded and eventually dictated the letter of the law. Thus, for many observers, maintaining the customs held by others might be equally important to observing rabbinic mandates.

Kraemer uses a few approaches to explain this more rigorous and more separatist development. He attributes the separation of dishes in part to the evolution of “the technology of eating.” Forks were not invented until the late Middle Ages, and before that people generally ate with their hands from a common tray. If people owned dishes, they probably only owned a few. “Sets of dishes were not separated,” Kraemer explains, “at least in part because there were no dishes to separate.”<sup>99</sup>

Historically, the majority of Jewish kitchens were run by women who were not frequently educated in the details of the law. Because a woman would therefore not know how to fix kashrut mistakes, it was safer for her to adopt the more stringent standard of complete separation. Separation was then generationally enforced. Women would organize their kitchens like those of their mothers.<sup>100</sup> With no alternative system or law to compare, complete separation became the defining element of a kosher

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 120-121.

kitchen. Moreover, in more emancipated communities in which kashrut observance was not standard, women, as the heads of the kitchen, were frequently empowered to decide whether or not their homes remained kosher. Jewish women were generally subservient to men in public religious spheres, but in certain home based practices their judgements reigned supreme.

Separating dishes, unlike waiting between meat and dairy, is, according to Kraemer, a wholly private decision. Whereas an observant Jew must publicly refuse dairy if she has just eaten meat, only family and close friends will have any knowledge of the way she keeps her kitchen.<sup>101</sup> Thus, although the practice creates a substantial financial and logistical burden, it need not further separate observant Jews from gentiles. The private dimension of this practice might explain the tremendous number of non-Orthodox kashrut observers who continue to keep separate meat and dairy dishes. Even though the *halachic* basis for the prohibition is tenuous, observance is possible while maintaining a highly integrated life in a non-Jewish and or non-observant world.

### **Persecution and Observance**

Because Jews were frequently scorned political minorities, external political factors sometimes influenced religious observance. For example, although Jewish butchers would generally sell imperfectly slain animals (*nevelah*), and the hindquarters that had not had their veins removed to non-kosher butchers, in the middle ages, non Jews boycotted this Jewish meat. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries non-Jews monopolized all meat for slaughter in certain towns,<sup>102</sup> making kosher meat too expensive and largely unavailable to Jewish communities. In many cases, the Jewish poor

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>102</sup> Cooper, 110.

could not afford kosher meat so they were forced either to abandon the practice or to eat vegetarian. Many likely *did* abandon kashrut. Nonetheless, despite these hardships and despite others, the dietary laws continued to define and to maintain the Jewish community.

### **The *Haskalah***

In what is termed The *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, a group of late eighteenth century German Jewish intellectuals sought to portray Judaism as a religion based in reason which could be conducive to the development of German culture.<sup>103</sup> By rationalizing the Jewish religion, *Maskilim*, (Jewish enlightenment thinkers), sought to break down the framework for discriminatory laws and to encourage Jewish integration into enlightened society.

Moses Mendelssohn, who was known as the “Socrates of Berlin” was arguably The *Haskalah*’s most important thinker. He argued that Judaism is a religion, meaning it does not encompass all political, social, and economic aspects of life. Religion, for Mendelssohn is a sphere “largely private and not public, voluntary and not compulsory.”<sup>104</sup> Ritual observance should then reflect individual choice rather than communal pressures. In fact, Mendelssohn asserted that coercion betrays the “true meaning of both Judaism and religion more broadly defined.”<sup>105</sup> According to Mendelssohn, Judaism is best and most meaningfully practiced when observance is left to individual choice.

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<sup>103</sup> Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 85.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

Before The *Haskalah*, the law was, at least at the communal level, authoritative. An individual who rejected his rabbi's interpretation of *halachah* might be excluded from his community. The *Haskalah* empowered Jewish intellectuals to openly challenge *halachah*. The poet Yehuda Leib Gordon created a fictional encounter between a poor woman and her rabbi to illustrate the inequities of Jewish food practice.<sup>106</sup> The woman comes to her rabbi with two freshly slaughtered geese to check that they are kosher and can be used to transform her "otherwise poor table...into a rich one for holiday [Passover] freedom." The rabbi finds minor imperfections and tells her she cannot. As she weeps, the rabbi tells her, "You should not despair, poor woman! Jews are charitable! You should support yourself by begging!"<sup>107</sup> For Gordon, strict observance of *halachah* forces poor Jews into hunger, and prevents them from properly celebrating the holidays.<sup>108</sup> Gordon, like many of his contemporaries, contended that rigid observance might not be worth its costs. Countless Jews agreed.

Emancipation welcomed Jews "into universal" society, and provided them new rights as full citizens of their countries.<sup>109</sup> But although emancipated Jews had more freedom to practice their religion, their practice had to remain privatized. As Count Clermont-Tonnerre stated in the French National Assembly of December 1789, "The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals."<sup>110</sup> After emancipation, Jews had more political rights than ever before, but Jewish communities were disempowered.

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Shall I Toil: Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) in Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 146-147.

<sup>107</sup> Yehuda Leib Gordon, "Barburim Abusim," in *Kol Shire Yehuda Leib Gordon* (Vilna: Dfus ha'Almanah ve-ha'Ahim Rom, 1899), pp. 152-159 in Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 146-147.

<sup>108</sup> Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 147.

<sup>109</sup> Brenner, 190.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

This chapter examines the sources and the evolution of Jewish dietary laws. It argues that very few of the elements of kashrut observed today were practiced in biblical times. The bulk of the laws emerged throughout the Talmudic period and, in the case of separate dishes, throughout the Middle Ages. It contends that Jewish dietary restrictions evolved as a product of various social, economic, and political factors, many of which non-Orthodox Jews might critically examine when determining how to keep kosher.

This chapter also asserts that Jewish dietary restrictions exist in part to separate Jews from non-Jews. However, I argue that the laws regulating mixtures of kosher and non-kosher foods reveal that kashrut does not demand absolute separation. Thus, non-Orthodox Jews who negotiate restrictions to enable relationships with non-Jews are not necessarily acting out of step from the law's intentions. This chapter also explains that throughout history, sects of Jews have adopted more stringent standards in part to distinguish themselves as 'more pious' than other Jews. Their choices, I assert, divide, rather than unite the Jewish community through kashrut observance.

This chapter examines the effects of coercion on observance. I explain that Jewish communities frequently coerced observance, while non-Jews sometimes made observance more difficult. The *Haskalah*, I argue, mitigated both of these pressures. Up until The *Haskalah*, a Jew needed to maintaining the community's standard of kashrut or he risked exclusion. The *Haskalah*, by privatizing religion, made observance an individual choice. Jews could not only choose whether or not to keep kosher, they could determine independently what standards they would maintain.

By the nineteenth century Jews kept the 'laws of kashrut' in a manner resembling that of countless Jews today. But nineteenth century Jewish communities were nothing

like those of the twentieth century. While enlightenment thinkers endeavored to separate Judaism from nationalism and to create a framework which would be adopted by American Jewry, the Zionist project succeeded because it could join the two. American and Israeli Jews would embark on two distinct and ideologically opposed paths to modernity.

## Chapter Two

### **Tradition in Flux: Migration to the United States and Israel**

Elizabeth Ehrlich is the daughter of Eastern European immigrants who grew up in what she terms a ‘kosher style’ household. As her mother went along, Ehrlich explains, she

made up the rules. These were not consistent, were not legal, were not the accumulation of centuries of rabbinical thought. Our practices, when I was a child, reflected that which my parents chose to remember, or with which my mother could not bear to part. They were vestiges of their own upbringing, aesthetic in the end. They had to do with comfort and familiarity and perhaps just a bit of superstition. Commandment and community pressure, which had kept our great-grandparents in line, had fizzled out in the long march of the twentieth century.<sup>111</sup>

Ehrlich’s mother approached kashrut in a manner similar to other twentieth century immigrants. She embraced the freedom, choice, and economic mobility of an American life, but also maintained elements of kashrut as a way to remember the world she had left behind. Early immigrants to Israel faced a harsh climate and an undeveloped land. Because food was for fuel rather than for pleasure, Jewish Israelis did not encounter temptations comparable to those in the United States, but they did face pragmatic obstacles to keeping kosher.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the vast majority of the the world’s Jewish populations moved, generally out of fear of persecution or from dire economic conditions, from European, Asian, and Middle Eastern Countries to North America or to Palestine. At both destinations immigrants were exposed to new cuisines, interacted with non-observant peers and encountered varied, practical obstacles to kashrut observance. Immigrants had varied responses to their new environments. While some

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<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam’s Kitchen*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 178.



renegotiated their relationship with dietary laws, others abandoned them altogether. Many went to great lengths to maintain their previous standards of observance. This chapter is an attempt to examine their experiences and to outline the context of contemporary American and Israeli kashrut observance.

## **The United States**

### **Sephardic Migration**

A small group of Sephardic settlers from Brazil were the first Jews to arrive in the United States in the mid seventeenth century. These immigrants established synagogues in Colonial America which modeled themselves after other American religious establishments. For Sephardic immigrants, Judaism was a private aspect of their identities, distinct from their American lives.

Sephardic immigrants were outnumbered by Ashkenazi by 1730<sup>112</sup>, and their share of the population was dwarfed by the later migrations of millions of European Jews. Thus, although this chapter will focus on the foodways of American Ashkenazi Jews, the experiences of Ashkenazis should not be taken to characterize all Jewish communities who came to the United States.

### **Western European Migration and Jewish Denominationalism**

Western European Jews began to migrate to the United States in the early nineteenth century because they faced persecution, restrictive laws and economic hardship. Significant numbers came from Germany in 1840. By World War I there were

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<sup>112</sup> Joellyn Zollman, "Jewish Immigration to America: Three Waves," *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed January 23, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-immigration-to-america-three-waves/>.

approximately 250,000 German speaking Jews in the United States, mostly dispersed in smaller cities in the Midwest, West, and South where they started off as peddlers.<sup>113</sup>

Western European Jews brought with them the denominational framework of Emancipation. The foundation for the radical reform of Jewish institutions was established in Germany at several rabbinical conferences throughout the 1850s, and in the United States many of these Reforms reached fruition.<sup>114</sup> In Cincinnati in July 1883, in what has been termed the “*Trefa* Banquet,” Hebrew Union College celebrated the ordination of its first class with crabs, shrimp, and ice cream and cheese following a meat meal.<sup>115</sup> Although Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of Hebrew Union College, claimed that he ordered the meal to be kosher and the caterer acted on his own, the leaders of the Reform movement used the mistake to argue that dietary laws were irrelevant. In fact, Wise responded to criticism of the banquet by railing against “kitchen Judaism.”<sup>116</sup>

Although the meal did not include pork, the food considered most taboo by observant and non observant Jews alike,<sup>117</sup> the banquet divided American Jews into two camps: “Reform” and “everything else.”<sup>118</sup> The Reform Movement outlined its ideological tenets in the 1886 Pittsburgh Platform. The Hebrew Bible, it explained, should not be treated as divine truth. Reform Jews should treat morality and social

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Feldberg, “The Trefa Banquet and the End of a Dream,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-trefa-banquet-and-the-end-of-a-dream/>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid “*Trefa*”, like *tref*, refers to a food that is not kosher, generally explicitly so, for example shellfish, pork, or mixed dairy and meat.

<sup>116</sup> Feldberg, Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Pigs, according to the Torah, are no worse than other non kosher animals. However, anti-semites from as early as Rome have taunted Jews by forcing them to eat pork, so pork carries unique cultural baggage. Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), 228.

<sup>118</sup> Michael R. Cohen, “Organized Movements of American Judaism: From 1880 to World War II,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, ed. Alan T. Levenson, (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 409.

justice as more important than traditional laws, and Reform synagogues should be referred to as ‘Temples’ to remind Jews that they do not need the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>119</sup> The platform’s stance against kashrut was unequivocal:

We hold that all such Mosiac and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.<sup>120</sup>

Although the Reform Movement has since softened its stance on kashrut, The Pittsburgh Platform provided American Jews an institutional and religious framework to eat all that America offered.

The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and the Orthodox Union (OU) founded in 1886 and 1898 respectively, responded to the Pittsburgh Platform, by offering a stricter approach to *halachah*. Although many immigrants self identified as ‘Orthodox,’ the movement struggled to appeal to those who found American Orthodoxy unlike that they had known in Eastern Europe.<sup>121</sup>

Solomon Schechter founded an intermediate, the Conservative Movement, in 1902. He stressed the importance of English sermons, modern education, and decorum in synagogues. The movement strived, according to its Constitution, to “further the observance of the Sabbath and the Dietary Laws,” but also to empower individuals to make their own decisions.<sup>122</sup> Some of Schechter’s disciples decided to eat dairy food from non-kosher restaurants. This intermediate approach to kashrut, they reasoned, would enable closer relationships with non-Jews. Others maintained stricter observance.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 409-410.

<sup>120</sup> Conference of Reform Rabbis, “The Pittsburgh Platform (1885),” in *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, 45 (1935), p. 198-200, in in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jehuda Reinharz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 532.

<sup>121</sup> Cohen, 411-412.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 415-416.

The movement was intentionally non prescriptive as its leaders aimed to ‘represent all of Israel’ on traditional, historical track.

## **Eastern European Migration**

By the late nineteenth century the bulk of Jewish immigrants to the United State came from Eastern rather than Western Europe as conditions in Western Europe improved and those in Eastern Europe worsened. Jewish migration to the United States from Eastern Europe coincided with a larger wave of Eastern-European migration beginning in 1881 and continuing until 1924 when the Johnson-Reed Act limited the annual admittance of immigrants to just two percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States,<sup>123</sup> generally about 10,000 Jews.<sup>124</sup>

Migration to the United States was, for many, an economic choice. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Eastern European Jews found their resources stretched increasingly thin. Impoverishment stemmed in part from the rapid growth of Russia’s Jewish population. Simon Kuznetz found that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while Russia’s general population grew by 150 percent, its Jewish population grew by 220 percent.<sup>125</sup> By 1900, Russia’s Jewish population numbered over five million and comprised approximately 50 percent of the Jewish population worldwide.<sup>126</sup> This growth proved burdensome as it meant that one

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<sup>123</sup> Jessica Cooperman, “The Great Migration: 1881-1924,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2012) 381.

<sup>124</sup> Mark Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948), p. 289 in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jehuda Reinharz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 532.

<sup>125</sup> Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>126</sup> Jarrod Tanny, “The Jews in the Land of the Russian Tsars,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 362.

third of the Russian Jewish population was small, dependent children. Russian Jews needed to stretch their limited resources to feed even more mouths.<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, in 1881, Alexander III ascended to the Russian throne and enacted of a series of explicitly anti semitic policies. He restricted Jewish residence to the westernmost region of the empire known as the Pale of Settlement and denied Jews access to major centers of trade and commercial life.<sup>128</sup> Jews were sometimes even barred from working in factories owned by other Jews and frequently labeled “unskilled socialist instigators.”<sup>129</sup> Because the economic opportunities available to Jews were so limited, they were concentrated in few, generally less profitable occupations.<sup>130</sup>

By 1881 Russian anti-semitism was so severe that the non-Jewish population began to pillage and murder Jewish communities in a series of pogroms which continued until 1921. Those which took place between the years 1903 and 1906 were particularly violent. Some sources estimate 2,500 Jews were killed in the 1905 Odessa pogrom.<sup>131</sup> The new Tsarist government refused to aid Jewish pogrom victims and instead blamed Jews for inciting attacks against them. The police rarely intervened to help the Jewish population. As N. Tchaykovsky observed, in the massacre of Jews in Kishinev in 1903, “the police of the town not only refused to render any efficient protection and assistance to the...attacked and murdered Jewish population, but deliberately prevented by force any assistance being rendered to them by those private persons who were willing to do

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<sup>127</sup> Alroey, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Wischitzer, 383.

<sup>129</sup> Aroey, 45.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>131</sup> Hila Ratzabi, “What Were Pogroms,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed January 23, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/what-were-pogroms/>.

so.”<sup>132</sup> A man in Vilna explained “if someone gets into an argument with a Christian the latter immediately says: ‘Just wait, soon we’ll settle all the scores,’ or something similar or even worse.”<sup>133</sup> Many felt their choice was either to leave or to die.

According to Hasia Diner, another motivation for Eastern European migration was hunger. By the mid-nineteenth century, because of tax increases, military invasion, and food shortages, many once comfortable Eastern European Jews were forced into poverty that would only increase into the twentieth century.<sup>134</sup> Their diet was primarily one of dark bread, potatoes and herring.<sup>135</sup> Their meals differed little from one another and meat, vegetables, fat and sugar appeared only in small quantities.<sup>136</sup> Many depended on the welfare of their local Jewish communities.<sup>137</sup>

## **Kashrut in Eastern Europe**

Although strict kashrut observance, under the instruction of a rabbi, was the norm within Jewish households,<sup>138</sup> it imposed significant cost. For example, if a rabbi declared a goose *tref* because of a minor imperfection, a family would lose the money and labor invested to buy it. Likewise, many families were pressed for resources to buy single utensils, let alone two separate sets.<sup>139</sup> Women from poorer households who needed to

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<sup>132</sup> N. Tchaykovsky, “The Massacre of Jews at Kishinyov,” *Free Russia: Organ of the Friends of Russian Freedom* 14, no. 6 (June 1, 1903), pp. 62-63, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jehuda Reinharz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 389.

<sup>133</sup> [Unsigned letter to the editor from a Jew in Vilna], *Nedel'naya kronika voshkroda*, no. 1 (February 1882), trans. L. Sachs, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jehuda Reinharz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 389.

<sup>134</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 163.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 158-160.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 156-160.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 178-179.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 166.

work<sup>140</sup> were pressed for time not only to cook kosher meals but also to maintain the integrity of their kitchens. Many could not cook the meals that they wanted or that society expected of them. Meanwhile, their affluent counterparts could hire servants to help with cooking. For wealthy Jews, the costs of kashrut were manageable. For the majority of the Jewish population, they were impoverishing.<sup>141</sup>

Jewish tradition teaches “*kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*,” “all of Israel are responsible, one for the other,” so many wealthier Jews felt a communal obligation to those in need. They worked to fill the tables of the poor at sacred times, and many saved portions of their Shabbat meals to feed to visitors after Saturday morning services.<sup>142</sup> Others went from house to house collecting money and left over food for their neighbors.<sup>143</sup> Communities also developed more formal charitable institutions, including soup kitchens which offered the poor a hot meal every day.<sup>144</sup> Many even hosted public banquets and holiday meals which joined Jews of all social classes at a single table. But, as Hasia Diner explains, charity reinforced class divisions. Those willing to feed their poorer neighbors were generally not willing to treat them as equals.

One Yeshiva student described the dread he felt twice a week on “eating days” when he received charity from wealthy Jews. “They never asked me to come into the parlor,” he explained, “they fed me in the kitchen.”<sup>145</sup> Those on the receiving end of charity generally came to resent those who offered it. The tight economic and educational spaces Jews occupied only aggravated this resentment. Jewish boys studied

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<sup>140</sup> Throughout this period in Eastern Europe, female labor was taboo. Generally the only women who worked were those whose families needed the income.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>145</sup> Israel Pressman, “Roads that Passed,” 16, in *Hungering for America*, 171.

together in the *heder* where the poorer would marvel at the “richer and tastier” lunchtime meals of their peers. Jews worked for other Jews in factories and in homes, and “rubbed against” one another in the marketplace.<sup>146</sup> Thus, Jews who did not eat well were reminded daily that others did.

## **Early Life in America**

Migration was made possible by Russian industrial development which began in the 1870s, following the liberation of the serfs in 1861.<sup>147</sup> In the following decades, Russia emerged as a top industrial power with a railway infrastructure only bested by that in the United States.<sup>148</sup> Russian industrialization created the technology which made mass migration possible. By the twentieth century every major town in Poland and in the Pale of Settlement could reach the Russian empire, and from ports there to the larger world.<sup>149</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century the American Civil War and the Crimean War facilitated the development of iron steamships, which shipping companies recognized could carry hundreds of migrants.<sup>150</sup> From 1881 to 1924 two million Jews, nearly one third of the Jews in Eastern Europe chose to leave. Some went to Western Europe, Canada, Argentina or Palestine, but 90 percent went to the United States.<sup>151</sup>

Those who migrated to the United States came from the lower, but not the lowest economic classes. They were the ones with both the means and the greatest incentive to emigrate.<sup>152</sup> Although most would have observed dietary proscriptions in Eastern Europe, migrants to the United States were likely not those most committed to

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<sup>146</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 172-173.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid 38.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 176.



*halachah*. The leading Orthodox rabbis in Europe urged their followers not to leave, contending that America was “a heathen land where their religious lives would suffer.”<sup>153</sup> The travel alone would involve two weeks with limited food in cramped and unsanitary conditions.<sup>154</sup> Kosher food was generally not available and the accessibility of kosher options within the United States was uncertain.

