FROM THE 'TREIFA BANQUET' TO TOMORROW'S CLASSROOMS: EDUCATING ABOUT KASHRUT IN A REFORM SETTING

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In memory of my grand-father

Nathan Horvilleur z"l,

who 'fed' me with an enlightened Judaism.

A la mémoire de mon grand-père

Nathan Horvilleur z"l,

qui m'a nourrie d'un judaïsme éclairé

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"FROM THE TREIFAH BANQUET TO TOMORROW'S CLASSROOM: EDUCATING ABOUT KASHRUT IN A REFORM SETTING"

INTRODUCTION:

IS *KASHRUT* ... IN THE AIR?

For over a century, *kashrut* has been perceived as a kind of 'boundary' of differentiation between practicing and non-practicing Jews. As Max Freudenthal (1868-1937), a German Reformer, wrote[1]:

"The laws of kashrut are generally considered by Jews themselves to be the watershed between orthodoxy and liberalism. He who keeps dietary laws appears to the liberals as an orthodox Jew, and those who disregard them are, in return, decried by the orthodox not only as liberals but even as godless and un-Jewish"

Nevertheless, the current praxis among Jews seem to be less polarized than this quote may suggest. Indeed, many Reform leaders define themselves nowadays as adhering to a 'form' of *kashrut* practice. Many Reform congregations have developed a 'form of' *kashrut* policy inside their institutions and the question of *kashrut* is today a 'hot topic' in different settings of the Movement. In the following analysis, I will present examples that testify to the prevalent debate in the Movement. In fact, in the fall of 2001, the CCAR sponsored a two-day conference in Boston. There, participants explored the theme of diet in Jewish life, and some

[1] G. Plaut, cited in The Growth of Reform Judaism, WUPJ edition, 1965, p. 266

leaders even expressed the necessity to formulate a 'Movement statement' on the issue of *kashrut*.

Even in our institution, the Hebrew Union College, *kashrut* has become a theme in sermons and discussions among Hebrew students. Both the current and future leaders of the Movement are grappling with this issue on a regular basis in formal and informal conversations.

PERSONAL REASONS FOR CHOOSING THIS THEME

As I started to consider topics for my education thesis, I looked for a subject that would allow me to dive into my deepest theological doubts and dilemmas. Since I first became involved with the Reform movement and started to teach in Reform congregations, I have often confronted the same philosophical dilemma: as a movement which places such a strong emphasis on personal choice and autonomy, how do we / should we teach about the concept of *mitzvah or* commandment?

Recently, when I taught my students about *tzedakah*, I said to my fourth graders *"a mitzvah is something you HAVE to do, not simply something you CAN do to be nice."* Zoe, a thoughtful ten-year old girl, raised her hand and timidly asked: *"But isn't it better to do something out of your heart rather than just because you are forced to?"* Zoe, probably unaware that she was touching one of the most central questions of modern Jewish philosophy, brought me back to this central question and challenge.

How do we teach about duty and commitment, when we place such a high value on freedom and informed choice?

To answer this question, I have researched the relationship of Reform Jews to *kashrut*. Indeed, *kashrut* appears to me as the ideal example in which to explore this question. Undoubtedly,

we feel more confident teaching and preaching about *tzedaka* or *tikkun olam*: *mitsvot* which are more obviously perceived as ethical. What about *kashrut*? How do we perceive and present to our congregants this less obviously ethical *mitsvah*?

In this thesis, I will analyze this question through a historical and philosophical lens. I have focused on different educational settings and then proposed a curriculum related to *kashrut* for congregational boards, who might be considering the issue and the teaching of *kashrut* inside their institutions.

Finally, I will discuss the Movement's theological approach to *mitzvah* . How have our scholars, rabbis and theologians reconciled the dichotomy between duty and free will? How have they explained *mitzvah* in the light of autonomy?

My hypothesis is that the way *kashrut* has been taught and continues to be taught today precisely mirrors the Movement's theological approach to the notion of *mitzva*.

FIRST PART :

IS IT "KOSHER" TO BE KOSHER

WITHIN THE REFORM MOVEMENT?

The year 1883 is probably the most symbolic date in the History of American Reform Jews' relationship to *kashrut*. In that year, the newly-formed HEBREW UNION COLLEGE ordained its first class of Reform American rabbis, in Cincinnati. This event, which might have marked the official birth of an American-raised Jewish leadership, was instead to be remembered as a scandalous episode: "The Treifa Banquet."

I-THE FOUNDING NARRATIVE

On July 11, 1883, at the official ceremony following the first Hebrew Union College ordination, graduating rabbinical students and their family participated in a banquet. An eight-course dinner was served for two hundred people at the Highland House in Cincinnati. "*Terrific excitement ensued when two rabbis rushed from the room: littleneck clams had been placed before them as the first course.*"[2] The Banquet basically *"violated every law of kashrut, except the prohibition on Pork.* "[3] Was this merely an 'involuntary mistake', as some argued? If it was the result of a deliberate choice, the incident surely served as an ideological

[2] Joan Nathan, A social history of Jewish food in America, in Food and Judaism, Creighton Press, 2002, p.5
[3] Aaron Gross, Reform views of Kashrut, in CCAR Journal, winter 2004, p.9

statement. Largely reported on, in the Jewish press, the event became the focus of a wide controversy and probably contributed much to the formation of the Conservative movement[4].

[4] argued by R. Isaacs and K. Olitzky in Critical documents of Jewish History: a sourcebook, Northvale, N.J., London, 1995, p.60

THE MENU OF THE TREIFA BANQUET

MENU.

Little Neck Clams (Half Shell).

Amontillado."
Sherry.

POTAGES.

Consomme Royal.

Sauternes."

POISSONS.