Most Eastern European immigrants settled in cities. The vast majority stayed where they arrived, in New York, where Yiddish speaking communities helped Jews feel at home. For the most part, early immigrants lived in densely populated Jewish neighborhoods<sup>155</sup> and worked with other Jews. Because they had already developed the requisite skills in Eastern Europe, many migrants entered the garment industry. By the turn of the twentieth century, 75 percent of New York garment workers were Jewish.<sup>156</sup> Jews worked long hours in trying and dangerous conditions. However, workplaces were populated primarily with other Jews, and were therefore sites of solidarity, friendship, and even romance.<sup>157</sup> Jews also joined together in more traditional religious settings. By 1910, Jewish communities had built over two thousand synagogues in New York, 90 percent of which labeled themselves as Orthodox,<sup>158</sup> even though many of their members no longer identified as observant. Synagogues and Jewish communal organizations provided support and services to their members, but unlike the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, their membership was always voluntary.<sup>159</sup>

Although Jews generally worked with other Jews, and frequently for Jewish employers, they were often forced to compromise on traditional observance. Many

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<sup>153</sup> Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), 59.

<sup>154</sup> Cooperman, 383.

<sup>155</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 199.

<sup>156</sup> Cooperman, 384.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 385.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 388.

<sup>159</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

risked losing employment if they did not work on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.<sup>160</sup> Families frequently made efforts to balance practical and religious requirements. Often one member would work on Sabbath while the others would try to rest.<sup>161</sup> Most American Jews were compelled to pick and choose among the *mitzvot* (the commandments.)

While late nineteenth century Europe was overpopulated, the United States suffered from chronic labor shortages. Migrants came to the United States with the knowledge that they would find work,<sup>162</sup> and the hope that they would be able to eat their fill. Most were successful. Historian Hasia Diner argues that compared to Europeans, American Jews “had access to higher wages and greater levels of material comfort, and at almost any point in time they expected to experience some mobility.”<sup>163</sup> In the United States, “broad expanses of cheap land” made products such as grain, vegetables, and fruit, which were luxuries in Europe, available to most Americans. A drop in the prices of many food products in 1880 expanded options.<sup>164</sup> Meat was a luxury item in Eastern Europe, meaning the complications of kashrut observance were not a day-to-day concern. Because in the United States many Jews could afford to eat meat everyday,<sup>165</sup> most needed to decide whether and to what extent they would continue to observe dietary restrictions.

Most women found their burdens lighter and their opportunities broader in the United States. For one, technological advances including running water and gas substantially reduced the time and effort necessary to cook a decent meal.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, in the United States, women who were once confined to the home found various

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 385.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 388.

<sup>162</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 15.

<sup>163</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 7.

<sup>164</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 13-15.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 185-186.

opportunities outside of it. One such opportunity came through cooking classes offered in New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. In the early twentieth century Milwaukee, more Jewish women sought enrollment in cooking classes than could be accommodated. Diner argues that through these classes many Jewish immigrants ‘became American.’ Classes were comfortable and markedly Jewish, but they taught American cuisine.<sup>167</sup>

### **Variant Approaches to Kashrut**

The relative consensus on what was kosher in Eastern Europe fell apart in the United States. In Eastern Europe a community’s rabbi would ensure that the local butcher slaughtered animals in accordance with Jewish law. In the United States laissez-faire economics and the separation of church from state rendered communal supervision unfeasible.<sup>168</sup> Butchers could name any meat ‘kosher,’ so Jews could not trust their meat supply.<sup>169</sup> According to New York City’s Commissioner of Markets, in 1925, 45 percent of the meat sold as kosher in New York City was fraudulent.<sup>170</sup> Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries local synagogue communities across the East Coast took responsibility for their communities kosher meat. They hired and fired *schochtim* and attempted to supervise their practices. However, by the mid nineteenth century, there were so many Jews in New York that butchers learned they could open separate shops. Shortly thereafter, communal supervision fell apart.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Fishkoff, 57.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

Despite the pressures of becoming American, kashrut remained a top priority for many Jewish immigrants. Some went to great lengths to obtain kosher meat even in towns without a *schochet*. For example, in 1880 the Jews of Stamford, Connecticut would transport kosher meat by horse and wagon from New York or Port Chester.<sup>172</sup> Kosher meat was and is expensive. In 1935 non-kosher beef liver sold for 15 cents a pound while kosher beef liver sold for 40.<sup>173</sup> Even during The Great Depression kosher meats averaged about a dollar per pound.<sup>174</sup> Thus migrants who bought kosher meat bore what would have been a substantial financial hit to do so.

In the United States kosher customers were not passive consumers. Although they were willing to pay a price differential for kosher meat, they did not tolerate prices they perceived as unreasonably skewed.<sup>175</sup> In 1902, when the price of kosher meat in Manhattan's Lower East side rose from 12 to 18 cents per pound, two Jewish women, Fanny Lee and Sarah Edelson, went from door to door agitating for a strike against kosher butchers. They encouraged a reported 20,000 women to break into kosher butcher shops, take meat into the street, and set it on fire. The crowds, armed with sticks, confiscated kosher meat from those who had bought it. The riots spread to Brooklyn, Boston, Newark, and Pennsylvania. Although many of the rioters were new immigrants, these women quickly learned the organizing strategies of the labor and suffrage movements, and took control over the economics of kashrut.<sup>176</sup>

Kosher meat was, at least relative to today, widely available. In the 1920s, approximately 25 percent of cows slaughtered for consumption were kosher, compared

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<sup>172</sup> Diner, 182.

<sup>173</sup> Fishkoff, 59.

<sup>174</sup> Ruth Glazer, "From the American Scene: The Jewish Delicatessen," *Commentary*, March 1946.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>176</sup> "Jews in America: The Kosher Meat Boycott," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed January 17, 2018.

to six percent by 1980.<sup>177</sup> Between 1920 and 1930 over half the poultry sold in New York was kosher. Immigrants, and particularly urban immigrants, could find kosher meat, generally in small, local butcher shops. What they couldn't find were kosher versions of classic American foods. Countless American products including the classics, Coca-Cola and Oreo cookies, contained traces of meat substances which rendered them *treif*. Although Coca-Cola went kosher in 1935, Oreos were made with lard until the 1990s.<sup>178</sup> Many Jews needed to sacrifice what were seen as quintessential American tastes to maintain compliance with dietary laws.

Kashrut quickly became a source of contention among American Jews. Families separated because some felt they needed to live closer to a *schochet*. Observant Jews found they were not comfortable eating in other Jewish homes. Slaughterers and supervisors attempted to undermine their rivals by declaring their meat non-kosher.<sup>179</sup> Jews and Jewish organizations engaged in bitter debates over kashrut standards. The Hebrew Children's Home and the Hebrew Sheltering and Guardian Society in Rochester New York maintained two separate orphanages solely because neither could agree to the other's kashrut standards.<sup>180</sup>

As Diner explains, the majority of Eastern European immigrants wanted both to engage in American cuisine and culture, and to eat 'Jewish' "without too much fretting over the details."<sup>181</sup> Because American Jewish culture was "derivative" and "made up of immigrants," Diner argues that American Jewish identity was "fluid, negotiable, and highly voluntary."<sup>182</sup> American Jewish immigrants, like, I will argue, contemporary

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<sup>177</sup> Horowitz, 164.

<sup>178</sup> Fishkoff, 21-22.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>181</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 181.

<sup>182</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 2.

American non-Orthodox kashrut observers, “operated with a sense of empowerment.” For them, Judaism was not a fixed entity, but could instead be adapted to fit their needs.<sup>183</sup> Most did not abandon kashrut; instead, they sought compromise. Some decided to keep kosher homes but to eat non-kosher foods in restaurants. Others opted for a ‘kosher style’ diet. They would not eat specifically forbidden foods, but they would eat meat which had not been slaughtered in accordance with *halachah*.<sup>184</sup>

### **‘Jewish’ Delis**

Delis were at the heart of Eastern European Jews’ struggles to both eat ‘Jewish’ and to succeed as Americans. When Ruth Glazer was sixteen her father decided to open “a real Jewish delicatessen.” Although he considered opening a kosher delicatessen he ultimately decided to keep his ‘kosher style.’ A kosher deli, he worried, could antagonize non Jewish sectors of the community and would subject him to the supervision of “snooping rabbis.” According to Glazer, the Jewish delicatessen “looks exactly the same” as the kosher delicatessen, “smells exactly the same, and the pastrami sandwiches lack neither juiciness nor flavor.” Only “the neon kosher sign is missing from the window.”<sup>185</sup> A ‘kosher style’ delicatessen could bring Jews the tastes of Eastern Europe without the headache and expense of kashrut.

Culminating in the 1920s, a variety of social and governmental policies including the immigration quota system, the quota systems in colleges and Universities, law firms, and hospitals limited and in some cases barred Jewish entry.<sup>186</sup> Because American Jews wanted to take part in American institutions, many took various steps, including

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*, 185.

<sup>185</sup> Glazer, Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 3.

changing their names, to “mitigate their otherness.”<sup>187</sup> Throughout the early twentieth century, increasing numbers of Americans stopped keeping kosher because they found affirmations of their difference interfered with their integrationist goals. Many also found they did not need to uphold traditions to maintain their Jewish identities. Jews continued to live and work among other Jews, and Jews together, faced discrimination.

In this context, Ted Merwin argues that ‘Jewish delicatessens,’ and particularly those which were not kosher, were successful because they helped American Jews feel like part of the ‘in-crowd.’<sup>188</sup> ‘Jewish’ delis attracted a broader, American clientele. In the jazz age they even earned an association with glitz and glamour. ‘Jewish’ delis frequently earned success by adding *treif* items such as shellfish and pork to their menus.<sup>189</sup> Their success demonstrates that for Americans, abandonment of kashrut could allow both success and assimilation in American society, and affirmation of Jewish identity.

## **Israel**

### **The First Aliyah**

Although immigration to Israel (*aliyah*) is often understood as ideologically motivated and therefore distinct from migrations to other countries, the majority of Israeli immigrants migrated for reasons similar to those who came to the United States. The first wave of migration to Palestine, termed the “First Aliyah” began in 1881 and continued into 1903. It was spurred by the same Russian pogroms which motivated immigration to the United States. The majority of immigrants for the First Aliyah came in families. They founded the first agricultural settlements, but they faced difficult

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<sup>187</sup> Fishkoff, 37.

<sup>188</sup> Ted Merwin, *Pastrami on Rye: an Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli*, (New York: New York University Press: 2015), 7.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

conditions, including harsh climate, disease, Turkish taxation, and attacks from their Arab neighbors. Of the 35,000 Jews who migrated during the First Aliyah, only half chose to remain in Palestine after several years.<sup>190</sup>

Most who migrated during the First Aliyah were observant Jews, and the settlements they established were religious in nature. Surrounded by other observant Jews, most were able to maintain their previous standards of kashrut. However, religious settlers were also accompanied by a small minority group known as *Bulluyim*, who adhered to a modern, secular-national ideology.<sup>191</sup> Early settlers lived near their Arab and Bedouin neighbors. They adopted many of their food practices, trading fresh fish for olive oil and tobacco. They did so in part because few of the foods familiar to them were available. For example, many found it difficult to procure flour and learned that pita bread could serve as a more feasible alternative.<sup>192</sup>

## **The Second Aliyah**

The “Second Aliyah” which took place from 1904 to 1914 is generally understood as the most ideological wave of immigration. Historians frequently posit that those who emigrated to Palestine during this period were young, single men, while those who went to the United States during the same period went in families.<sup>193</sup> If settlers intentions were ideological, settlers must have been, in important ways, distinct from those who came to the United States. Yet evidence suggests that settlers may not have been so ideologically motivated. Gur Alroey uses documents from the Palestine

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<sup>190</sup> “Immigration to Israel: The First Aliyah,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-first-aliyah-1882-1903>.

<sup>191</sup> Yael Raviv, *Falafel Nation*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 215.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 216.

<sup>193</sup> Alroey, 25.



Information Bureau, Ports of Departure and Destination in Palestine, and Newspapers to demonstrate that the claim that Zionist ideology was *the chief* motivator for immigration during the “Second Aliyah” ignores historical context.<sup>194</sup> Jews who came to Palestine were not of a fundamentally different type than those who went to the United States.

Demographically, the majority of migrants during the Second Aliyah resembled immigrants to the United States in the same period. Most were very poor and motivated by ‘push’ factors, to find a new home.<sup>195</sup> Their migration was spurred by the pogroms of 1903 and by the instability which followed the failed 1905 revolution in Russia. In the years 1905 and 1906 there were 657 pogroms in Eastern Europe. More than 3,000 Jews were murdered.<sup>196</sup> Refugees from pogroms moved to different towns, placing new economic burdens on the Jews who lived there, and encouraging migration.<sup>197</sup> As Alroey argues, contrary to most Zionist historiography, these ‘push’ factors motivated the migration of *both* single persons *and* families. As their letters to information bureaus demonstrate, those who considered Palestine considered it among other alternatives.<sup>198</sup> Their decisions were focused on economic questions: most pressing, could they find work? Jews were looking for a way out of Eastern Europe, and for some, Palestine was the more realizable haven. In 1908 it would cost an entire family, in today’s dollars, \$8,979 to migrate to the United States, but only \$1,775 to migrate to Palestine.<sup>199</sup> For the many Jews with no money to spare, migration to the United States was fiscally

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 20.

impossible. Additionally, those who traveled to Palestine recognized that they might be able to afford a return trip if their endeavors failed.<sup>200</sup>

In 1910, Russians began to maintain kosher kitchens on their ships to Palestine to ensure their boats were full.<sup>201</sup> This indicates that for some, kashrut must have been a determining factor in deciding whether to leave. Kosher ships may have encouraged more religious immigrants set on leaving to go to Palestine instead of going to the United States. Nonetheless, for early settlers, making and obtaining strictly kosher food could be difficult. Many did not have access to private kitchens and needed to share communal ones with other settlers who had no interest in observing dietary laws. In some instances, religious settlers would need to set up a separate, kosher, kitchen.<sup>202</sup> For all early immigrants, food options were limited, and poor kitchen accommodations made many meals “inedible.”<sup>203</sup> Even throughout the Second Aliyah, nearly half of those who came to Palestine returned to their countries of origin. Many of those who were more religious did so because they found the atmosphere antithetical to their beliefs.<sup>204</sup> Throughout the same period, a much greater percentage of immigrants remained in the United States. In the few years before World War I, 5.75 percent of the America’s Jewish population returned to their countries of origins compared to one-third among other US immigrant groups.<sup>205</sup> These figures suggest either that the religious life possible in the United States was more acceptable to European immigrants, or simply that American Jews were less committed to maintaining the same level of observance.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>202</sup> Raviv, 91.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>204</sup> Berel Wein, “The Third Aliyah,” *Jewish History*, Accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.jewishhistory.org/the-third-aliyah/>.

<sup>205</sup> Shmuel Ettinger, “Jewish Emigration in the 19th Century,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed March 5, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-emigration-in-the-19th-century/>.

While those who migrated to the United States generally moved into industries similar to those they had occupied in Eastern Europe, many early migrants to Palestine moved from urban trades to agricultural labor. As Alroey points out, their move was often a necessity. Many came to work on the land only after failing to find work in the town.<sup>206</sup> One immigrant named Zeev Smilansky explained, “one can meet professional people and skilled technicians who overseas were well-paid for their work, and who, when they get to Palestine, choose to go and work in the colonies simply because there is no demand for their labor.”<sup>207</sup> Thus the move to Palestine was, for most early immigrants, destabilizing.

During the Second Aliyah the first *kibbutzim* were established, Hebrew was revived as a modern language, political parties were founded, and agricultural organizations were formed.<sup>208</sup> However, even during this, most ideological wave of immigration, most of the 35,000 Jews who came to Palestine were not fundamentally different from those who came to the United States. The differences in kashrut observance among these immigrants were, at least at first, situational rather than ideological.

### **The Third Aliyah**

The Third Aliyah, which took place from 1921 to 1924 was largely a continuation of the second. It was prompted by the British Mandate in Palestine and the British issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, supporting the establishment of Palestine as

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<sup>206</sup> Alroey, 178.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> “Immigration to Israel: The Second Aliyah,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed January 20, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-second-aliyah-1904-1914>.

a national home for the Jewish people.<sup>209</sup> In it, 40,000 Jews from Russia and Poland came primarily to escape the tumult of the Russian Revolution. Many of the Jews of the Third Aliyah supported socialist policies and opposed traditional Jewish observances. The Third Aliyah thus strengthened Israel's anti-religious voice, and created small communities, many of which were hostile to observance.

### **The Fourth Aliyah**

Immigration to Palestine increased substantially after 1924, when quotas limiting immigration to the United States took effect.<sup>210</sup> “The Fourth Aliyah” which took place between 1924 and 1928 consisted of 82,000 primarily Central European Jews who, unlike their predecessors, had occupied higher social classes. A larger proportion of Fourth Aliyah immigrants came in families compared to previous waves. Many did not see such a pressing need to break from diaspora occupations. Most were more likely to work in urban and craft trades than to “labor the land.”<sup>211</sup> This is likely because, without the United States as an alternative, migration to Palestine during the Fourth Aliyah was even less voluntary than it had been prior. With many more female and family migrants, the *Yishuv* (Jewish community), learned to place an emphasis on family needs, including kitchens and the quality of food. While earlier waves of immigrants had held that enjoying food was secondary to building the state, by the late 1920s, members of the *Yishuv* raved about Israel's food in Zionist propaganda.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> “Balfour Declaration,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Last Updated November 11, 2017, Accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Balfour-Declaration>.

<sup>210</sup> Raviv, 17.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 219-220.

## The Fifth Aliyah

From 1929 to 1939 after Hitler's rise to power, nearly 250,000 Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe migrated to Palestine in the "Fifth Aliyah," bringing the Jewish population of Palestine to 450,000<sup>213</sup> out of a total population of approximately one and a half million.<sup>214</sup> After the British government restricted immigration to Palestine, many Jews continued to migrate illegally. A number of German immigrants were professionals who helped develop new industrial enterprises and created the infrastructure for a modern nation.<sup>215</sup>

## The Foundation of the State

After the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing war with other Arab nations, Jewish population growth accelerated. In 1950 the Law of Return granted every Jew an automatic right to immigrate to Israel as a full citizen. By 1951 Israel's Jewish population was again double its 1948 size. New immigrants were largely Holocaust refugees and Jews expelled from Libya, Yemen, and Iraq.<sup>216</sup> Though these immigrants may have wanted to come to Israel for ideological reasons, their migration was not voluntary. Many immigrants during this period were children or elderly, meaning proportionally few, compared to previous waves of immigration, were able to work. Most were less educated than previous immigrant groups and many were not proficient in modern Hebrew. As a result, new immigrants generally had low status and little

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<sup>213</sup> "Immigration to Israel: The Fifth Aliyah," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed January 23, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-fifth-aliyah-1929-1939>.

<sup>214</sup> "Demographics of Israel: Jewish & Non-Jewish Population of Israel/Palestine," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-and-non-jewish-population-of-israel-palestine-1517-present>.

<sup>215</sup> "Immigration to Israel: The Fifth Aliyah," *Ibid*.

<sup>216</sup> "Immigration to Israel: Introduction and Overview," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/introduction-and-historical-overview>.

income. Social and economic rifts thus separated new immigrants from earlier waves, and particularly divided European from non-European migrants.<sup>217</sup> To help incorporate new immigrants and to build a national economy, the Zionist government embarked on a mass industrialization program which encouraged rapid economic growth.<sup>218</sup>

While food was abundant in the United States, in early Israel it was strictly rationed. In 1947, a ration of food could consist of “four pounds of Dutch potatoes, two pounds of Turkish onions, and four pounds of homegrown navel oranges.”<sup>219</sup> Because meat was a luxury, kashrut was not yet a source of contention. New foods such as hummus and Israeli couscous became staples, and surplus vegetables, such as eggplant, frequently stood in for meat.<sup>220</sup> During the War of Independence, an Arab siege of the Jewish sections of Jerusalem meant that rations consisted only of those foods delivered before the war. To ease their hunger, one man remembers posting pictures of food on his work-bulletin board with co-workers. One day he found a picture of a ham roast, remarked that it was not kosher, and replaced it with a picture of kosher frankfurters.<sup>221</sup>

Food shortages and meat scarcities continued into the months after the war. By December of 1948, some Israelis insisted that the country should prioritize the health of its citizens and import non-kosher meat. The opposition within Israel was vocal and comprised not only the religious, but a number of secular Jews. Most seemed to believe that kosher food would be necessary to sustain a unified Jewish state. Despite his secular inclinations, Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion opposed the consumption of pork. He saw eating habits as a vehicle for national unity. Israel’s parliament, the

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<sup>217</sup> Raviv, 222.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 222-230.

<sup>219</sup> Liel Leibovitz, *Aliyah*, (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 2006),45.

<sup>220</sup> Joan Nathan, “The Evolution of Israeli Cuisine,” *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed January 12, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israeli-food-after-1948/>.

<sup>221</sup> Leibovitz, 85-86.

Knesset, has since supported keeping Israel's meat supply exclusively kosher. In 1962 it passed a law banning the breeding and sale of pigs in all but Arab-Christian areas.<sup>222</sup> In 1994 it passed a law banning the importation of non-kosher beef.<sup>223</sup>

Nevertheless, kashrut was a source of contention among early Israelis. As Joseph Badi explains, most secular pioneers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from socialist backgrounds and considered religion "the opium of the people." Many saw the Czarist government use "the Church as a tool," and thought it natural to "discard the traditions of their faith," including its dietary laws.<sup>224</sup> During the War of Independence, when food was scarce, Orthodox Jews "practically demanded that the secular "eat the forbidden pig meat" to "assure kosher meat" for themselves.

After the foundation of the state, Ben Gurion, upheld what was termed the 'status quo' agreement, which maintained the religious character of all public spaces but ensured that individuals were free to act as they chose, and made kashrut standard throughout the country. All food in government organizations, the military, schools, and hospitals would be kosher and placed under Orthodox rabbinical supervision.<sup>225</sup> Most accepted this legislation without argument, believing it imperative that the infrastructure of the Jewish state include all Jews.

Kashrut within these institutions, and within the army specifically, is significant because the army is perhaps the most important socializing agent within Israel. Military service is compulsory for all Jewish-Israelis (although the ultra-Orthodox are exempt),

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<sup>222</sup> Shira Rubin, "Land of Pork and Honey," *Roads and Kingdoms*, June 19, 2015, Accessed January 17, 2018, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/roads/2015/06/pork\\_in\\_israel\\_how\\_russian\\_immigrants\\_and\\_hipster\\_foodies\\_are\\_challenging.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2015/06/pork_in_israel_how_russian_immigrants_and_hipster_foodies_are_challenging.html).

<sup>223</sup> Samuel Thrope, "What's Your Beef?" *Tablet*, July 28, 2016, Accessed January 16, 2018, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/206983/whats-your-beef>.

<sup>224</sup> Joseph Badi, *Religion In Israel Today*, (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959), 17.

<sup>225</sup> Joan Nathan, "The Evolution of Israeli Cuisine," *My Jewish Learning*, Accessed January 9, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israeli-food-after-1948/>.

and the army is generally the setting in which new immigrants first experience ‘common’ Israeli culture.<sup>226</sup> Because of their army service, even Israelis who identify as ‘secular’ spend at least two to three years eating kosher food and maintaining the kosher kitchens on their base. Thus even those who personally oppose dietary restrictions know and understand the tastes and practices of their religious peers.

Although not legally required to do so, most grocery stores in Israel carry only kosher products and do not sell pork or shellfish. The cost of alienating kosher customers, they reason, would be too great. Shortly after the establishment of the state, consumers could only find shellfish in smaller more specialized retailers, many of which were run by *kibbutzim* or Arab merchants.<sup>227</sup> Others, particularly those living on *kibbutzim*, and influenced by their Arab neighbors, procured *tref* meats through hunting.<sup>228</sup> Although the majority of Israelis made no effort to keep kosher homes, many would have to go out of their way to find *tref*.

## **The Soviet and Ethiopian Aliyah**

The 1980s and 1990s Jews from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union came to Israel in a different type of *aliyah*. Ethiopian immigrants came on two separate rescue missions to free them from the religious persecution, famine, and the civil wars which took place under their self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist leader, Col Mengistu Haile Mariam.<sup>229</sup> The first mission was in 1985 and rescued 7,000 Ethiopian Jews, the second,

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<sup>226</sup> Raviv, 168.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 78-79.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>229</sup> Yossi Meckelberg, “The Plight of Ethiopian Jews in Israel,” *BBC News*, May 25, 2015, Accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32813056>.



in 1991, rescued 15,000 or more.<sup>230</sup> By the end of the Mengistu regime, Ethiopian Jews could more easily migrate, and by the late 1990s, approximately 90,000 had done so. Ethiopian immigrants are often marginalized within Israel. Although they identify as Jews, because there are few reliable accounts of their Jewish descent, the Orthodox establishment is wary to accept them as Jewish. Ethiopians are not well integrated into Israeli society. They maintain separate social ties and identify as their own community within the larger Israeli one. No element of Ethiopian cuisine has yet to earn broad Israeli appeal.

Between 1990 and 1997, over seven hundred thousand immigrants left the former Soviet Union for Israel, adding roughly 20 percent to Israel's population. Because the Soviet Union restricted religious practice, few soviet immigrants were observant. According to Yael Raviv, many Soviet immigrants identified as Jews only because they were labeled as Jewish in their countries of origin. Many came to Israel not out of a desire to make *aliyah*, but instead because they wanted to leave the Soviet Union.<sup>231</sup> A 2016 Pew survey found that Russian Jews today are significantly less religious than other Israelis. 81 percent of Russian-Jewish Israelis identify as *hiloni* (secular), compared to just 41 percent of the general Israeli-Jewish population<sup>232</sup>. Migrants from the former Soviet Union, like those from Ethiopia, maintain close ties to their countries of origin. Many attend separate schools, continue to speak the Russian language, listen to Russian music, read Russian literature, and eat Russian foods.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Raviv, 229.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 230-231.

<sup>232</sup> Angelina E. Theodorou, "Israeli Jews from the former Soviet Union are more secular, less religiously observant," *Pew Research Center*, March 30, 2016, Accessed January 12, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/30/israeli-jews-from-the-former-soviet-union-are-more-secular-less-religiously-observant/>.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

Migrants from the former Soviet Union demanded more non-kosher products and introduced into the Israeli market a range of *tref* options,<sup>234</sup> in particular, different varieties of pork.<sup>235</sup> By 2007, 80 percent of the 90 workers at Ma'adney Mizra, a company which manufactures sausages, salamis, and turkey, chicken, beef, and pork products were from the Soviet Union.<sup>236</sup> Soviet immigration brought non-kosher products to supermarket shelves, and earned them greater visibility with other Israeli consumers. Today, Ma'adney Mizra reports greater demands for products like buttered chicken schnitzel and ham and cheese, which comes both from Soviet immigrants and from the larger Israeli population.<sup>237</sup> New non-kosher supermarket chains, Tiv Ta'am and Miniya, emerged to cater primarily to Soviet immigrants. These stores are open on Shabbat and earn a reputation as 'gourmet' with a 'modern and sophisticated' shopping experience. They distribute food to delicatessens and restaurants throughout the country. For that, they are winning popularity among secular Israelis.<sup>238</sup> As Yael Raviv argues, as the country matures, attempts to promote national unity through kashrut are no longer so necessary.<sup>239</sup> Israelis, or at least secular Israelis, have come to accept the presence of pork and other *tref* foods.

## **The American Aliyah**

American immigrants to Israel comprise a small portion of the population. Approximately 2,000 make *aliyah* each year. However, American *olim* represent a large percentage of Israel's observant, but non-Orthodox community. Their migration is

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>235</sup> Rubin, Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Raviv, 79.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 81-82.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 83.

distinct from that of most Israelis in that it is, for the most part, wholly voluntary. Most are motivated more by Israel's 'pull-factors' than by 'push factors' in the United States. Many come to Israel young and single, generally in their 20s and 30s. Most have had some exposure to Israel and Israeli culture, often through study abroad and or Zionist Youth groups such as Young Judaea. Many frame their desire to make *aliyah* in terms of belonging. As one immigrant explained, "I decided when I was eight years old that I was going to make *aliyah*. I was learning in Hebrew school that Israel is the Jewish homeland and that I'm a Jew and it just made sense." While some I have interviewed in the United States find their Jewish identities more meaningful in an America as a minority, many *olim* explain that they came to Israel because they wanted to live in a majority Jewish culture. Many Americans and *olim* observed similar standards of kashrut in the United States. However, most of those who made *aliyah* believed that something was missing in their Jewish lives, and in some cases, in their kashrut observance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the reasons that the vast majority of the world's Jewish population migrated to either Israel or the United States in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. I argue that those who migrated to Israel before the foundation of the state were not fundamentally different from those who migrated to the United States at the same time. Immigrants to both Israel and the United States moved because they needed to escape persecution and economic hardship in their countries of origin. The differences between observance in both countries, I contend, are therefore a product more of each country's economic and social context than of ideological differences between the immigrant communities.

Those who migrated to the United States inherited the denominational framework from Western Europe and treated Jewish religious practices as wholly voluntary. However, most immigrated into 'Jewish' spaces. They worked and lived among other Jews and they found their Jewish identities inescapable and sometimes tied to discrimination. The American atmosphere was, at times, antithetical to observance. Although many went out of their way to continue to observe dietary laws, many adapted or were forced to adapt *balachab* to fit the realities of American life. Most wanted to maintain traditions, but felt empowered to adapt their Judaism to life in a new world.

Early immigrants to Palestine faced economic hardships which motivated countless to return to their countries of origin. Although those who came to Palestine did not face temptation comparable to those who came to the United States, difficult conditions and other, anti-religious settlers, created an atmosphere some found antithetical to religiosity.

After the foundation of the state Ben Gurion ensured that kashrut was standard in public Israeli spaces. Although immigration from the Soviet Union expanded the market for non-kosher foods, most supermarket chains within Israel are fully kosher. Because Jewish immigrants to Israel come from a wider variety of cultures than Jewish immigrants to the United States. 'Jewish Food,' within Israel describes more than the 'classic' Ashkenazi dishes such as gefilte fish, cholent, kugel, and brisket, characterized as 'Jewish' in the United States. Immigrant communities bring a repertoire of dishes which more closely resemble those from their countries of origin than the foods of other Jewish communities. Although the market for *tref* has expanded, the unifying element in Israeli cooking continues to be its deference to traditional dietary laws. Even non kosher Israelis generally separate milk and meat, and few 'Jewish' dishes contain pork.

## A Note on Interviews

In compiling research for the following two chapters I conducted 36 interviews, 32 of which I conducted via phone or video chat. I interviewed 12 Americans, four *sabras* (native born Jewish Israelis,) and 20 *olim* (immigrants to Israel,) 18 of whom were born in the United States. The other two *olim* were born in Holland and South Africa. Four of those I interviewed, two *sabras* and two *olim*, are Sephardic. Thirty-one are Ashkenazi, and one, a convert to Judaism, does not identify as either. My interviewees range in age from 18 to 72. Twelve are between the ages of 18 and 35, one is 46, and the remaining 23 are between the ages of 51 and 72. Twenty are married. Nineteen have children. The professions of those I interviewed are varied. Some are doctors or lawyers and some are artists. One is a car salesperson and another cleans apartments. The education levels of those I interviewed range from high school to PhD.

Of the Americans I interviewed, six identify as Conservative, one identifies as Reform, and five do not identify with any of the movements in the United States. Of the *olim* I interviewed, one identifies as Reform, four identify as Conservative, eight identify as *Masorti* (closest to Conservative), one identifies as *Dati* (closest to Modern Orthodox), and five do not identify with any of the traditional religious labels. One of the *sabras* I interviewed identifies as *Hiloni* (secular,) two identify as *Masorti*, and one does not identify with any of the traditional religious labels.

Although most of the Americans I interviewed live or have lived in the Northeast, a few of the *olim* I interviewed come from outside. One has lived in Texas, one Michigan, one North Carolina, one California, and a few in Illinois. Most of the Israelis I interviewed live in more religious areas. Nine live or have lived in or near Be'er

Sheva. Seven live or have lived in or near Jerusalem. Only three live or have lived in Tel Aviv or Haifa, more secular cities.

Thirty-two of the 36 people I interviewed keep some level of kashrut. One other generally avoids bacon and shellfish, but not as a rule and only out of habit. Another does not keep kosher at all, though her family once owned a kosher deli and kosher catering company. Two are considering keeping kosher in the future, but have not yet started. Four of those I interviewed keep kosher only in their homes. Four maintain 'kosher style' diets, meaning they will eat meat without kosher certification, but do not eat *tref* foods and do not mix milk and meat. Most of those I interviewed maintain religious observances other than kashrut. Fifteen observe Shabbat to some degree, and 30 attend synagogue at least somewhat regularly.

I asked interviewees about their family's kashrut and other religious observances growing up. I asked whether and why they decided either to start or to continue keeping kosher, and I asked whether they have had any breaks and starts in their observance. I asked how they keep kosher in their homes, how and whether they '*kashered*' (made kosher, typically by pouring and soaking surfaces in boiling water to remove all traces of non-kosher food) their kitchens, and whether they perceive themselves as detail oriented when it comes to kashrut. I asked how they keep kosher outside of their homes. I ask whether they find it difficult to keep kosher, and, for those who keep kosher, what motivates them to continue. I ask about the composition of their peer group. Are many of their friends Jewish and do many keep kosher? How do they believe their peers, both Jewish and non Jewish, perceive their keeping kosher? I ask about what other rituals they observe, and I ask about their synagogue attendance. I ask Israelis whether they feel the climate around keeping kosher has changed in the time they have lived in Israel, and I

ask *olim* whether they believe *olim* and *sabras* have different attitudes towards keeping kosher. A full interview script is included as an appendix. In a few cases I omitted questions which, based on previous answers, did not appear relevant. Otherwise, I attempted to ask every question included in the script.

## Chapter Three

### **Going Kosher:**

#### **Why non-Orthodox Jews in the United States and in Israel**

#### **Make the Choice**

Chuck is a junior and a member of the rowing team at the College of the Holy Cross. He was raised in Madison, Connecticut, with a Jewish mother and a Catholic father. While his Catholic father had warned him before he enrolled at Holy Cross that many of his classmates would never before have met a Jew, Chuck assumed his father “was being overly cautious.” He was wrong. Although Chuck can name a few Jewish faculty members, since his freshman year he has only interacted with one other Jewish student. Yet life at Holy Cross, Chuck explains, has, if anything, reinforced his Jewish identity.

I think when you are surrounded by other people who are like you that common thread can just be a given part of your identity, so you [start] looking for what else makes you unique. But...you show up here and you mention you are Jewish, and people are very curious and you wind up talking about it a lot, I end up talking about it for a good portion of my day seemingly every day...so it has become much more fundamental to my character and my identity...Whereas before I would say oh I am Jewish and it is not very special, now I would say it is in the top three features of my identity along with being on the rowing team and the family I come from.<sup>240</sup>

Even though people at Holy Cross accept Chuck as a friend and his teammates let him say a Hebrew prayer at the beginning of his races, for the first time in his life, Chuck feels like an ‘other.’ Because he feels alienated from his school’s community, he is seeking out ways to feel more a part of the Jewish community. One thing he intends to do, as soon as he is outside the confines of a Catholic dining hall, is to keep kosher. “As I explore this concept of otherness and encamp myself within Judaism,” he explains, “it

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with “Chuck,” February 19, 2018, unpublished.



feels like it is the right thing to do. I am Jewish, I am proud of it, so I have to act like it.”<sup>241</sup> Chuck also believes that kosher eating “is just a much more environmental and humane practice.” Like veganism or vegetarianism, keeping kosher, “puts you outside the general food production mechanisms,” while it also draws you closer to your Jewish roots.

Adina is an 18 year old Israeli who is spending the year before her army service in Connecticut, volunteering for the Jewish community. Since all meat prepared for sale in Israel is kosher, Adina has, for as long as she can remember, kept kosher by avoiding *tref* foods in restaurants and separating milk from meat. Both of Adina’s parents come from Orthodox backgrounds and keep their home in Eilat, a city in Southern Israel, strictly kosher. They make kiddush every Friday night, host a seder for Pesach, and go to synagogue for the major holidays. Although most American Jews would label these practices ‘religious,’ Adina describes her family as “mostly secular.” For her year in the United States, Adina is maintaining a “kosher style diet.” Which, as she explains, means “I will go and grab a burger [from a non-kosher restaurant], but I will drive them crazy to check that there is no ham or cheese or whatever, just fresh beef burger.” Outside of Israel, Adina does not want “to miss the experience,” but she still has no desire to eat *tref* food, which “just doesn’t really speak” to her. Adina continues to eat ‘kosher-style’ not out of conviction, but out of habit.

Although Chuck and Adina are close in age and live less than one hundred miles apart, they balance the demands of kashrut observance in very different ways. When Chuck, who has never kept kosher, nor ever had an immediate family member who kept kosher, entered a community in which he felt his Jewish identity under attack, he latched

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid

onto his Judaism, and he latched on, in what he sees as explicitly religious ways. Because he already feels he is an ‘outsider’ in his school’s community, he is looking for ways to feel an ‘insider’ in the Jewish community. Nonetheless, his circumstances have motivated him to wait a couple years before taking on religious practices. In delaying his observance, Chuck is attempting to balance his place in the Jewish community and his desires for environmental eating with the realities of life at a Catholic school. Adina also balances the maintenance of her practice with the realities of life in the United States, yet her choice to maintain a “kosher style” diet is less overtly purposeful and less explicitly religious than Chuck’s. Adina is, for the most part, continuing to eat as she always has, as she enjoys eating. In Israel, Adina has never felt an outsider. In the United States, volunteering in the Connecticut Jewish community, she does not feel her identity is under attack. Thus, she feels comfortable maintaining a similar but compromised observance.

As Chuck and Adina’s experiences demonstrate, Jews motivations for keeping kosher are varied and interact with one’s familial background, one’s peers, one’s tastes, and one’s ideology, sometimes in surprising ways. The factors which motivate an individual’s observance are not generalizable. Although they interact with nationality, nationality alone cannot explain differences in motivations. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is not to compare American and Israeli Jews as distinct groups, but instead to outline the motivations for kashrut observance expressed in my interviews, and to outline how similar motivations interact with either the Israeli or the American context.

## Peer Influence

Many kashrut observers, both in Israel and in the United States, frame their motivations for observance in social terms. In the United States many choose to keep kosher in their youth after engaging with kashrut observant peer groups in Jewish day schools, summer camps, or youth groups. In the 1940s, the Reform and Conservative Movements established significant numbers of both youth groups<sup>242</sup> and summer camps<sup>243</sup> to “develop future leaders.” These camps and youth groups appealed to large numbers of American Jewish youth and continue to flourish today. Nancy’s family was active in a Reform synagogue in Utica, New York when she was growing up in the 1970s. She believes that her youth group, “SNIFTY,” a branch of the Reform youth movement “NIFTY,” kept her afloat throughout difficult teenage years. “When you’re a teenager it’s rough stuff.” She explains,

It was rough then, I am sure it is rough now. You are trying to figure out who you are [and] where you want to go. You spend a lot of time...being hypercritical of [yourself] and it, youth group, and the discussions with the rabbi, gave me an opportunity to be kinder and gentler and to become more open minded, which allowed me to be a much better person overall

For people in need of guidance, like Nancy, Jewish Youth groups are and were appealing because they provide social and spiritual support.

Although the Reform and Conservative movements’ summer camps and youth groups are consciously Jewish, they offer popular activities which appeal to religious and non religious youth alike. One BBYO<sup>244</sup> student, Evan Seltzer, joined the movement to

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<sup>242</sup> Danny Jacobs, “Jewish Youth Groups: Places where everybody knows your name,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, (September 5, 2003), 21.

<sup>243</sup> Jerry Zeder, “How Summer Camp Became A Jewish Thing: A history of this iconic institution in American Jewish Life,” *The Forward*, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/summer-camps/>.

<sup>244</sup> B’nai B’rith Youth Organization. BBYO is a pluralistic Jewish Youth Movement which aims to deliver “to the post- Bar/Bat Mitzvah audience fun, meaningful and affordable experiences that inspire a lasting connection to the Jewish people.” “About BBYO,” *BBYO*, Accessed March 23, 2018, <http://bbyo.org/about/mission/>.

play basketball. He stayed because he made so many friends.<sup>245</sup> Camp and youth group events are varied. Today BBYO's include an open mike night, battle of the bands, overnight laser tag, paintball, Habitat for Humanity, professional sports games, ice skating, retreats, and monthly Friday night onegs. As Amy Sales and Leonard Saxe explain in *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, Jewish summer camps, and by extension Jewish groups, fulfill three primary purposes: they bring together Jewish adolescents, they introduce or supplement aspects of Jewish traditions or rituals, and they reinforce Jewish values.<sup>246</sup>

Essentially all Conservative and Orthodox and most Reform and unaffiliated Jewish youth institutions serve exclusively kosher foods, and many of the children who attend come from kosher households. Many Conservative youth groups even require that students who hold leadership positions observe dietary restrictions. This means that Jewish summer camps, and insofar as they support the same values, Jewish youth movements, are formative for at least two distinct reasons. They introduce youth to Jewish practices and rituals, such as kashrut observance, and they create a network of Jewish peers, which, as my interviews have demonstrated, is an integral factor in sustaining observance. Jewish youth who participate in summer camps, day schools, and youth programs with no conception of kashrut leave, at least the Conservative and Orthodox programs, educated in the practice and significance of dietary laws, and immersed in a community of kashrut observers.

I interviewed 23 people born in the United States who choose to keep kosher outside of their homes. Eight of them explained that they decided to keep kosher after

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<sup>245</sup> Jacobs, Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Sales, Amy, Saxe, Leonard, *"How Goodly Are Thy Tents": Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences*. (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

participating in a Jewish youth group or attending a Jewish summer camp. Laura, a Conservative Jew from New York is a prime example. She grew up “eating everything that was *tref*...ham and bacon and pork chops with a glass of milk and lobster.” But at age 14, Laura asked her parents to attend Camp Ramah.<sup>247</sup> Laura jokes that her mother sent her on the bus saying “have a great time but don’t come back kosher.” Her parents, like many American Jews who came of age around the time of World War II, when Jews were still stigmatized and excluded from the American mainstream, wanted to to be fully American, which for them meant not being ‘too Jewish.’ Although they were willing to embrace their Judaism enough to send their daughter to a religious summer camp, they did not want to become more observant. To their dismay, Laura *did* come back kosher. She has remained kosher for the last 46 years.<sup>248</sup>

Susan grew up with two Israeli parents in the suburbs of DC. Her family was “a very typical Israeli family in that [they] didn’t keep kosher by any strict observance or understanding even of the *halachah*, but [they] did have two sets of dishes, dairy and meat, that they washed together in the [same] dishwasher.” Susan’s parents would bring non certified meat into their house, and though they would not intentionally mix milk and meat, they never paid close attention to the labels on their foods. In junior high school Susan joined Young Judaea, a pluralist Zionist youth movement, which as Susan explains, “tries to observe in a way that you would be comfortable if you were observant and that you would learn about observance if you weren’t...without any kind of shaming or pressure that this is how you have to be when you go home.”<sup>249</sup> As Susan became a leader in her region’s chapter, she earned responsibility for ensuring its events were

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<sup>247</sup> Ramah was and is a Hebrew speaking camp with a Jewish educational mission.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with “Laura,” September 26, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with “Susan,” September 27, 2018, unpublished.

kosher. Because their group would scrupulously read labels and separate utensils, Susan became more aware of the foods she and her parents brought into their home. When Susan noted that a salad dressing had dairy, her family stopped serving it with meat meals. When she realized Ritz crackers were made with lard, they stopped stocking them on their shelves. Thus, even youth, like Susan, who have some background in Jewish law, can find their knowledge and awareness of *halachah* sharpened by their involvement with youth groups.

Many of those I interviewed, even those who do not participate in Jewish youth movements, explain that their peers facilitate and or encourage their observance. All but one of the 33 kashrut observers I interviewed report having or having had close friends or family members who also observe dietary restrictions. Although kashrut observance can alienate Jews from secular or non-Jewish communities, keeping kosher often facilitates membership in Jewish communities. For example Erin, a 32 year old woman who grew up in Irvine, California started keeping kosher in her 20s when she was living in San Francisco because, as she explains, “I wanted to get married and the guys that I was interested in were more religious than [I was] and I guess I was kind of being rejected by some people because they didn’t trust my kashrut.” After she started to keep kosher, Erin met an Orthodox man she soon married.<sup>250</sup>

In the early twentieth century, American Jews lived ‘high density’ Jewish lives in ethnically Jewish neighborhoods. They, and the Jewish communal institutions which supported them, could concentrate on learning “the ways of American life” because they ran no risk of losing their distinct Jewish identities. Prior to World War II,<sup>251</sup> religious

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with “Erin,” January 17, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>251</sup> Robert P. Amyot and Lee Sigelman, “Jews without Judaism? Assimilation and Jewish Identity in the United States,” *Social Science Quarterly* 77, No. 1 (March 1996), 178.

barriers were so high and discrimination so rampant, Jews did not have the option to fully integrate, and thus, the Jewish community remained cohesive.<sup>252</sup> For example, in the early nineteenth century, Jews lacked the income and the status for distant and extravagant travel. To escape the polluted urban air, they spent summers in the Catskill mountains in what has been termed the “Borscht<sup>253</sup> Belt,” with other Jews. Catskill complexes served kosher food, hosted comedy and events, housed various facilities, and became sites of Jewish interaction and Jewish community. However starting in the 1960s, these resorts declined as Americans became more wealthy and more assimilated. Jews could travel anywhere they wanted. But this freedom separated them from previous sites and spaces of community.<sup>254</sup>

Arnold Eisen sites four sources of mobility in developed nations which make it more difficult to sustain communities than it was a century ago. These include

the *geographic mobility* that uproots us from our family and friends...the *social mobility* that takes us far from the commitments and pursuits of our parents...the *martial mobility* that not only permits divorce and remarriage, but allows for unions across ethnic and religious lines and...the *political mobility* that has meant a loss of reliable loyalties to leaders, movements or parties.<sup>255</sup>

Thus, every opportunity afforded American Jews could distance them from their traditional communal loyalties.

In this context, Eisen asserts that “Jewish summer camps, day schools and ‘Israel experiences’” are particularly effective because they “provide the gifts of public Jewish time and space combined with immediate and tangible emotional and intellectual

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<sup>252</sup> Sherry Israel, “Ethnicity, Geography and Jewish Community,” *The Reconstructionist*, 60, No. 1, (Spring 1995): 14-17.

<sup>253</sup> a beet soup common in Eastern European countries and recognized by many Ashkenazi Jews as a ‘Jewish’ dish.

<sup>254</sup> *Welcome to Kutsber’s: The Last Catskills Resort*, directed by Caroline Laskow and Ian Rosenberg (2012: East Broadway Pictures).

<sup>255</sup> Arnold Eisen, “Reimagining Jewish Community in America,” *The Reconstructionist*, 60, No. 1, (Spring 1995): 7.

connection to other Jews.” Thus, these communities can offer the support, reliability, and consistency that increasing numbers of individuals lack. Eisen argues that successful Jewish communities can, in turn, create ‘plausibility structures,’ the socio-culture context which legitimates the religious beliefs and practices that are responsible for maintaining Jews’ connections to their religion.<sup>256</sup> Thus, although a Jew may join a community to establish a sense of social belonging, she may find that her community builds or reinforces religious beliefs and practices.

For Erin, kashrut creates the “groundwork to have a connection to [her] faith.” Erin and her husband lived in Italy for three years before making *aliyah* to Ashkelon six months ago. Because her kitchen is strictly kosher, Erin can, for the first time in life, open her house to Orthodox Jews who support her faith. When she and her husband felt isolated in Italy, her kitchen helped build her community.<sup>257</sup> That community then became a site of knowledge, discussion and practice. Thus, although the motivations for kashrut observance are varied, non-religious and religious motivations may reinforce one another.

### **Difficulty of Observance**

Those more likely to keep kosher are, naturally, those who feel as though they sacrifice less for their observance. Jews raised in kosher households generally express little to no desire to eat *tref* food and are thus predisposed for observance. Many of those I have interviewed raised in kosher households, express little difficulty keeping kosher. Dina has remained kosher even as many of her other religious observances have ceased.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with “Erin,” January 17, 2018, unpublished.



“There is nothing,” she explains, “that makes me not want to keep kosher.”<sup>258</sup> Others, like Nancy, a Reform Jew from Utica, find *tref* foods too fundamental to their identities. Nancy’s father was a first generation Italian immigrant, so although their family enjoyed a number of classic Ashkenazi dishes, pork and Italian cooking were central to their home cooking. Although Nancy still enjoys cooking with kosher recipes, she could never forgo pork-based Italian food and keep a kosher home.

For those who become kosher, tastes can change quickly. Elisa has kept a kosher home for under a year but has already lost any desire to eat a cheeseburger. “Suddenly” she explains, “I find the idea of cooking meat with butter or putting cheese on meat...almost strange...so whenever I visit America I have to adjust a little bit and then it is ‘oh this is good, I like this.’”<sup>259</sup> Both Rebecca and her husband Gabriel loved shellfish before they started keeping kosher. Now neither craves it.<sup>260</sup> Nonetheless, Elisa, Rebecca, and Gabriel all live in Israel where few foods are *tref*. It is possible that their cravings transformed because they rarely face temptation. American Jews who are constantly surrounded by *tref* options might more often crave forbidden foods.

While kosher keeping American Jews are forced to decline not only *tref* but also most meat foods, Israelis can keep kosher almost by default. In Israel a substantial number of restaurants, and the vast majority in Jerusalem and in cities in the South, are certified kosher. In fact, although Elisa and her husband keep kosher inside their home she finds it “kind of annoying” that all restaurants in Jerusalem are kosher.<sup>261</sup> Other than the few non-kosher supermarket chains mentioned in Chapter Two, an Israeli can walk

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<sup>258</sup> Interview with “Dina,” October 18, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>259</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018.

<sup>260</sup> Interview with “Rebecca,” January 24, 2018, unpublished. Interview with “Gabriel,” January 29, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

into almost every supermarket with the knowledge that every product on the shelves is certified kosher.

Even *kibbutzim*, once militantly anti-religious, are becoming inundated with religious elements, such as kashrut. Up until the 1990s, members of kibbutz Beit Alfa were so opposed to religion that they enforced a rule which forbid weddings held under the traditional *chuppah* (wedding canopy). Omer Einav, a former member of the kibbutz remembers “grilling pork on Yom Kippur.” Now, due to economic considerations, outlined in the documentary *The Kosher Kibbutz*, Beit Alfa’s dining hall is certified kosher.<sup>262</sup> Even explicitly secular institutions within Israel have recently come to accommodate religious Jews, making kashrut not only feasible, but also largely unavoidable. Kosher keeping Israelis do not generally need to sacrifice *tref* options, because, in many parts of the country, their only options *are* kosher.

In an episode of *Srugim*, a popular Israeli drama depicting the lives of five single, religious Israelis in Jerusalem, the two male leads, Nati and Amir, rave to one another about the cakes served at their synagogue after services. A man who overhears their conversation asks if they are kidding. “They are the worst cakes I have ever had,” he tells them. After the man leaves, Nati remarks to Amir that “those non religious guys are spoiled.” When Amir asks how Nati knew the man was not religious, Nati responds, “he is complaining about the food,”<sup>263</sup> implying that the man has a non kosher reference point. As this scene demonstrates, kosher consumers have traditionally needed to sacrifice quality for kashrut. Although this sacrifice might have been easy for Jews from

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<sup>262</sup> Noa Shpigel, “Kibbutzim Compromise on Secular Identity in Bid to Survive,” *Haaretz*, May 3, 2016, Accessed January 13, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-kibbutzim-compromise-on-secular-identity-in-bid-to-survive-1.5378124>.

<sup>263</sup> *Srugim*, “Not Kosher,” Season 1, Episode 4, Directed by Laizy Shapiro, Written by Laizy Shapiro, Released, July 14, 2008.

Orthodox backgrounds, like Nati and Amir, who have never tried non-kosher alternatives, it would have been difficult, and perhaps a major deterrent, for those Jews deciding to take on the practice. Sue Fishkoff estimates that one-third of the approximately 350,000 kosher households in the United States include Jews who, in the past, have eaten non kosher foods. “They’ve tasted aged cheese and tender steaks, and they are not willing to settle for second rate food just because it has a *becksber*.”<sup>264</sup>

However this sacrifice is becoming less necessary because kosher options, both in Israel and in the United States, have come to rival non-kosher alternatives. As Fiskoff explains, “when the first kosher Chinese restaurants and pizza joints appeared in New York City in the 1950s, they didn’t have to be good--it was enough that they were kosher, and that they existed.” Now, as Jeff Nathan, the co-owner of kosher restaurant called Abigail’s on Broadway, put it, “the kosher consumer is more educated and wants more interesting things.”<sup>265</sup> According to Fishkoff, as upscale kosher restaurants open in major cities, they break “down the social barriers kashrut seeks to enforce, by providing dining venues where Orthodox can eat with non-Orthodox and with non-Jews.”<sup>266</sup>

Innovators in food technology have also created kosher versions of classically *tref* foods. Today, a kashrut observant Jew can eat a kosher version of a cheeseburger (either with imitation meat or cheese), enjoy imitation crab, and eat soy ice cream after a meat meal.<sup>267</sup> Although kosher Americans must continue to pass on many ‘classic American dishes,’ they can eat kosher foods which taste more and more like ‘the real thing,’ in settings which rival many of America’s top restaurants. Thus, although kashrut observance is still generally a greater sacrifice in the United States than it is in Israel,

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<sup>264</sup> Fishkoff, 225-226.

<sup>265</sup> Jeff Nathan, in *Kosher Nation*, 225.

<sup>266</sup> Fishkoff, 223.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

developments in the food market in the last decades have arguably minimized the American kosher consumer's culinary loss.

Likewise, kashrut observance is relatively consistent with Israel's culinary culture. As several of my interviewees explain, many secular Israelis, even those scornful of religion, refuse to eat bacon. Shirley, a 60 year old *Masorti* Jew who has lived in Israel for the past 30 years, 29 in Be'er Sheva, recalls a boy her daughter was dating going to McDonald's and ordering a burger with bacon, but insisting it not have cheese. On passover some of Shirley's family members will eat cheeseburgers on special, unleavened passover rolls.<sup>268</sup> Choices so inconsistent are likely not ideological. This means that elements of kashrut observance have engrained themselves in the way Israelis eat. Although most secular Israelis do not separate meat from dairy dishes, none would be baffled to find a meatless breakfast buffet, or to find a burger with no option for added cheese. Many are accustomed to cakes cooked with olive oil rather than butter, which one can eat after a meat meal. Thus keeping kosher, for many Israelis, will not require one to fundamentally change the foods she eats, when she eats them, and what she eat them with. It will require care in kitchen, two sets of items, and mindfulness when eating out. These, although substantial demands, are nothing like the demands of kashrut observance in the United States.

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with "Shirley," January 15, 2018, unpublished; according to Exodus 12:15 and Deuteronomy 16:4, to remember the Exodus from Egypt, Jews are prohibited from eating or owning leavened products (grain products allowed to stand or rise for 18 minutes prior to thorough cooking) during the 7-8 spring festival referred to as passover. "Why do Jews not Eat Bread on Passover," *Passover Fun*, Accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.passover-fun.com/117/why-do-jews-not-eat-bread-on-passover/>.

## **Kashrut as a Form of Compromise**

Some Jews, both in Israel and in the United States, who have little personal desire to keep kosher at home do so for their loved ones. Linda grew up in an Orthodox family in Philadelphia. Her father, she notes, “led with a tight fist,” so when she went away to college she decided to eat non-kosher foods. “It was my freedom,” she explains, “my rebellion from everything.” Although Linda loves bacon, shrimp, and scallops, and does not engage in many Jewish practices, she has always maintained a kosher kitchen. She did so first to ensure that her parents could eat in her home, and now for the sake of her observant brother. Although she does not find it difficult to keep a kosher home, Linda does not believe she would continue if none of her family members observed dietary restrictions.<sup>269</sup> Likewise, even though Elisa believes that keeping a kosher home is a “nice touchstone of Jewish practice” which aligns with her and her husbands’ desire “to not eat so much meat and to be more mindful of the food we eat,” she keeps kosher for her husband’s sake. “I grew up eating pork and being very strongly identified as Jewish,” she explains. “For me there is no connection there... I don’t personally necessarily do it to be in touch with Judaism.”<sup>270</sup>

Shlomit lived in Israel until she was 17, then met and married a Conservative Jew. She is “very committed to being secular.” She does not believe in God and she finds “the whole concept of prayer really stupid.” Nevertheless, because it is important to her husband, Shlomit has kept a kosher kitchen for 35 years. She sometimes still has “secret wishes that he [her husband] would give it up and we would be free of it.”<sup>271</sup>

When kitchens are shared they are frequently spaces of compromise rather than spaces

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<sup>269</sup> Interview with “Linda,” February 6, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>270</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>271</sup> Interview with “Shlomit,” October 24, 2017, unpublished.

of individual choice. The kashrut of a kitchen then, is not necessarily a measure of its owner's religious conviction.

### **Kosher Kitchens as Relationship Foundations**

In Israel a kosher home facilitates new friendships. Maya grew up in a Reform household in Orlando, Florida. Although her parents would not bring bacon or shellfish into their home, their house was not kosher because her mother, who ran their kitchen, decided it would be too difficult. However, Maya explains that when she was about to make *aliyah*, “somebody suggested to me that a lot of people in Israel keep kosher so I might want to keep kosher in order to be able to invite other people over for dinner. And that made a lot of sense, so that’s what I did.” Just before she got on the plane in 1986, her anti-religious aunt fed her oysters. She has been kosher in and out of her home ever since.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, when Elisa and her husband moved from Tel Aviv, where none of their friends were religious, to Jerusalem where most are, they thought “well if we want people to come to our home to be able to eat with us then we should probably keep it kosher.”<sup>273</sup>

The same phenomenon appears less common in the United States, not only because kashrut observance is comparatively rare, but also because most non-Orthodox kashrut observers are willing to eat vegetarian food from a non kosher kitchen, and Orthodox communities who in the United States make up just ten percent of the Jewish population,<sup>274</sup> are more socially segregated. Although Laura maintains a strictly kosher kitchen in New York, her neighbors are not comfortable with their children playing with

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<sup>272</sup> Interview with “Maya,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>274</sup> “A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews,” *Pew*, August 26, 2015, Accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/08/26/a-portrait-of-american-orthodox-jews/>.

Laura's, for fear that she would serve them *trif* food. There is little Laura could do that would convince her Orthodox neighbors they could eat in her kitchen, so she does not try.<sup>275</sup>

### **Kashrut, Vegetarianism, and Purposeful Eating Practices**

Both Maya and Elisa found that kashrut was in line with their other dietary choices. Maya is a vegetarian so even when she and her husband spent seven months traveling across the United States to places like Wyoming and Montana where there is little kosher meat, she had no problem.<sup>276</sup> Mara and her husband want to eat less meat “so,” she explains, “we made our kitchen dairy and it made it really easy for us to be ‘okay so we don’t cook meat in the house because it’s kosher dairy’ and it is just simple.” Elisa also believes that kashrut “aligns with our [her and her husband’s] desire to be more mindful of the food we we eat. I think that ties into the growing awareness of how food is made and how meat is produced.”<sup>277</sup> It seems likely then that social incentives for kashrut observance are particularly determinative when observance is consistent with or facilitates other dietary choices.

Kashrut observance is more in line with eating practices than ever before. According to Kathy Lyons, in the early twentieth century America’s population was primarily rural and labor was primarily physical. Food was fuel, and early nutritionists did not believe greens and fresh fruits were worth the energy expended consuming them. Because early immigrants wanted to join the American mainstream, there were few

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<sup>275</sup> Interview with “Laura,” September 26, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with “Maya,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>277</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

ethnic options. “In fact,” Lyons contends, “dietary assimilation was a mark of pride.” Therefore, the American diet was largely one of “meat and potatoes.”<sup>278</sup>

Many of today’s Americans are concerned with ‘food purity.’ Organic food sales have more than doubled from 1994 to 2014 and Pew found that 55 percent of Americans believe organic produce is healthier than non organic varieties, and 40 percent of Americans say that “most” (6 percent) or “some” (34 percent) of foods they eat are organic.<sup>279</sup> In this environment, producers have successfully marketed kosher foods as the more ‘pure’ option. Fishkoff observes that even though there are approximately six million Jews in the United States, only a small percentage of whom keep kosher, more than 11.2 million Americans “regularly buy kosher food... products *because they are kosher.*” If a product is certified kosher *pareve*,<sup>280</sup> consumers who are vegan or lactose intolerant trust that it *really is* dairy free.<sup>281</sup> Similarly, Americans perceive kosher food as “cleaner, safer, better.” Sixty-two percent of Americans who buy kosher foods do so because they believe it is higher quality, 51 percent because they believe it is more healthy, and 34 percent because they believe it is safer.<sup>282</sup> Although these Americans are not, in all cases, correct, their beliefs have legitimized kosher food throughout the United States.

Likewise, kashrut observance is now less abnormal. Dietary restrictions are increasingly common, in part because of greater awareness of allergies and food intolerances. Fifteen percent of adults in the United States have mild, moderate to severe

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<sup>278</sup> Kathy Lyons, “How America’s Eating Has Changed,” *Life Skills* 2, No. 2, (Summer 2001), 1.

<sup>279</sup> Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, “The New Food Fights: U.S. Public Divides over Food Science.” *Pew Research Center*, December 1, 2016, Accessed March 25, 2018, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/12/01/the-new-food-fights/>.

<sup>280</sup> an indication that a product is non-dairy and thus can be served with or after meat.

<sup>281</sup> Fishkoff, 6.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



allergies while an additional 17 percent have intolerances to one or more foods.<sup>283</sup> Likewise, greater numbers of Americans are avoiding meat and dairy for moral or environmental reasons. Three percent of Americans follow a strict vegetarian or vegan diet, while another six percent are mostly vegan or vegetarian. In fact, 12 percent of U.S. adults say that at least some of their close family and friends are vegan and vegetarian.<sup>284</sup> “Just eat,” an online, international food ordering company named veganism the top consumer trend of 2018, and sites a 94 percent increase in ‘healthy food ordered’ from 2016.<sup>285</sup> Similar trends are taking place in Israel which, at five percent, has the highest number of vegans per capita<sup>286</sup> As it becomes increasingly common for individuals to selectively avoid certain foods, religiously motivated dietary restrictions become less taboo. Likewise, because most vegetarian and vegan foods are kosher, the kosher consumer has greater and more varied choices. For Michael, even when there are limited options, he never worries he will go hungry. “There is plenty of food around,” he says, “just shut up and eat.”<sup>287</sup>

## Observance and Social Repercussions

American Jews encounter greater social challenges to kashrut observance than do Israelis. While most American Jews have non-Jewish colleagues and friends who may not know or appreciate what it means to keep kosher, many of the Israelis I interviewed interact only with other Jews, who, especially in Israel, are conscious and respectful of

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<sup>283</sup> Funk and Kennedy, Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Jemima Webber, “Demand for Vegan and Vegetarian Food Increased by 987% in 2017,” *Live Kindly*, December 29, 2017, Accessed March 28, 2018, <https://www.livekindly.co/just-eat-veganism/>.

<sup>286</sup> “Abigail Klein Leichman, “Israel has the most vegans per capita and the trend is growing,” *Israel 21c*, March 26, 2017, Accessed March 26, 2018 <https://www.israel21c.org/israel-has-most-vegans-per-capita-and-the-trend-is-growing/>.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with “Michael,” October 17, 2017, unpublished.

the Jewish dietary laws. Moreover, while many Americans are unnerved by public ritual practice, even secular Jews in Israel respect religiosity – at least as it is expressed in daily practices. James has lived in Israel for the last year and a half and he has been surprised to learn that:

you can show up to a *Hiloni's* house and they give you an apple...and you can pull out your kippah and make a blessing and this guy did not know you that much before, and so long as you are not trying to change his political beliefs and put tefillin on him the next morning, he is probably not going to have a problem with whatever you are doing, he will pretty much be like 'do whatever, do your thing that's alright'...And it is mostly because you are raised in a Jewish state but...everyone here is more "live and let live" especially about the Jewish stuff.<sup>288</sup>

Some secular Israelis not only accept but also *embrace* Jewish dietary restrictions. James is looking into "*kashering*"<sup>289</sup> his kitchen and his *hiloni* (secular) roommates are encouraging rather than pushing back against his efforts.<sup>290</sup> Moreover, most of Israel's non-Jewish population is Muslim, many of whom practice or at least respect Muslim dietary restrictions (*halal*.) Even though some invariably believe that kashrut divides Muslims from Jews, generally, Muslims in Israel, unlike many Christians in the United States, can respect and understand religiously motivated dietary choices. Moreover, because kashrut is standard in Israel, even those with no basis for understanding and appreciating its significance must learn to accept its observance. Israelis can then, in many cases, observe the Jewish dietary laws at minimal social cost. By contrast, 31 percent of Americans say "it bothers them at least some when guests ask for special food options at social gatherings they are hosting."<sup>291</sup> Because dietary restrictions are increasingly common, Americans are likely significantly more accommodating than they have been in the past.

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<sup>288</sup> Interview with "James," January 17, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>289</sup> making kosher, usually by replacing or boiling all utensils, countertops and equipments to ensure that no remnants of nonkosher food remain, or to ensure that no dairy remains in a pan which will be used to cook meat, or vice versa.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, Ibid.

Nonetheless, this figure indicates that American kashrut observers have valid reasons to feel as though their practices might be burdensome for some of their peers.

## Location and Meaning

In both Israel and the United States Jews observe dietary laws as an expression of their Jewish identities. Nonetheless, location influences the meaning attached to observance. Some Israelis find that their religious practices, including observance of dietary laws, become more significant in environments like the United States where Jews are a minority and where observance is more difficult. Avigail explains that when her family lives abroad:

our connection to Judaism becomes even stronger and I think that is because in Israel it is taken for granted that you are Jewish. It is the majority, you don't have to prove anything. Everybody observes Yom Kippur, Shabbat is a communal value. But in the United States you have to work harder to prove your values, your religion, your difference, because it is a minority and if you don't work to keep your identity, it is something that could easily be lost.<sup>292</sup>

Similarly, Ruth, a *Masorti* Jew living on a *moshav*, a small agricultural community, outside Jerusalem, explains that she and her husband decided to keep a kosher home after living for three years in the United States. Outside of Israel, “you have to decide every day and you have to act every day in order to be Jewish.” Kashrut for them was one such daily act.<sup>293</sup>

In fact, those in the United States who encounter greater obstacles to observance frequently find meaning in those obstacles. Noah, a Conservative Jew from Los Angeles who goes to College in Connecticut lives in a house with three non-kosher roommates. Although he will not eat uncheckshered meats, Noah has found it impractical to maintain

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<sup>292</sup> Interview with “Avigail,” February 2, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with “Ruth,” January 24, 2018, unpublished.

separate utensils from his housemates. “Here,” he explains, “the pan that I am using to make my eggs is the pan that my housemate is using to cook bacon.”<sup>294</sup> Because almost all of his peers eat non-kosher meat, Noah must check that everything he eats is kosher. Yet Noah finds meaning in checking. Every time he refuses meat, or tries to avoid the bacon fumes from his housemates, he is reminded of his Jewish identity. Marv, a rabbi from Connecticut *likes* that he is a 30 minute drive from the closest kosher butcher. “If I want meat one week I can’t just buy it thoughtlessly. I like that I need to figure out when I will have time buy it. I like that I need to think in advance about what I might want.”<sup>295</sup> Keeping kosher affirms Noah and Marv’s identities precisely because they find observance difficult. The more they have to think about what they eat, the more they are reminded of their Jewish character.

Israelis, unlike Americans, have a variety of avenues through which they can express their Jewish identities. In Israel, every form of nationalism, including mandatory service in the Israeli Defence Forces, can affirm an Israeli’s sense of her Judaism. Dina’s family made *aliyah* when she was 15 and her sister was 11. Although they were Shabbat observant in the United States, two years after they moved to Israel, when she and her sister started to have sports games and social commitments on Saturdays, her family started driving on Shabbat. “I guess the feeling was,” she explains, “that we were in Israel and we were doing our thing in terms of Judaism.” Religious observances was less urgent.

In the United States the primary way to express one’s Jewish identity is through religion. Most sites and sources of Jewish community maintain at least some explicitly religious elements. Those who wish to engage with communities of other Jews generally

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<sup>294</sup> Interview with “Noah,” January 12, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>295</sup> Interview with “Marv,” January 5, 2018, unpublished.

need also partake in religious functions. For example, Avigail's mother identifies as secular in Israel, but became very involved with her synagogue community when her family lived in the United States.<sup>296</sup> Likewise, Marv's father was a self proclaimed atheist. Neither Marv nor his brother had a Bar Mitzvah, and the only Jewish holiday he remembers celebrating in his youth was Chanukah. Nonetheless, Marv "always had a strong sense of being Jewish...having a *yiddersher kop* (a "Jewish head") was not a compliment but an expectation." Although his father was born in the United States, Yiddish was his aunts' first language. The adults, Marv remembers, would speak in Yiddish when they did not want to children to understand. Everyone in his family was "really Jewish." But Marv knew, from a relatively young age that "if [he] wanted to maintain [his] Jewish identity [he] would have no choice but to become more religious." Thus, long before he started to keep kosher, Marv believed that he might. After his grandmother passed away and he inherited her set of china, Marv decided not to use them. "I think I knew that one day I would keep kosher," he explained, "and I didn't want to *tref* the dishes because I didn't think I would be able to *rekasher* them."<sup>297</sup> Marv considered religious observance because he lost a non-religious source of identity. It is possible, then, that some American Jews take on religious practices, like kashrut, not because they are religiously inclined, but instead because they have fewer non religious avenues to express their Judaism.

In fact, Robert Amyot and Lee Sigelman found the two factors with the greatest influence on Jewish identification to be 'religiosity' followed by social contact with other Jews. This means, in general, the more religiously observant an American Jew, the

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<sup>296</sup> Interview with "Avigail," February 2, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with "Marv," January 5, 2018, unpublished.

stronger his or her Jewish identification.<sup>298</sup> Although some American Jews might succeed in maintaining a secular or cultural Jewish identity, their experiences are not the norm. Religious practices appear the most powerful and reliable mechanisms for an American Jew to affirm his or her identity.

Because non-Orthodox kashrut observance is so rare in Israel, some observers find meaning in breaking Israeli religious norms. When Kate first started keeping kosher in the United States, she feels she did it in part for ‘Jewish pride.’ In Israel she feels she is making a statement: “hey guess what. I am not Orthodox. Also I am a lesbian. But yes, I keep kosher. That aspect of tradition... I am allowed to do it even though I don’t fit all these other boxes that people assume go with keeping kosher.”<sup>299</sup> Many Israelis take issue with the power monopolized by the Orthodox religious establishment, and many non-Orthodox observers in Israel regret that observance is so often associated with Orthodoxy. In maintaining non-Orthodox religious observance, Israelis can and do legitimate an alternate form of religious practice. Their choices help to mitigate religious polarization which divides Israelis and isolates American Jews.

### **Kashrut as Identity Affirmation**

Benedict Anderson posits that individuals create “imagined communities” through cultural acts which can serve as essential components of a national culture. For Anderson there are three dimensions to such of a cultural or ritual act, each of which can apply to kashrut observance. The act must first, involve a cultural object, such as food. It must second, turn particular things, times, or places into a symbolic expression of group identity, just as a kosher kitchen, or refusing *tref* are symbolic expressions of Jewish

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<sup>298</sup> Amyot and Sigelman, 183.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with “Kate,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

identity. And third, the object must be handled in a manner acceptable and recognizable to other members of the group.<sup>300</sup> Kashrut is an interesting observance in this sense because although those who keep kosher imagine that they connect to a larger, national community, non-Orthodox observers keep kosher in a variety of ways. What is ‘kosher’ to one is not necessarily ‘kosher’ to another. As shown in Chapter One, what was ‘kosher’ in biblical times, would be considered ‘kosher’ by few today. In this sense, observers are ‘imagining’ a community of similar observers whose practices, in reality, likely diverge or have diverged from their own.

Kashrut observance may be a particularly common means for Jews to express their identities because eating is core to daily life, and it does not require synagogue involvement or ritual practice. Michael is 67 years old, lives in Essex Connecticut, and is a member of a Reform but “eclectic” synagogue which goes “from Roman Catholic to Chabad under the same roof.” Michael will eat non heckshered meat, but he has kept kosher by avoiding non kosher animals and separating milk from meat, for his entire life. “Keeping kosher,” for Michael, “is a reminder of being Jewish...and it is one that is easy to remind myself. I don’t have to go to a synagogue, I don’t have to do a ritual, I don’t have to put on tefillin. I can make a choice....a conscious, in the moment choice.” Michael believes that his generation, those born with the baby boomers, comprises Jews “very conflicted about their Judaism and their Jewish identities. They want to be Jewish. They know they’re Jewish. But at the same time, they don’t want to be Jewish and they want to be part of the greater assimilated America.”<sup>301</sup> In that context, more lenient

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<sup>300</sup> Ezra Kopelwitz and Lior Rosenberg, “Israeli Jews’ vs ‘Jewish Israelis’ and the Ritual Connection to Diaspora Jewry,” in *Dynamic Belonging*, ed. Harvey Goldberg, Steven M. Cohen, Ezra Kopelowitz, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 141.

<sup>301</sup> Interview with “Michael,” October 17, 2017, unpublished.

kashrut observance, like Michael's, provides a way both to be consciously and actively Jewish and to be 'fully American.'

Although many Israelis see their national and religious identities as intertwined, some differentiate expressions of their Israeli identity from expressions of their Jewish identity. For example, Deborah made *aliyah* from Boston and now lives in Haifa with her husband and her children. For Deborah, kashrut is important because "it is nice for the kids. It is part of being Jewish, especially because when you live in Israel you are surrounded by Jews on the one hand, but they are very *Israeli* and not very *Jewish*."<sup>302</sup> Although Israelis primarily eat sufganiyot on Chanukah, Deborah has "to get in the latkes" to remind her kids "okay we are Ashkenazi too and not just Israeli."<sup>303</sup> Kashrut can be an important identity affirmation, even in Israel, because the identity it marks is distinct from national, Israeli identities.

Using survey data, Ezra Kopelowitz and Lior Rosenberg found that the vast majority of secular Israelis were "proud to be Jewish," but only around 30 percent would choose to be born Jewish abroad.<sup>304</sup> Those who can "readily imagine themselves living as Jews outside of Israel," typically those who identify as more religious, they term "Jewish Israelis," whereas those who do not distinguish between the Jewish and Israeli components of their identities, typically those who identify as 'secular,' they term "Israeli Jews."<sup>305</sup> Kopelowitz and Rosenberg found that whereas majorities of both "Jewish Israelis" and "Israeli Jews" support kosher food in the public spaces, comparatively few "Israeli Jews" support the presence of kosher food in private spaces.<sup>306</sup> From these

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<sup>302</sup> Interview with "Deborah," January 15, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Kopelowitz and Lior Rosenberg, 140.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 136-137.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 145.



results they conclude that “the Israeli Jew is a product of the Jewishness of the Israeli public sphere that is created from above, and not from the private initiative of the individual.”<sup>307</sup> In other words, an “Israeli-Jew’s” identity is grounded in her nationality, in the present time and space, whereas the “Jewish-Israeli’s” identity is more transcendent. A “Jewish-Israeli” not only lives as a Jew in a nation of Jews, she imagines herself as part of global Jewish community. Thus, Kopelowitz and Rosenberg’s research indicates that the identity affirmed through kashrut is not particular to one’s community, but rather connects one to Jews throughout the world and throughout different times. Even though practices can differ across national lines, Jews keep kosher to unite with the larger community of Jewish people.

It seems probable that a greater portion of *olim* than *sabras* are “Jewish Israelis.” Those who have lived as Jews outside of Israel likely have more meaningful connections to the diaspora than those raised in a Jewish State. Many likely maintain some desire to connect and to identify with other Jews from their countries of origin. In fact, most *olim* interviewed explain that they came to Israel not to become ‘Israeli,’ but rather, to live in a country where their religious practices were the norm. Coming from a place where Judaism is primarily a religion, *olim* appear more likely to maintain a distinct Jewish-religious identity. For *sabras*, global Jewish identification likely comes less naturally. Deborah notes that although she feels more “Jewish” than “Israeli,” her children, who were born in Israel feel the opposite. They have always lived in a Jewish majority, and their Jewishness has always been a part of their Israeli identity.<sup>308</sup>

This difference may in part explain why relatively few secular Israelis keep kosher despite the greater feasibility of observance in Israel compared to the United States.

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>308</sup> Interview with “Deborah,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

Israelis who do not feel religiously obligated to observe dietary laws likely do not perceive their observance as an urgent identity affirmation. They likely feel ‘publicly’ Jewish, and see no need to affirm a ‘private’ and ‘global’ Jewish identity. This national difference may also explain non-Orthodox American kashrut observers’ greater synagogue involvement. Most American Jews who actively wish to affirm their identity, as do most American kashrut observers, attend a synagogue because in the United States, synagogues are frequently a venue for social, religious, and cultural Judaism. In Israel there are more and more varied opportunities to express Jewish identity.

### **Religious Motivations for Observance**

Although non-Orthodox observers generally take nuanced approaches to dietary restrictions, many express religious motivations for kashrut observance that are no less intense than those of Orthodox Jews. Although they are willing to question the origins, purposes, and practicality of specific observances, they nonetheless honor dietary restrictions because they believe God has commanded them to do so.

Jews commonly distinguish between elements of law derived *D’Oraita* (from the Torah), and those *D’Rabbanan* (from the Rabbis). Although Orthodox Jews maintain their claim that all Talmudic laws, such as the requirement that a Jew wait until the next meal to consume dairy after consuming meat,<sup>309</sup> *really* derive from the Torah, Marv does not buy it. “With kashrut, I think the clear discrepancy between what is written in the Torah [i.e. thou shalt not cook a calf in its mother’s milk] and what is practiced, lends observers agency in interpreting the law.” Marv does not ‘buy’ that the Torah commands Jews to keep separate sets of milk and meat dishes. Thus, although he keeps kosher to

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<sup>309</sup> Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 203.

uphold the values of the Torah, he does not feel religiously obligated to uphold what are clearly rabbinic elements of the law. Those he practices “just because that is what Jews have done for centuries.”<sup>310</sup>

Scott had few kosher peers after his divorce, nonetheless, he decided to start keeping kosher because he has become more of a “covental Jew.”

The notion of whatever that is, and the theology gets pretty complicated, and the notions of God and covenant and, but as I developed that, I wanted to follow Jewish law more and more. Again I am not Orthodox so I don't put on tefillin every day, I don't go to services twice a day. I am not Orthodox. I pray at an egalitarian, Conservative synagogue. I am not Orthodox. But I work at cultivating a sense of a relationship with the divine, whatever that is. And I as part of that, I have made kashrut a part of my observance.<sup>311</sup>

After his parents' death, Scott grew “more sensitive to all things Jewish, including keeping kosher.” He recalls writing a paper in a psychology graduate course on death and dying, in which he observed that young adults who lose their parents experience a “leap” forward in spiritual development. He believes he is no exception.<sup>312</sup> Scott started keeping for the same reason he cultivated other ritualistic practices: he wanted to be closer to God.

Amy, who lives in Woodbridge Connecticut and will eat vegetarian food from non kosher restaurants, believes that dietary restrictions force a discipline that molds her into a better human being.

It is what we are taught to do in the Torah and it's not...about what's clean and unclean and health benefits. That's not really the main point for me....the main point is this idea that we have some things but we can't have everything, which I think is a really important way to live, having some discipline about what you can have and what you can't have. I think that's a very Jewish concept...it is about elevating your humanness to not be about those id compulsions, about elevating yourself to really being thoughtful about what you're putting in your mouth and when you're putting it in your mouth and why. So it is just a constant mindfulness of being Jewish and this lifestyle we have of trying to elevate ourselves to be more godly.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with “Marv,” January 5, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>311</sup> Interview with “Scott,” October 19, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Interview with “Amy,” October 15, 2017, unpublished.

Amy is not concerned with finding independent, non-religious validations for her observance. She feels no need to justify why she will not eat pigs, but she will eat cows. What matters to her is that Jews are taught not to eat pigs, and observance of this restriction enforces a lifestyle of balance. As Amy's, Scott's, and Marv's experiences demonstrate, although non-Orthodox observers are often willing to question the origins, purposes, and practicality of specific observances, they nonetheless honor dietary restrictions because they believe God has commanded them to do so.

Many non-Orthodox Jews, both in Israel and in the United States, decide to keep kosher at the same time as they take on other *mitzvot* (commandments). Ari, who is 72, and made *aliyah* to Be'er Sheva 14 months ago from New York, decided to keep kosher in his 30s after taking a class in observant Judaism. Although he continued to eat vegetarian food from non-kosher establishments, he started to live "a totally observant life." He kept Shabbat, all the holidays, and went regularly to synagogue. He decided to keep kosher not because he found the practice more appealing than other rituals, but instead because he believes keeping kosher is one of a number of practices he is commanded to observe.

According to this, more religious calculus, meaning follows, rather than proceeds observance. In her memoir, *Miriam's Kitchen*, Elizabeth Ehrlich examines her own decision to keep a kosher home. "What is the lure of ritual when passionate belief is hardly ever to be found?" She asks. "When fulfillment of ritual is a matter of choice? It is the conviction," she contends, "deep and unspoken, that ritual, the vessel, contains a precious substance, though I cannot name it. My ignorance is my problem, not that of

the vessel.”<sup>314</sup> A religiously motivated observer, like Ehrlich, starts to keep kosher not necessarily because she finds the practice personally meaningful, but instead because Jews are commanded to keep kosher and have continued to keep kosher throughout generations. Though she may find her observance meaningful for any number of reasons, her observance is not contingent upon finding meaning. The ritual is, in a sense, larger and more meaningful than she can herself comprehend.

## **Conclusion**

The choice to keep kosher is not a decision not made in vacuum. This chapter has argued that kashrut observance can be either a socially facilitated or a socially isolating practice. Among communities of observers, such as youth groups, summer camps, or synagogues, kashrut observance may provide a way to belong. Among those separate from other observers kashrut may be a socially isolating practice. Thus, the communities to which a Jew belongs have bearing over whether or not she decides to keep kosher. This chapter has also argued that the choice to observe is influenced by taste and temptation. Jews living in Israel face fewer temptations than those living in the United States. However, recent developments in food technology and the kosher certification of many popular American products have eased the culinary sacrifices of observance. Today’s kosher consumers can enjoy kosher versions of classically *tref* foods they have long denied. These developments may, in part, explain the increased number of American kashrut observers.

This chapter has also made the point that non-Orthodox kashrut observers maintain varied religious commitments. In some cases, kashrut observance does not

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<sup>314</sup> Ehrlich, 3.

indicate religious conviction. Some keep kosher homes for the sake of their loved ones, others, particularly in Israel, keep kosher homes to facilitate relationships with observant Jews. Others find meaning in the ritual but do not necessarily express faith in God. They keep kosher to maintain a global Jewish identity but do not indicate that they feel commanded to do so. Still other non-Orthodox observers keep kosher out of a sense of commandment. Although they do not feel equally commanded to observe all elements of the law, kashrut observance, they feel, brings them closer to God.

This chapter also contends that although observers in both Israel and the United States frequently keep kosher to express a global and transcendent Jewish identity, the meaning American and Israelis associate with observance is influenced by location. In the United States where Jews are a minority and where there are fewer non-religious avenues to express Jewish identity, religious identifiers, such as keeping kosher, can earn added significance. Similarly, American observers sometimes enjoy defining themselves in opposition to the majority culture. Keeping kosher reminds them of their Judaism and their difference. Greater obstacles to observance, in some cases, are only a stronger reminder. Likewise, some Israeli observers define themselves in opposition to the Orthodox. Keeping kosher while subverting Orthodox norms can be a progressive religious statement. It is possible, these observers contend, to maintain observance while leading a more integrated life.

## Chapter Four

### **‘Eating Out’: Explaining the ‘Levels’ of Kashrut**

In her memoir, *Miriam’s Kitchen*, Elizabeth Ehrlich experiments with ritual as a means to connect with her past. “With ambivalence and some sense of irony,” she explains, “I light a candle, recite a prayer, grate a potato, and move toward making my kitchen kosher. Thus, I forge links from my grandparents, and my husband’s grandparents, to my children, who bear their ancestors’ Hebrew names.”<sup>315</sup> Ehrlich acknowledges that her ritual observances do not fully reflect those of her ancestors to whom she connects. Rather than replicating her ancestor’s practices, she “choose[s] [her] own history, deciding which snapshots, decades, recipes, versions of arguments and events are to be discarded, and which will stand for the whole.”<sup>316</sup> As I argued in Chapter Three, non-Orthodox observers, like Ehrlich, often keep kosher to imagine themselves as part of a global and transcendent Jewish community. However, they frequently identify through nuanced and individualized practices, often unlike those with whom they identify.

Most Orthodox observers keep kosher in roughly homogeneous ways: they look for certification, they eat out only in kosher restaurants, and when they have a question concerning kashrut they defer to their rabbi’s judgement. For non-Orthodox observers, ‘keeping kosher’ can mean a variety of things. While some are as essentially strict as Orthodox, others keep kosher only by avoiding inherently *tref* foods such as pork or shellfish.

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<sup>315</sup> Ehrlich, xii.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid, xii-xiii.

All non-Orthodox observers I interviewed are ideologically different from their Orthodox counterparts. Each takes ownership and autonomy over her observance, and many prove willing to adapt their practices to the realities of present life. For non-Orthodox observers, kashrut is a dynamic rather than a static practice. Because the realities of Jewish life in Israel are unlike those in the United States, one's 'level' of kashrut may indicate more about his or her location than about his or her ideology. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore how location may influence various elements of kashrut observance. This analysis, I hope, will elucidate some of the elements of kashrut most fundamental to non-Orthodox observers.

## **Price**

Kosher meat is and has long been more expensive than non-kosher alternatives. In the United States, kosher poultry generally costs 50 to 100 percent more than non-kosher poultry, while kosher beef might cost several times as much.<sup>317</sup> In Houston in 2010, a brisket sold at a kosher store cost seven times as much as an equivalent non-kosher cut sold nearby.<sup>318</sup> Scott recently bought short ribs for his family. The store he bought them, in Columbus Ohio, sold them in packets of three to four, each for 20 dollars. Because short ribs are three fourths meat and one fourth bone, each cooks down to almost nothing. To make enough for everyone, Scott needed to buy three packages for a total of 60 dollars. Though Scott can afford the cost,<sup>319</sup> some American Jews cannot, or at least cannot consistently. For example, when she was growing up in Irvine, California, Erin's parents did not buy kosher meat. Now that they no longer have to

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<sup>317</sup> Jack Wertheimer, "The High Cost of Jewish Living," *Commentary*, March 1, 2010, Accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-high-cost-of-jewish-living/>.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Interview with "Scott," October 19, 2017, unpublished.



support children, they buy it exclusively.<sup>320</sup> Marcy and her husband have switched between buying kosher and non kosher meat depending upon their location and upon their financial situation. When they cannot afford or cannot access kosher meat, they stick to “kosher type foods,” meaning they avoid pork and shellfish and do not mix meat and milk.<sup>321</sup>

In each of these instances, individuals adapt their level of observance to present realities. When the observance they would prefer is not economically or socially feasible, they continue to observe in a modified way. When a higher level of observance becomes possible, rather than maintaining an easier, less stringent observance, they raise their standards. Their choices speak to the importance and resiliency of kashrut observance among many American and Israeli non-Orthodox Jews. Many maintain whatever level of observance is viable given their financial situation, and continue to do so as their finances change. Even if they compromise to a more lenient standard, when greater observance becomes viable, non-Orthodox observers often sacrifice ease and readapt.

Their choices also demonstrate an adaptive approach to *balachab*. If these observers believed eating exclusively kosher meat is a religious requirement but they could not afford it, they could, in theory, eat strictly vegetarian. Thus they do not maintain the highest standard of kashrut possible. Instead, their standard is the highest they can *comfortably* sustain.

Increasing numbers of American Jews can afford kosher meat. American Jews started to move into higher economic classes as early as 1920, by which time Jewish immigrants were outnumbered by their American born children, who better assimilated into the American mainstream. Following World War II, the American economic boom

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<sup>320</sup> Interview with “Erin,” January 17, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>321</sup> Interview with “Marcy,” September 27, 2017, unpublished.

ushered in what some term a ‘golden age’ for American Jewry. Many families relocated to suburbs and secured their place in America’s middle class.<sup>322</sup> Today Jews earn, on average, the most of any American religious group. According to a 2016 Pew report, 44 percent of Jewish households have annual incomes at or above \$100,000, and only 16 percent of Jewish households have annual incomes below \$30,000.<sup>323</sup> This means that today, the majority of the American Jewish community could, if they chose, bear the economic costs of kashrut.

Kashrut also raises the price of consumption in Israel. In 2016, the Israeli finance ministry estimated that kosher certification costs the Israeli economy \$770 million a year, and adds about five percent to the cost of producing food. Much of that cost is borne by consumers.<sup>324</sup> Nevertheless, because all meat produced in Israel is kosher, Israelis do not have access to cheaper, non-kosher alternatives. This means that the price differential between kosher and non kosher meats does not deter more stringent observance in Israel as it does in the United States.

## **Accessibility**

The market for kosher meat in the United States has transformed in the last seventy years. Until the 1950s, kosher consumers shopped primarily in small kosher corner stores which sold kosher meat and a selection of other kosher items. A corner store was, according to Stanley Shapiro, “something more than a store set up to meet the

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<sup>322</sup> “Jews in America: The Jewish American Family,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-jewish-american-family>.

<sup>323</sup> David Masci, “How income varies among U.S. religious groups,” *Pew Research Center*, October 11, 2016, Accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups/>.

<sup>324</sup> JTA, “State kosher certification costs Israeli economy \$770 million a year,” *The Times of Israel*, January 6, 2016, Accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/state-kosher-certification-costs-israeli-economy-770m-a-year/>.

needs of the Jewish community for kosher meat.<sup>325</sup> It served social and communal functions large scale kosher markets cannot.<sup>326</sup> People shopped at corner stores to see their friends and in some cases to scrutinize their purchases. In this context, Shapiro argues that a class of Jews bought kosher meat only out of a sense of communal obligation.

Today, small-scale kosher stores cannot compete with grocery chains which sell pre-packaged kosher meats, often alongside non kosher alternatives. Grocery stores, because of their scale and broad market appeal, can provide kosher meat at lower prices, even though they cannot serve the same communal functions. Although many Jews continue to support small stores, even those who insist that the service and community at independent stores is worth the added cost, frequently find it more convenient to buy all their groceries from a single, larger store.<sup>327</sup> Kosher corner stores also faced a staffing problem. Many were family owned businesses, handed from one generation to the next. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, many of those who would have inherited family stores turned to other professional pursuits. Thus, when original owners died, stores frequently had no option but to close their doors.<sup>328</sup>

Today, a number of supermarket chains throughout the United States maintain kosher sections of various sizes, depending on the demand from the local Jewish community. This means that more Jews in more areas throughout the country are able to access kosher meat at lower prices. Because purchases at grocery stores are not subject to the communal scrutiny that often characterized small shops, this transformation also

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<sup>325</sup> Stanley Shapiro, "Marketing of Kosher Meat," *Jewish Social Studies*, (April 1961,) 98.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>327</sup> Fishkoff, 133.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

means those with little personal desire to buy kosher meat likely no longer feel the same degree of pressure from their local Jewish communities to do so.

Despite its market expansion, kosher meat is still largely inaccessible throughout much of the United States. Linda Silvern lives with her husband in Auburn, Alabama, where just one other family keeps kosher, and the closest kosher butcher is two hours away in Atlanta. Because Linda's husband is a rabbi and they feel it is important to ensure that everyone feels comfortable eating in their home, Linda drives to Atlanta every three months to stock up on kosher meat.<sup>329</sup> That length a drive would likely dissuade many potential observers. However, since the vast majority of the American Jewish population lives in more centralized Jewish communities throughout metropolitan areas, most observers in the United States do not need to grapple with Linda's choice. Instead they might drive half an hour to an hour to purchase meat, a substantial, but not insurmountable, burden. Thus, more American Jews are buying kosher meat,<sup>330</sup> presumably because the shift in the kosher meat supply has made it easier and cheaper to do so.

## **Eating Out**

Not surprisingly, kosher restaurants, though sparse in the United States, are abundant in Israel. This abundance can in part explain the greater number of Israeli non-Orthodox kashrut observers who eat out only in kosher restaurants. While all of the American observers I interviewed will eat vegetarian foods from non-kosher restaurants, seven out of 24 living in Israel will only eat in kosher establishments. Because many top-rated restaurants in Israel are kosher, non-observant Israelis, particularly in certain areas,

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 27-30.

will have little problem meeting at a kosher restaurant. In the United States where there are few kosher restaurants and essentially none outside metropolitan areas, a Jew who eats exclusively from kosher restaurants will have limited opportunities to dine with non-observant peers. Because dining out is a central social activity, eating exclusively at kosher restaurants in the United States can prevent the establishment of meaningful relationships with non-Jewish and with non-observant peers. It might also strain relationships with existing family and friends who do not keep kosher. Bonnie's siblings, for example, are frustrated by her decision to eat out only in kosher restaurants.<sup>331</sup>

A 2012 responsa from the Conservative movement discusses the conditions under which “pizza from a non-kosher establishment can be considered kosher for use by institutions of the Conservative movement.”<sup>332</sup> It argues that although a kosher restaurant is always preferable, “perhaps the ability to serve hot pizza (or eventually other hot meal alternatives) at a USY program, or at a regional meeting, would contribute to the success of the event and viability of the group itself.”<sup>333</sup> However, the responsa specifies that if there is a kosher option available, “groups affiliated with the Conservative Movement should eat cooked food exclusively in such facilities.”<sup>334</sup> Aside from the ‘*halachic* benefits,’ the responsa argues that the choice to dine in kosher restaurants has “a positive sociological effect on our community by establishing yet another institution (i.e. kosher restaurants), where Jews meet each other and interact as observant Jews.”<sup>335</sup> Thus, although the movement would prefer the more stringent

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<sup>331</sup> Interview with “Bonnie,” January 28, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>332</sup> Rabbi Paul Plotkin, “Pizza from a Non-Kosher Establishment,” *CJLS*, May 30, 2012, Accessed April 4, 2018, <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/plotkin-pizza-non-kosher-restaurant.pdf>.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

practice, it cedes that interpretation of the law should change with context. If eating exclusively in kosher restaurants interferes with outreach, the ‘*halachic* benefits’ are not worth the cost. This logic mirrors that of many American Conservative Jews. Survey data indicates that essentially all Conservative rabbis and cantors in the United States, likely among the most observant members of the movement, are willing to eat out at non kosher restaurants.<sup>336</sup>

I posit therefore that many Israeli non-Orthodox observers who eat out only in kosher restaurants might make a different decision if they lived outside of Israel. In fact, some Israelis who eat exclusively at kosher restaurants in Israel will eat vegetarian food from non-kosher restaurants when they travel. For example, Stephanie, who keeps strict kosher inside and outside her home in Israel and observes Shabbat, makes the exception to eat vegetarian when traveling with her husband to Brazil, where he grew up.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, Susan loves to travel. Although she generally errs towards cold and or vegan options when nothing kosher is available, she values trying different foods. If she is in a foreign country and something looks interesting, as long as she is “80 percent sure” it is vegetarian, she will eat it.<sup>338</sup> Likewise, even though Erin and her husband attempt to maintain strict, Orthodox kashrut, they made the exception to eat in a vegan restaurant during the time they lived in Italy because kosher options were so limited.<sup>339</sup>

That being said, Israeli communities are varied. While it may be easy to eat exclusively from kosher restaurants in Jerusalem or in cities in the south such as Be’er Sheva, it may be quite difficult in more secular cities such as Haifa or Tel Aviv. In fact, many of Israel’s top chefs explain that they need to use non-kosher techniques, such as

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<sup>336</sup> Fishkoff, 98.

<sup>337</sup> Interview with “Stephanie,” October 1, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>338</sup> Interview with “Susan,” September 27, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>339</sup> Interview with “Erin,” January 17, 2018, unpublished.

finishing a meat sauce with butter or cream, in order to compete with high end competitors both internationally and within Israel.<sup>340</sup> In cities with a smaller religious population, a restaurant owner might find non-kosher cooking techniques more lucrative than maintaining their share in the kosher market. Thus, a Jew who wishes to eat exclusively from kosher restaurants, but also seeks to maintain relationships with others whose practices may differ from her own, may struggle in secular cities where the majority of restaurants are not kosher.

A number of Israelis continue to live within smaller micro-communities in which the norms and accommodations for observance might vary drastically. When Gabriel first came to Israel in 1981, he lived on the *moshav*<sup>341</sup> founded by HaBonim, a labor Zionist movement. Gabriel had long wanted to start keeping kosher and keeping Shabbat, so when he made *aliyah* from South Africa, he decided it was finally practical for him to do so. However, he found the culture of his *moshav* so anti-religious he needed to leave because it was too difficult to maintain religious practice.<sup>342</sup>

Historically, some *kibbutzim* were so hostile towards religious observance that they went out of their way to find and grill pork on the fast day of Yom Kippur,<sup>343</sup> the “Day of Atonement,” arguably the most holy and somber day of the Jewish year. Today, many kibbutz communities accommodate observance. Following their decline throughout the 80s and 90s, the majority of *kibbutzim* abandoned their socialist models and privatized. As of 2014, all but 60 of Israel’s original 273 *kibbutzim* were privately

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<sup>340</sup> Yael Raviv, *Falafel Nation*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 166.

<sup>341</sup> A cooperative agricultural settlement.

<sup>342</sup> Interview with “Gabriel,” January 29, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>343</sup> Noa Shpigel, “From Cowshed to Synagogue: Kibbutzim Compromise on Secular Identity in Bid to Survive,” *Haaretz*, May 3, 2016, Accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-kibbutzim-compromise-on-secular-identity-in-bid-to-survive-1.5378124>.

owned.<sup>344</sup> After privatizing, many found it economically necessary to keep kosher dining halls. Hagit Liron's documentary, "The Kosher Kibbutz" tells the story of the kibbutz Beit Alfa's decision to turn their dining hall kosher. Though many members were pained by the decision, they recognized that without kosher certification the dining hall would lose too many potential customers.<sup>345</sup> As the socialist and secularist movements in Israel lose ground, more Israeli communities accommodate religious observance.

### *Hecksbers*

Location also seems to influence non-Orthodox kashrut observers' reliance on kosher certification in shopping for food. Most of the Americans I interview are willing to buy non-meat products that do not have a *hecksber* (a mark indicating that the product is kosher according to a named authority) so long as none of the listed ingredients are *tref*. This practice distinguishes them from Orthodox observers in the United States, many of whom will buy only kosher certified products.

This stringency among America's Orthodox is a relatively recent phenomenon, made possible only by the transformation of America's food industry. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, because so few products were certified kosher, even Orthodox consumers often relied upon ingredient labels rather than kosher certification when shopping for food.<sup>346</sup> Now, as Sue Fishkoff observes, even though under two percent of the United States population is Jewish, and Pew estimates that only 22 percent of American Jews maintain kosher homes,<sup>347</sup> one half to one third of the food for sale in all American

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<sup>344</sup> Leah McLaren, "Privatizing the Modern-Day Kibbutz," *MacLean's*, June 3, 2014, Accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.macleans.ca/news/world/privatizing-the-modern-day-kibbutz/>.

<sup>345</sup> Shpigel, *ibid*.

<sup>346</sup> Fishkoff, 48-49.

<sup>347</sup> *Pew*, "Twin Portraits."



supermarkets is certified kosher. Many American food producers believe that appealing to the small but significant kosher market is worth the added cost.<sup>348</sup>

Today, unlike 40 to 50 years ago, it would be possible for an American kashrut observer to bring only *heckschered* products into her home. Therefore, the fact that many non-Orthodox observers believe that reading ingredient labels is sufficient, sheds light on their approach to the law. American shoppers take ownership of what they will or will not eat. They will read ingredient labels and avoid foods rejected by Jews for generations. However, they will not limit their options simply because an Orthodox rabbi has not supervised all aspects of production.

By contrast, because most food products in Israel are kosher certified, non-Orthodox Israeli observers typically buy only *heckschered* products. Rebecca, a Conservative Rabbi who lives on a pluralistic kibbutz, Kibbutz Ketura, explains that since almost all products in Israel are certified kosher, those without a *heckscher* probably “really aren’t kosher.”<sup>349</sup> An otherwise kosher product in the United States might forgo certification because it decides the requisite expense and monitoring is not worth expanding its market. Because kosher consumers comprise such a large proportion of the Israeli market, Israeli producers are unlikely to face the same calculus. Although Rebecca takes issue with the kosher certification process in Israel, and would love to buy food with alternative non-Orthodox *heckscher*, she feels she cannot forgo certification without eating something *tref*.<sup>350</sup> Thus, in upholding similar values to American observers, because of the realities of the Israeli market, Rebecca adopts a more stringent practice.

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<sup>348</sup> Fishkoff, 4.

<sup>349</sup> Interview with “Rebecca,” January 24, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

## Cheese

Similar differences are evident in American and Israeli approaches to the dietary laws concerning cheese. As I discussed briefly in Chapter One, strict observers may rule cheese ‘unkosher’ for two reasons. First, because many hard cheeses are made from animal rennet, they rule that a cheese formed with a product from unkosher meat is, by extension, *tref*. Cheese made using rennet from a kosher animal *can* be kosher, as the rennet is not counted as ‘too miniscule’ to be meat, and can therefore be mixed with dairy. Second, because of a Mishnaic prohibition, many rule that a cheese, even one made without rennet, is *tref* unless it is produced under rabbinical supervision. The Conservative movement in the United States takes a different *halachic* approach. They rule that rennet is a so highly processed substance that it no longer has the status of food, meaning all cheeses, regardless of what they were made with or who made them, should be considered kosher.<sup>351</sup>

All of the observers I interviewed take an approach toward cheese more in line with that of the Conservative movement. Although many, particularly those who are also vegetarian, check to see if the cheeses they consume are made with animal rennet, all of the American observers I interviewed are willing not only to eat non heckshered cheeses, but also to bring them and cook them in their homes.

American cheese consumption, like many aspects of modern food culture, is radically different than it was seventy years ago. In 1950, the average American consumed 7.7 pounds of cheese annually. In 2012, he or she consumed 33.5 pounds.<sup>352</sup> Cheese is now a staple in American cuisine, meaning American observers could severely

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<sup>351</sup> Laurence Boxer, “Conservative Judaism,” *Powerpoint*, Presented to REL 306, April, 2004.

<sup>352</sup> Calvin Covington, “Cheese consumption’s phenomenal increase: Will it continue?” *Progressive Dairyman*, March 11, 2014, Accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.progressivedairy.com/blogs/guest-blog/cheese-consumptions-phenomenal-increase-will-it-continue>.

limit their options were they to refuse non-kosher cheeses. Moreover, although the market for kosher cheese in the United States is expanding, generally only large-scale producers can create kosher batches.<sup>353</sup> This means that to observe the regulations on cheese, an American would have to forgo almost all local varieties. Thus, non-Orthodox Americans' decisions to eat all varieties of cheese again reflect their attempt to balance observance with its costs. Most rule that the restrictions, in this case, are not so fundamental and their rationale not so sound, to justify the social, logistic, and culinary sacrifices.

The majority of Israeli observers I interviewed will try *unbecksbered* cheeses, particularly when traveling, but many will not cook them in their homes. For some the practice is a product primarily of access. Susan lives on a pluralistic kibbutz outside Eilat, Kibbutz Ketura. "99 percent of the time" she buys her food through the kibbutz, which provides no option but certified kosher cheese.<sup>354</sup> Almost all cheese produced within Israel is kosher, and due to barriers, and strict regulations, Israel imports few foreign cheeses.<sup>355</sup> Other Israelis do not bring *unbecksbered* cheeses into their homes because their peers may have higher standards than their own. Non-kosher cheese could be enough to compromise a kitchen for many more strict observers whom Israelis host. An Israeli might therefore observe restrictions on cheese because a strict kosher kitchen can build a foundation for relationships. Thus, although Israelis and Americans often observe proscriptions against cheese in different ways, their practices might reflect balancing similar to that of American Jews. Given the market and social dynamics in Israel,

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<sup>353</sup> "As consumption rises, more companies produce kosher cheese," *Israeli National News*, July 15, 2017, Accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/232502>.

<sup>354</sup> Interview with "Susan," September 27, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>355</sup> Dafna Afrad, "Something is Rotten in Israel's Cheese Industry," *Haaretz*, November 21, 2013, Accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-something-rotten-with-israeli-cheese-1.5292309>.

observing restrictions at home may be worth the cost, while denying one's options outside of the home and in travel may not.

American and Israeli choices concerning cheese are significant because cheese tests the limits of kashrut, and it does so on arguably shakier religious grounds. Whereas kosher slaughter is mandated by the Torah, avoiding rennet and supervising production is not. Because an American Jew who already avoids non-kosher meat will find it difficult to limit another common ingredient from her diet, she is likely to scrutinize the validity and centrality of the prohibition. An Israeli who can easily observe both proscriptions need not apply the same scrutiny.

### **Interpretation of the Law: Wine**

American Jews are generally more likely than Israelis to question and to pick and choose among elements of the dietary restrictions. For example, even though some American Jews will not make a blessing using non-kosher wine, all American observers I have interviewed are willing to drink *unbecksbered* wines. Many express ideological opposition to the laws which make wine unkosher. As I discussed briefly in Chapter One, according to restrictions outlined in the Mishnah, any wine which is handled by a Jew who does not observe Shabbat, from the time the grape juice separates from the pulp, to the time it is ultimately poured, cannot be considered kosher.<sup>356</sup> The proscription against gentile wines derives from Deuteronomy 32:38 which asks, "Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you and be your refuge."<sup>357</sup> The rabbis interpret this line as a prohibiting wine

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<sup>356</sup> Fishkoff, 116.

<sup>357</sup> Deuteronomy 32:38, *New King James Version*,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/nkjv/deuteronomy/32-38.html>.

used for idol worship. Because this restriction is profoundly isolating, under the presumption that pagans would not use boiled wine to worship their idols, early authorities deemed that kosher wine which was “*mevushal*,” that is to say, cooked, and could be touched by anyone and remain kosher. In the Talmudic period when Jews lived in majority Christian societies, rabbis established a different rationale: “ordinary wine,” (*stam yaynam*) would bring Jews and non-Jews together with lowered inhibitions, which would lead to sexual intercourse and then intermarriage.<sup>358</sup> For observers like Scott, “the rules on kosher wine border on being racist.” As an ideological point, he does not limit his consumption.<sup>359</sup>

Because wine is a fixture at countless social and professional occasions in the United States, observance of this element of *balachab* could isolate American Jews. Moreover, the quality of kosher wines in the United States cannot yet match that of non-kosher alternatives. As Jeff Morgan, who makes kosher wines in the Napa Valley put it, Jews “are known as the worst winemakers in the world, and we are the people with the oldest codified relationship to wine.”<sup>360</sup> Because the costs of observing this element of *balachab* are substantial, American observers may be particularly disposed to question the purpose and background of the law.

By contrast, because most wines produced in Israel are kosher, Israelis can observe the prohibition with few repercussions. Israelis may therefore be less likely to question the ideology behind the law. Although Kate drank non-kosher wines when she started keeping kosher in the United States, in Israel she refuses. “It feels so *davka* (spiteful)...there are so many kosher wines that I am not going to drink the only non

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>359</sup> Interview with “Scott,” October 19, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>360</sup> Fishkoff, 111.

kosher wine.”<sup>361</sup> In Israel, she feels she would be going almost out of her way to defy the prohibition. According to cognitive dissonance theory, individuals have trouble holding contradictory beliefs or acting in contradictory ways. If an individual cannot reconcile or explain her decision to observe one prohibition but not another, she will feel ‘uneasy’ in her choice. Therefore, when a religious practice would be easy, those who value observance would generally need to find a compelling reason *not to* adopt it. Many do not go looking for such a reason.

In some instances the Israeli context creates the opposite effect. Rebecca and her husband Gabriel will only bring food products with *heckschers* into their home on Kibbutz Ketura. Nonetheless, when buying wine, they prefer to buy the few available wines without kosher certification. As Rebecca understands it, in the 32 years she has lived in Israel, “the fundamentalists have gotten much more fundamental and louder.” She is appalled that it is illegal to label a product ‘kosher’ without the official certification of the rabbinate. Her frustration with religious authorities in Israel has, she believes, made her more aware and more critical of elements of religious law which, outside of Israel, she may never have questioned.<sup>362</sup> Although Rebecca and Gabriel place great value in keeping kosher, they are so ideologically opposed to the prohibition against wine that they, unlike Kate, do go out of their way to defy it. Their choice does not create cognitive discomfort because they have successfully reconciled their decision with the values they uphold in keeping kosher.

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<sup>361</sup> Interview with “Kate,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with “Rebecca,” January 24, 2018, unpublished.

## Social Costs of Varying Levels of Observance or non-Observance

One's level of observance is informed by the corresponding social costs. Those costs, although generally more substantial in the United States than in Israel, have eased in recent years. For one, Americans feel more comfortable asking about food preparation than even before. Because increasing numbers of Americans have dietary restrictions, many believe that waiters are more accustomed to and accommodating of those who inquire. Thus Jews who eat vegetarian at non-kosher restaurants can unselfconsciously ensure that what they order is kosher. Moreover, as Americans have learned to place greater value in intentional eating, many admire rather than scorn the choice to keep kosher. Laura believes that many of her non-Jewish peers admire her decision. "They think it is interesting" she explains, "much in the way like someone who might choose to be vegan or vegetarian."<sup>363</sup>

Nonetheless, many non-Jews outside of Israel have trouble understanding why someone would "ever let anything as silly as religion control what [they] eat."<sup>364</sup> Others, Michael points out, simply do not know what it means to 'keep kosher.'

They've heard of a kosher deli. They've heard of a kosher pickle. They've heard the word kosher vented about on sitcoms. But the truth is they have no idea that it is a commandment from God. They have no idea that it is part of an identity. They have no idea that it is part of the covenant. So I would say that a lot of my friends, peers, business folks are either indifferent or insensitive.<sup>365</sup>

Michael has belonged to a mens club for over 19 years, and every once in a while a member will bring a pulled pork dinner for the group and claim he forgot Michael keeps kosher. He has been a member of this group for so long, and they have eaten together

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<sup>363</sup> Interview with "Laura," September 26, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with "Mara," January 14, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>365</sup> Interview with "Michael," October 17, 2017, unpublished.

on so many occasions, that Michael understands their actions as “blatant hostility.”<sup>366</sup> Although such hostilities are often subtle or unintentional, they signal that kashrut observance can be perceived as out of step with the majority culture. Often the stricter the observance, the more out of step. For American Jews who seek full integration into the majority, more stringent observance of dietary restrictions can create an ideological disconnect with peers.

In Israel where Jews are the majority and where national institutions maintain strict kashrut standards, non Jews have no choice but to accommodate observance. Although some secular observers are ardently anti-religious, the majority are willing to accommodate observant Jews. In fact, few of the Israelis I interviewed report others reacting negatively to their practice. Non-Orthodox kashrut observers do, however, report being perceived as more religious than they are. Although Israelis understand what it means to keep kosher, few can appreciate why someone who is not Orthodox would make that choice. In that sense, Israeli non-Orthodox observance is sometimes out of step with prevailing majority norms.

That being said, Israeli observers, like Americans, sometimes need to compromise their observance if their loved ones do not keep kosher. Kate, for example, prefers to eat in kosher restaurants, but her girlfriend and her girlfriend’s parents do not observe dietary restrictions. Were she to refuse to eat in their home, “that would be an issue.” Therefore, because she knows all the meat in Israel is kosher, she will eat anything they serve, even though she will not eat meat and milk in the same meal. Although Kate finds it easy to maintain a ‘kosher style’ diet in Israel, living in Tel Aviv among more secular Israelis, she finds it hard to maintain the standards she would

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.



prefer.<sup>367</sup> Social effects are not homogenous in each country, or even in particular regions of each country.

Because many more Jewish Israelis (22 percent) than Jewish Americans (10 percent) are ‘Orthodox,’ and 12 percent of Israel’s Jewish population is modern Orthodox,<sup>368</sup> and integrated into Israeli life, whereas less than four percent of America’s Jewish population is Modern Orthodox,<sup>369</sup> the level of kashrut in an Israeli family’s home is more likely than an American’s to reflect the standards of potential guests. For example, Elisa would willingly eat anything *tref*. But when she and her husband *kashered* their kitchen, “they really *kashered* it.” When they moved to Jerusalem they knew that many of their peers would keep kosher and they knew that having people over for meals could create the foundation for lasting relationships. In keeping a strictly kosher home, Elisa and her husband make their kitchen a communal space which can welcome people of all backgrounds.<sup>370</sup> The higher their standards, the more Jews they can welcome into their home. Kashrut is so prominent in Israel that non-Jews and non-observant Jews are accustomed to eating in kosher settings. Thus, while it is possible that a kosher kitchen in the United States might make non-observant guests feel excluded, a kosher kitchen is likely perceived as less exclusionary in Israel.

When she was living in Arizona, Shirley started working for Hillel. Since she was already vegetarian, she figured she would keep a kosher kitchen so that she could cook food for events. Although, at the time, she would eat shellfish outside her home, her standards within her house were scrupulous. She knew strict kashrut observance was

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<sup>367</sup> Interview with “Kate,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>368</sup> *Pew*, “American and Israeli Jews: Twin Portraits”.

<sup>369</sup> *Pew*, “A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews,” August 6, 2015, Accessed Accessed March 29, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/08/26/a-portrait-of-american-orthodox-jews/>.

<sup>370</sup> Interview with “Elisa,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

important for members of the Hillel and she wanted to honor their decisions.<sup>371</sup>

Similarly, even though Evelyn loves to eat everything that is *tref* outside her home, she will not bring any *tref* inside. Although there was a time when she kept a separate pan to cook meat and fish that was not kosher, she soon “got over that rebellion and threw out the pan so it wouldn’t cause any problems.”<sup>372</sup>

Strict observance for the sake of others does not seem the norm in the United States. Although kashrut standards separate Orthodox from non-Orthodox Jews in America, the two communities are already segregated. A more ‘kosher’ kitchen would not bridge that gap. As Marv explained, people who are ultra-Orthodox “are not going to eat in my kitchen. There is nothing I can do to make them feel comfortable eating in my kitchen, so I do not see the point in letting their standards dictate my own.”<sup>373</sup> The rate at which Jews enter the American Orthodox community demonstrates its insularity. According to Pew, just four percent and one percent of American Jews raised Conservative and Reform respectively become Orthodox later in life. Many (approximately 48 percent) in the Orthodox community leave, whereas very few join.<sup>374</sup> These percentages indicate a low level of interaction among Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews in the United States. Presumably if many Reform and Conservative Jews maintained close relations with Orthodox observers, a greater number would themselves change.

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<sup>371</sup> Interview with “Shirley,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>372</sup> Interview with “Evelyn,” February 6, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>373</sup> Interview with “Marv,” January 5, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>374</sup> “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” *Pew Forum*, October 1, 2013, Accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>.

## Reference Groups

Sociologists define a reference group as one with which an individual identifies and which will “serve[s] as a normative source of attitudes and self identity.”<sup>375</sup>

According to reference group theory, individuals make judgements comparatively, measuring a given behavior or attitude against that of their reference group.<sup>376</sup> “Attitudes are formed,” Gian Sarup relays, “in relation to reference groups...the differential persistence and change of attitudes can be explained in terms of acquisition and membership in one’s reference group and/or continuity with the aspired group.” An individual need not be a member of a reference group for its standards to influence her own, although reference groups appear more influential when an individual *is* a member.

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Because kashrut observance is often, as discussed in Chapter Three, a socially facilitated practice, an individual’s level of observance is frequently influenced by her social reference groups. Different communities offer different definitions of ‘kosher.’ ‘In some communities ‘keeping kosher’ means avoiding pork and shellfish and separating milk from meat. In others it means eating only food prepared in kosher kitchens. One’s observance seems correlated with his or her community’s definition of ‘kosher.’ This means that a Jew who already feels observant in comparison to his or her peers is less likely to feel more stringent observance is necessary.

Growing up in Upstate New York, Dora’s family kept a kosher household but would eat any food out, and would bring non-kosher food in on paper plates. Their observance was, as Dora remembers, among the most strict in the neighborhood, and

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<sup>375</sup> Gian Sarup, (1969), “Reference Groups: Some Determinants and Consequences,” Doctoral Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 7.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 31.

though their family valued keeping a kosher at home, neither Dora nor her parents saw a need to keep kosher outside of it. When she moved to New Jersey in High School, Dora made friends who would not eat *unbecksbered* meat. Before she moved to New Jersey, it had not occurred to her that one can be kosher outside the home too. Dora “didn’t know anybody who had eating habits like that.” Once she did, she matched her observance to theirs’ and started eating exclusively kosher meat. Some time after moving to Israel, where heightened observance is modeled, Dora decided she would only eat out in kosher restaurants.<sup>378</sup> Dora could not have raised her standards had she not known stricter observance was possible and practiced. Once observant behavior was modeled, and modeled by friends with whom Dora wanted to identify, she had to question her own motivations for keeping kosher. Because she found these aligned better with stricter observance, she adapted.

As Dora’s experiences demonstrate, observance of one element of kashrut often facilitates others. Sociologists have found that once an individual adopts a practice which identifies her with a label, her self-concept changes. For example, when one starts avoiding *treif* foods and starts separating meat from dairy, she starts to see herself as someone who ‘keeps kosher.’ Bruce Biddle reports that individuals possess “internal needs to conform to labels.”<sup>379</sup> ‘Self-referent labels,’ Biddle found, are formed and reinforced by others with whom a person identifies.<sup>380</sup> This means that what constitutes ‘keeping kosher’ is defined, in large part, by an external peer group. According to cognitive dissonance theory, individuals have trouble holding contradictory beliefs or

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<sup>378</sup> Interview with “Dora,” January 15, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>379</sup> Bruce Biddle, Barbara Bank, Don Anderson, Ragnar Hauge, Daphne Keats, John Keats, Marjorie Marlin, Simone Valantin, “Social Influence, Self-Referent Identity Labels, and Behavior,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 26, No. 2, (Summer, 1985), 163.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

acting in contradictory ways. Therefore, one who perceives of himself as keeping kosher, will likely feel uneasy eating unkosher things, because he might believe his actions undercut his label. For example, Marv initially intended to keep kosher only inside his home. “I remember going out for dinner after I finished *kashering* the kitchen. I ordered a turkey burger. That was the last unkosher thing I ever ate. I guess it just felt contradictory.”<sup>381</sup>

Noah is willing to mix chicken and turkey with dairy, because, as he sees it, since you cannot milk a chicken, the biblical prohibition against cooking a calf in its mother’s milk should not apply. After eating red meat, Noah does not wait a set amount of time before consuming dairy. “You are only as *fleyshevik* (meaty) as you feel.” Noah explains. “For me sometimes that is six hours. I’ll eat a big meat lunch and then I’ll not have dairy, and sometimes that’s like 45 minutes later I’m reaching for cream to put in my coffee and I’m like ‘yeah it’s fine.’”<sup>382</sup> Noah reckons that other kashrut observant Jews would question the legitimacy of these decisions. However, since none of Noah’s family and few of his peers keep kosher, Noah does not have to live with their judgement. The isolation of his observance, in this case, appears to facilitate his nuanced approach to the dietary laws.<sup>383</sup>

Perhaps then, relatively few Israelis, given the ease of observance, maintain non-Orthodox kashrut, because few of their peers model such behavior. Even though only 16 percent of Israelis eat pork,<sup>384</sup> Shlomit Levy found that Israeli public perception of

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<sup>381</sup> Interview with “Marv,” January 5, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>382</sup> Interview with Noah,” January 12, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Pew, “American and Israeli Jews: Twin Portraits.”

kashrut underestimates the practice.<sup>385</sup> Israelis do not *feel* as though non-Orthodox Jews keep kosher, even though large percentages do. Most I interviewed report having few peers with observance levels similar to their own, whereas the majority of Americans I interviewed report having many. This means that while the behavior of American non-Orthodox observers is frequently reinforced by peers, Israelis with more middle ground observance, for example, those willing to eat vegetarian from non-kosher restaurants, sometimes feel “like fish out of water.”<sup>386</sup> Isolated observance is likely more difficult to maintain.

As Biddle’s research demonstrates, when people label their own practices, they refer to reference groups from the society around them. Many of the Israelis I interviewed were reluctant to refer to themselves as ‘religious,’ despite reporting similar Jewish practices as religious identifying American Jews. For example Hodaya, who lives in Jerusalem reported that she does not “really keep kosher” even though she keeps a strictly kosher home and will only eat vegetarian outside of it.<sup>387</sup> Labeling is significant because an individual’s perception of whether or not she ‘keeps kosher’ will likely influence the meaning she associates with her observance, and the extent to which that observance affirms her identity. A Jew who does not feel she ‘keeps kosher,’ likely does not feel connected through her practice to a global, transcendent Jewish community. This means that a similar observance practiced in a more religious community could potentially feel less meaningful and less intentional because of surrounding context.

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<sup>385</sup> Shlomit Levy, Hannah Levinsohn, Elihu Katz, *Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction among Israeli Jews*, (Jerusalem: The Guttman Institute, 1993,) 35.

<sup>386</sup> Interview with “Rebecca,” January 24, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>387</sup> Interview with “Hodaya,” January 27, 2017, unpublished.

## Mistakes

Location also seems to influence how often observers mistakenly eat something that is not kosher, and how they react to those mistakes. Non-Orthodox observers both in Israel and in the United States generally forgive themselves for accidental violations of kashrut because they emphasize intentionality. Michael remembers roaming around his family's grape garden at the age of 13 or 14 on Yom Kippur.<sup>388</sup> He mindlessly started munching on a grape before he remembered he was fasting. Scared that "God would strike [him] down," he ran to his Rabbi, Rabbi Goldstein, who told him "if it happened it happened...just be conscious of it, dwell on it for a moment, think about it, and then move on."<sup>389</sup> In similar situations, observers, both in Israel and in the United States react as Rabbi Goldstein advised. Though momentarily upset, they recognize that "it happens" and they forgive themselves.

Nonetheless, those living in Israel are much less likely than those in the United States to mistakenly eat something that is not kosher. Many Israelis I interviewed cannot recall ever eating something *tref*, whereas almost all of the Americans I interviewed can. Kashrut is engrained in Israel's culinary scene. Little in Israeli cuisine mixes meat and dairy. Bacon is not a consistent meal 'add-on,' and many cakes are made with olive oil rather than butter so that an observant Jew can eat them after consuming meat. Moreover, since so much of the country keeps kosher, Israelis have an easier time than Americans asking about meal preparation to check the 'integrity' of their food. Mistakes are easy to avoid in Israel. Perhaps it is for this reason that Israelis report greater disturbance than Americans when mistakenly eating something that is not kosher. Those

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<sup>388</sup> At age 13 and Jewish boy or girl becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah and thus is religiously required to observe all commandments, including fasting on Yom Kippur.

<sup>389</sup> Interview with "Michael," October 17, 2018, unpublished.

who report the highest levels of disturbance are those who go to the greatest pains to avoid mistakes, often eating only in kosher restaurants. When one takes such measures to avoid transgressions, mistakes are naturally more dissapointing.

Many American observers make real efforts, although generally less substantial than those of Israelis', to avoid *tref*. For example, since David worries that "vegetarian" Chinese food often contains pork and pork fat, he tries to only patronize restaurants that serve Buddhist clientele. If Buddhists feels comfortable eating vegetarian food from the restaurant, David figures it is likley the vegetarian food *really is* vegetarian.<sup>390</sup> Laura loves French onion soup, but since she knows it is often made with beef stock, she will always ask about preparation.<sup>391</sup> Although American observers generally consume more foods which might not be kosher than Israelis, many are still uncomfortable eating 'risky' dishes. If they think there is a serious chance something will not be kosher, they will ask before they eat.

Many other American observers accept that mistakes are an inevitable product of life in a gentile world, and try not to give themselves a headache over this reality. Marv, for example, recalls buying *sufganiyot*<sup>392</sup> at the local doughnut shop in Wallingford, Connecticut. As the women at the doughnut shop prepared his order, it occurred to Marv to ask what kind of fat the shop uses to fry its doughnuts. "Vegetable oil," one of the women told him. "That's good," he answered, relieved the doughnuts were not made with lard or another animal fat. "No actually I think we might have changed it," the other woman corrected, "do you want me to check?" After thinking for a moment, Marv

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<sup>390</sup> Interview with "David," November 13, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>391</sup> Interview with "Laura," September 26, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>392</sup> Jelly donuts, traditionally served for the festival of Channukah.



answered, “No. Don’t check.”<sup>393</sup> Marv, like other American observers, will not eat something once he knows it is not kosher. But since so many foods are already off limits, and so many more are prepared with some remnant of meat, Marv does not actively try to rule out his options.

## Exceptions

Some kosher keeping Americans will, on occasion, make exceptions to their observance. Scott has made two. The first was twelve or fifteen years ago. He was returning with his fiancée, a kosher keeping rabbinical student, to Philadelphia, her hometown. She craved a Philly cheese steak, and to his surprise, ate it. He joined her. The second exception was this last year. “I was taking a trip with sort of a member of the extended family and I found myself in Buffalo New York,” he explains,

I willfully ate chicken wings at the Anchor Bar.<sup>394</sup> It was before the High Holidays so I said, “oh I am going to have some serious atoning to do.” They were good and all that, but I am not going to do it again. My pleasure was tainting a little bit. I relished them, but I knew what I was doing was a little bit... I gave into that craving.<sup>395</sup>

Both of Scott’s “transgressions” were facilitated and, in fact, encouraged by a peer. Both were products of exceptional circumstances. Scott does not seek out *tref* food, and he is not proud of these two transgressions. Yet he does not beat himself up over them either. Neither made him question his motivations for keeping kosher. After each, he moved on and continued to observe as he always had.

Ethan’s wife, Shlomit does not keep kosher. Ten years ago, for their twentieth anniversary trip in Florence, Italy, Ethan decided that the food was so good, he would

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<sup>393</sup> Interview with “Marv,” January 5, 2018, unpublished.

<sup>394</sup> Known as the birthplace of buffalo wings.

<sup>395</sup> Interview with “Scott,” October 19, 2017, unpublished.

take the week off from kashrut. When he came back, he continued to observe the dietary laws as he always had. Ethan has made exceptions like this “a handful of times throughout the years.” Probably less than once a year. When his kids are not around, he and his wife go to a restaurant and have a special, ‘unkosher’ night out. Ethan does not report any guilt over these instances, perhaps because his motivations for keeping kosher are more ‘secular’ than ‘religious.’ Ethan keeps kosher, he explains, as

kind of a combination of identity and aesthetic. I consider myself, secular as I am, a very very Jewy guy. That’s just part of my identity and what I like about kashrut is it symbolizes with *halachah* that not everything is for you... we have to control our desires and our urges and we make choices.<sup>396</sup>

Since Ethan chooses to keep kosher for himself, rather than for God, he need not answer to another for his choices. He can, as he sees it, maintain the identity and the aesthetic while making rare exceptions to his standards. Ethan imagines his membership in the community of kashrut observers is not contingent upon absolute observance because he feels he answers only to himself rather than to a higher authority. Thus, although Chapter Three holds that non-Orthodox observers often keep kosher to imagine themselves as part of a global and transcendent Jewish community, many imagine different standards and expectations for membership. For some they are internal, for others, they come from God.

Others make less intentional exceptions only in circumstances in which observance might create real inconvenience. For example, Abigail recalls receiving a chicken salad sandwich<sup>397</sup> after ordering a tuna salad sandwich. “I hadn’t eaten all day,” she explains, “and I think I ate the sandwich because...it was the evening of my brother’s wedding and I wasn’t going to be able to eat again until 8 o’clock at night. It was 2:30 in

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<sup>396</sup> Interview with “Ethan,” October 18, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>397</sup> The chicken, presumably, was not slaughtered in accordance with *halachah*.

the afternoon.” Although eating the sandwich bothered Abigail, it did not bother her so much that she stopped eating it.<sup>398</sup> Similarly, Rebecca remembers periods, particularly when traveling, when she loosened her standards. “I remember going to Greece,” she recounts, “and everything was ham or pork and meat and I remember having okra and I was pretty sure that it was in a red sauce probably made from beef stock and I was like I can’t eat anything, I am going to eat that.” Although Rebecca is generally a ‘guilt free kashrut observer, who tries not to concern herself with mistakes outside of her control, she finds she does feel a little guilty in those instances in which she has an inkling that something might not be kosher, and she eats in anyway. These instances, again, create ‘cognitive dissonance,’ or unease, because Rebecca’s actions conflict with her self-concept as a kashrut observant Jew.

In these instances Abigail and Rebecca balance the demands of their observance with immediate realities. They rule that kashrut, in that moment, would be too burdensome to maintain. Yet their balance is a troubled one, as their values and their present needs are irreconcilable. In Israel one is less likely to face such a dilemma. Because so much of the food is kosher, and that which is not is more clearly differentiated, an Israeli is unlikely to accidentally eat or ‘need’ to eat *tref*.

## **Conclusion**

Non-Orthodox kashrut observers are, in general, stricter in Israel than they are in the United States. Nonetheless, Israeli observers report less difficulty than Americans maintaining their observance. Almost every element of kashrut is more difficult and potentially more isolating in the United States than it is in Israel. Thus, although Israeli

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<sup>398</sup> Interview with “Abigail,” January 14, 2018, unpublished.

practices are ostensibly more 'stringent' in every respect than those of Americans, Israelis generally make sacrifices no more severe than those of American Jews. Their standards, therefore, do not necessarily connote greater ideological commitment to observance.

This chapter has also argued that because individuals refer to others when defining and labeling themselves, context will determine both one's level of observance and her self definition. Because attitudes are formed in relation to reference groups, those surrounded by more observant Jews are likely to maintain stricter standards for observance, while those whose standards are more lenient than those of his or her reference group are less likely to self define as 'kosher.' This chapter has further argued that once a Jew self defines as 'kosher,' she is more likely to observe other elements of dietary restrictions, as observing one element of kashrut and not others can create 'cognitive dissonance,' or mental unease. However, I argue that so long as Jews can reconcile their choices they can maintain nuanced observance without unease.

The adaptability of observance as Jews travel or as their family or financial situations change, demonstrates the importance non-Orthodox Jews place in keeping kosher. Modified kashrut can be equally meaningful when stricter observance is not possible. When observance is easier, more stringent standards might be necessary to ensure that one's practice continues to actively shape her life.

## Conclusion

### **Kashrut, Community, and Continuity**

As a student, Susan worked in a kosher house at the University of Maryland. One girl who lived in the house received ceramic dishes from her grandmother, who she was not sure had really kept kosher. “They were pottery dishes. They were really beautiful.”

Susan explains,

And we were trying to decide if she could use them or not so we all went off...we didn't really have google then, but we started looking for answers. We didn't want to ask a rabbi because if you ask a rabbi you have to accept their answer...so we asked the rabbi on campus to talk about kashering ceramics in general without telling him that we had a specific questions, and we looked in a bunch of books and at the end of the day we decided that we would have to bury the set of dishes because they were made from clay so they would need to go back in the earth for a year in order to *kasher* them...and then we decided, “there's no way that we are going to dig up a suburban Maryland yard and bury all these dishes in the yard, it's just not going to happen.”...One of the Conservative Movement books said that if you put it in a basement it's as if you buried it. It is down in the earth. And if you wait a year it's as if you...*kasher*ed it. They gave a very scientific explanation about how the molecules of food can't really survive for more than a year in any form that would be considered food, and they would be considered dust or back to dust, and therefore you can use them.<sup>399</sup>

Susan and her peers were both concerned with the kashrut of the dishes, and invested in finding a way to use them. They were responsive to the law, but they recognized that, from their standpoint, *halachah* was not clear-cut. Because they knew the strictest definition of the law would not give them the answer they were looking for, they kept looking. In so doing, they found a way to negotiate *halachah* with their specific need.

As Susan's experience demonstrates, and this thesis has attempted to argue, non-Orthodox kashrut observers, both in Israel and in the United States, are the controlling agents in their ritual practice. They determine for themselves what is and is not kosher,

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<sup>399</sup> Interview with “Susan,” September 27, 2017, unpublished.

and even those who make the stricter choice do so thoughtfully. For example, those in Israel who only buy exclusively *hecksbered* foods do so because they worry that products without certification contain explicitly *treif* ingredients, or they worry that more observant Jews will not be willing to eat in a kitchen which holds uncertified products and ingredients. No one I spoke with merely defers her judgement of what is and is not kosher to another.

For non-Orthodox observers, kashrut is also an elastic practice. Individuals relax their standards temporarily when they travel, and more permanently as they move in and out of different countries, or as their socioeconomic status changes. People tend to be more strictly observant when their circumstances make it easier to practice the law. This tendency demonstrates that Jews, both in Israel and in the United States, want to feel a tension between kashrut observance and their daily lives. Because non-Orthodox Jews keep kosher to affirm their Jewish identities, their practice must force them to think, to plan, and to make sacrifices. The balance of non-Orthodox observance is determining how substantial that interference ought to be. This determination is individual, and dependent on a variety of factors including price, access, reference groups, loved ones, and peers.

Thus, agency is often mitigated by context. For example, one who keeps kosher so observant family or peers feel comfortable eating in her home cannot decide for herself what is and is not kosher enough for her household. That determination belongs to those she hosts. Likewise, one who cannot access or cannot afford kosher meat has fewer options for observance. She can eat exclusively vegetarian, or she can maintain a kosher style diet. Nonetheless, challenge breeds autonomy. Kashrut observers in the United States, who seek to live lives integrated with the larger American population,

frequently find that strict observance of kashrut, which, as discussed in Chapter One, exists in part to separate Jews from non-Jews, interferes with their other personal and social goals. This interference breeds critical examination of the law, and encourages observers to distinguish between essential and non-essential components of kashrut. In Israel, where such interference is limited, an observer need not examine the law with such a critical eye.

This thesis has also argued that non-Orthodox Jews are pulled toward kashrut to affirm their identities. Non-Orthodox observance is in some ways discontinuous with the past because observers make new determinations of what they will and will not allow. Yet for many, kashrut still creates a sense of continuity. Even modified and compromised observance can connect Jews throughout history and across the world as a part of ‘imagined communities.’ In contrast to Anderson’s model, which asserts that the ritual object which provides basis for imagined communities must be handled in a manner acceptable and recognizable to other members of the group,<sup>400</sup> for many, kashrut remains a strong identifier even when practices are deemed ‘unkosher’ to more Orthodox observers.

Observers can more easily imagine communities when they are surrounded by others with similar practices. As I argued in Chapter Three, Jewish communities create ‘plausibility structures’ which legitimate belief and practice. Even discontinuous and compromised choices may feel legitimate and meaningful when shared by members of a desired community. Although observing certain elements of kashrut and not others can sometimes create feelings of cognitive dissonance if an individual’s group perceives of her and labels her as “kosher,” she is likely to feel her choices are sound and continuous

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<sup>400</sup> Kopelwitz and Rosenberg, 141.

with those of other Jews. That being said, isolation also appears to create latitude in imagining communities through unique practices. When observance is not subject to communal scrutiny, an individual can decide independently which elements of kashrut are essential. Those, like Noah, who make such determinations, generally feel as strongly identified through their practice as more traditional observers.

Although for many, communal belonging is a central component of observance, in some cases, non-Orthodox observers define their Jewish identities in opposition, either to Orthodoxy or to the non-Jewish world. Many American non-Orthodox Jews keep kosher to establish their difference. By avoiding bacon and cheeseburgers, they affirm that they are Jewish by asserting that they are separate from the American mainstream. Many non-Orthodox Israelis keep kosher to legitimate non-Orthodox religious practice. By keeping kosher while maintaining relationships with secular Israelis, they affirm that there is a less divisive and less extreme approach to religious practice. These observers thus affirm continuity with the larger Jewish people by establishing their difference from those surrounding them, whose choices, as they see it, threaten future Jewish continuity.

The heightened and more widespread observance of Israelis compared to Americans indicates that under the right conditions, kashrut observance will grow. This tendency is significant because kashrut promotes a global and transcendent Jewish identity in a period in which other global Jewish identifiers are becoming particularly weak. Collective memories of persecution, the Holocaust, and the foundation of Israel, no longer bond Jews across the globe.<sup>401</sup> Today Israelis and Americans disagree not only

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<sup>401</sup> "In Search of Roots and Routes," 213.



on religion, but also on fundamental political questions.<sup>402</sup> Steven Cohen of Hebrew Union College notes that even religious holidays take different meanings in Israel than they do in the United States. For example, in the United States, Chanukah is a response to Christmas and a statement of Jewishness in the face of assimilation. In Israel, Chanukah is a celebration of Jewish strength and Jewish nationalism.<sup>403</sup> If even religious holidays do not unite the American and the Israeli Jewish communities, kashrut may be one of the few remaining shared identifiers.

Although many Jews identify as Jewish through specific dishes and recipes, the foods identified as “Jewish” vary across regional and ethnic lines. In general, the “Jewish foods” of one country more closely resemble that country’s non-Jewish cuisine than the Jewish cuisines of other countries. Determinations of what foods are ‘Jewish’ also appear to vary from household to household. Whereas Hodaya associates spaghetti squash and meatballs with the Passover celebration,<sup>404</sup> I posit that few others would make the same association. This means that “Jewish eating” is more a local than a global identifier, meaning it identifies Jews with their ethnicity and nationality instead of with the global Jewish community. Rather than uniting Jews through what they *do* eat, kashrut unites them through what they *do not* eat. In so doing, it creates a ritual practice that enables Jews, throughout the world, to imagine their choices mirrored in others.

Non-Orthodox observance is significant because if kashrut is, as I have argued, a way to maintain Jewish community and continuity, the connection maintained through kashrut cannot exist only among Orthodox Jews. Because Orthodox Jews comprise a minority of both the Israeli (22 percent) and American (10 percent) communities, and a

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<sup>402</sup> Pew, “American and Israeli Jews: Twin Portraits.”

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Interview with “Hodaya,” January 27, 2017, unpublished.

significant portion of Israel's (45 percent) and America's (62 percent) Orthodox population is *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox)<sup>405</sup> and largely separate from American and Israeli life, a connection sustained only among the Orthodox isolates the majority of both Israeli and American Jews.

My research indicates that most who keep kosher also maintain other religious practices. In the United States most who keep kosher are involved in synagogues, and many who keep kosher in Israel are Shabbat observant. Those who keep kosher but do not practice other Jewish rituals are generally those who keep kosher only for the sake of others, or those who continue to keep kosher out of habit, because non-kosher foods have no appeal. This indicates that many Americans and Israelis are drawn to keeping kosher for similar reasons as they are drawn to going to synagogue or to observing Shabbat. Although observers often find unique meaning in keeping kosher, and many believe that keeping kosher is particularly significant because it is a constant reminder of Jewish identity, kashrut observers appear to be those drawn more broadly toward ritual practices.

Ritual practice does not necessarily indicate belief in God. As I argued in Chapter Three, because there are fewer non-religious avenues for Americans than Israelis to express non-religious Jewish identities, American Jews may be drawn to ritual because they lack alternatives. In fact, some, like Ethan, enjoy the discipline of kashrut, but do not believe in God.<sup>406</sup> Likewise, because social contact with other Jews is found to highly correlate with Jewish identification and religious practice,<sup>407</sup> it seems probable that many

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<sup>405</sup> "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews," *Pew Forum*, Accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/essay/american-and-israeli-jews-twin-portraits-from-pew-research-center-surveys/>; *Pew*, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society."

<sup>406</sup> Interview with "Ethan," October 18, 2017, unpublished.

<sup>407</sup> Amyot and Sigelman, 183.

keep kosher and attend synagogue in order to ‘belong’ to a community, without personally believing in God.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This thesis has focused primarily on Ashkenazi experiences in Israel and in the United States. The vast majority of those I interviewed had lived for some amount of time in the United States. Although this research provides insight into how observance changes across national lines, it does not depict the *sabra* (native Israeli) or the Sephardi experiences. Although *olim* comprise a significant portion of *Masorti* Israelis, *sabra* and Sephardim are still the majority. Thus, insofar as this thesis is an attempt to compare Israel’s *Masorti* community with America’s Conservative and Reform, interviews with more *sabras* and Sephardim would better elucidate the dynamics of another sector of Israeli *Masortim*. These interviews should ideally be conducted in Hebrew, as interviewees are likely most forthcoming in their native language.

Additionally, Shlomit Levy makes the argument that “in order to belong to and to continue the Jewish group in Israel, the ‘not strictly observant’ Jew selectively adopts religious motifs, without necessarily attaching religious significance to them.”<sup>408</sup>

According to this argument, some Israelis keep kosher as a form of nationalism while simultaneously rejecting the religious validity of dietary laws. None of the Israelis I interviewed take this approach, but many secular Israelis likely do. For these observers, kashrut may be a form of local and national identification, but not a form of global Jewish identification. Future research should examine why secular identifying Israelis are

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<sup>408</sup> Shlomit Levy, “Selective Observance as Component of Jewish Identity in Contemporary Israeli Society,” *Contemporary Jewry* 22, No. 1 (January 2001): 2.

motivated to keep kosher, and whether the meaning they associate with observance is substantively different than that of *Masortim*.

Because kashrut is frequently understood as a means to combat assimilation, future research should examine how sustainably dietary practices can maintain identity in assimilated environments. Can kashrut affirm Jewish identity on its own, or need observers also maintain other ritual practices to feel Jewish? Need observers relate their kashrut to their faith to feel connected to a global and transcendent Jewish community? Are there other daily observances, like kashrut, which affirm Jewish identity? If so, what are they, and how does their practice and the meaning attributed to them compare to that attributed to keeping kosher?

Future research might also compare Jewish kashrut observance with other groups' approaches to dietary restrictions. For example, do Muslims approach *halal* in comparable ways to Jews? Further, how is identification through non-religious practices like veganism or vegetarianism different from identification through religious restrictions? Such research might indicate the centrality of faith to kashrut observance. Because few of my interviewees mentioned God when discussing their observance, the primacy non-Orthodox Jews place on faith requires further examination.

Future research on food and identity will help us further understand how food practices and food taboos connect individuals to imagined communities. Although certain 'ritual' practices, like reading a newspaper, may be performed uniformly across national and even global lines, food practices, so long as they are left to individual choice, never will. As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, eating is influenced by peers, tastes, price, accessibility, and reference groups. Because these factors vary from individual to individual, even those who imagine communities often imagine others with

practices unlike their own. Future research ought determine whether this type of imagined community is substantively different from that formed through uniform ritual practices.

## Appendix: Interview Script

Can you tell me about where you live and where you have lived?

For *Olim*: What brought you to make *aliyah*?

Growing up how did you and your family-observe kashrut?

Do you have memories of specific dishes, holidays, or rituals you found particularly meaningful?

What other Jewish practices do you remember observing?

Did you go to synagogue? If so, for what events? How regularly?

Do you remember your family's observance as changing, or do you remember it as more static?

Did you ever independently decide to keep kosher?

Did you have any breaks and starts to your observances?

Can you tell me about how you keep kosher at home?

Can you explain your process for *kashering* your kitchen?

Would you describe yourself as 'detail oriented' when it comes to kashrut?

Have you ever mistakenly eaten something that is not kosher? If so, what happened?

How did you feel?

How do you keep kosher outside the home?

What keeps you keeping kosher?

Do you find it meaningful?

For *Olim*: do you associate different meaning with keeping kosher in Israel than you do in the United States?

Do you find it difficult?

For *Olim*: what are the differences between keeping kosher in Israel and keeping kosher in the United States?

Do you have friends or family who don't keep kosher?

Do you eat or cook together? If so, what do you do?

For *Olim*: if you think of your friends who are native born to Israel whose attitudes toward Judaism are most similar to yours, do they differ and how?

For Israelis: Do you feel that the climate around kashrut has changed in the time you have lived in Israel? If so, how?

How do you think your Jewish peers who themselves keep kosher perceive your keeping kosher?

How do you think your Jewish peers who do not keep kosher perceive your keeping kosher?

How do you think your non-Jewish peers perceive your keeping kosher?

What other rituals, if any, do you find important to observe?

Do you attend synagogue regularly? In what capacity?

Demographic Questions:

Age

Highest Level of Education

Profession

Marital and familial status

Ashkenazi/ Sephardi

Denominational identification

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