Fillet de Boef, aux Champignons.
Soft Shell Crabs,
a l'Amerique, Pommes Duchesse.
Salade of Shrimp.

St. Julien."

ENTREE.

Sweet Breads, a la Monglas.
Patte Pois, a la Francaise.

Deidesheimer."

RELEVEE.

Poulets, a la Viennoise.
Asperges Sauce, Vinaigrette Pomme
"Punch Romain." [Pate.
Grenouilles a la Creme and Cauliflower.

ROTI.

Vol au Vents de Pigeons, a la Tyrolienne
Salade de Saison.
"G. H. Mumm Extra Dry."

HORS-D'OEUVERS.

Bouchies de Volaille, a la Regence.
Olives Cavir, Sardelline de Holland
"Brissolins au Supreme Tomato
Mayonaise.

SUCRES.

Ice Cream.
Assorted and Ornamented Cakes.

ENTREMENTS.

Fromages Varies. Fruits Varies.
"Martell Cognac." Cafe Noir.

II- THE 'ORIGINAL SIN' OF *KASHRUT*

- *KASHRUT* OBSERVANCE "OBSTRUCTS" SPIRITUAL ELEVATION.

This position, developed in the **first Pittsburgh Platform** (1885), has become known as the expression of 'Classical Reform Judaism.' At that time, there was a will among Reform Jews to go beyond the particularism of their faith and thus an anti-ritual culture emerged in the movement. This platform resulted largely from the work of Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), then a rabbi in New York, helped by fourteen of his colleagues.

Together they edited this platform around eight points. The fourth point, concerned with *kashrut* among other topics, reads:

> *'We hold that all such mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress, originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely 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.'*

It may be that the groundwork for this radical position was laid by the Treifa Banquet. The episode may have alienated, at least, some individuals who would have pleaded for a softer position. But in reality, this statement, targeting outmoded rituals that do not elevate an individual's spiritual experience, fits the classical Reform beliefs. Kohler and his peers championed ethics over rituals, as stated in the third point of the Pittsburgh Platform:

> *'we recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today,* ***we accept as binding only the moral laws*** *... but reject all (ceremonies) not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.'*

Therefore, for early Reformers, the unproven morality of *kashrut* called for its rejection. Moreover, they argued that *kashrut* should be avoided because it accentuated Jewish particularism. Classical Reformers sought a universalistic message within Judaism and thus a distancing from "Jewish-y" rituals. Indeed, many viewed *kashrut* as a practice impeding Jewish-Gentiles relationships. Not only was *kashrut* not perceived as an ethical practice but **the rejection of *kashrut* was viewed as ethical**, because it eliminated boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, and pleaded in favor of a universalistic message of Judaism.

The platform was released as Jews were striving to integrate into modern civilization. *Kashrut* was perceived as a barrier to modern Jews' integration into mainstream society. Its rejection was a pre-condition for a successful adaptation to the American society. Finally, at a time of rationalistic thought, the rabbis perceived *kashrut* as a non-rational ritual. The sixth point of the platform declares:

> *'we recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason'*

Thus, the early Reformers rejected *kashrut* on the basis of four reasons: a spiritual quest (in their eyes, *kashrut* is not inspiring), a concern for ethics, rationality and universalism. Starting our research with the two dates of 1883 (Treifa Banquet) and 1885 (Pittsburgh Platform), we shall see that these four anti-*kashrut* motives have

regularly emerged throughout the movement's history. Paradoxically, these very same motives have surfaced to advocate a return to *kashrut.*

III-THE SPIRITUAL RATIONALE

As described, the **Pittsburgh Platform** called for a rejection of *kashrut* because it did not inspire Modern Jews. Yet, to this day, Reform theologians and leaders have brought forth the inspirational motive of *kashrut* on many occasions.

- *KASHRUT* IS INSPIRATIONAL

In an almost complete opposition to the Pittsburgh Platform, the **Columbus Platform** (1937) claims that certain rituals have *'a potential to increase inspiration, and a sense of holiness for the person who performs them.'* The Columbus Platform is largely the work of Samuel S. Cohon (1888-1959), a theology professor at HUC. Its content reflects a new period of the Movement's history. Reform theology was then clearly shifting from an anti-ritual stance, which characterized the beginning of the century. On one hand, the document repeats an argument already expressed in the Pittsburgh Platform and affirms that certain Torah laws *'being products of historical processes, ... have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth'*. But on the other hand, the Columbus Platform specifies that *'Judaism, as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value.'*

Kashrut is never specifically mentioned in the Columbus Platform. However, the document reclaims the value of certain rituals, whether or not ethical in nature. This clearly departs from purely ethical/rationalistic concerns expressed half a century earlier in Pittsburgh. This new platform introduces the value of rituals as being purely inspirational, even if not obviously ethical.

- *KASHRUT* CREATES HOLINESS

In 1979, the movement published a new guide called **Gates of *Mitzvah*** . Forty years after the Columbus Platform and less than a century after the Pittsburgh Platform, the discourse on the possible inspirational value of *kashrut* is clearly affirmed. *Kashrut* is referred to and described as *'offering the possibility of sanctification'*. Addressing dietary restrictions, it states that *'Jews should consider carefully whether or not it would add Qedusha* (holiness) *to their home and lives'*.

Adding *Qedusha* to people's life and home via actions and celebrations thus becomes one of the major arguments in favor of maintaining rituals in the movement. By this time, the same rationale of holiness appeared in books and educational resources when rituals such as lighting Shabbat candles and blessing one's children are discussed.

Over time, the possibility of enhancing one's spirituality through special rituals, including *kashrut,* becomes articulated more and more vociferously in the Reform discourse. In 1988, a CCAR task force on religious commitment declared that *kashrut* is 'a *Mitzvah that* can *deepen a Reform Jew's spiritual life.'* A century after Pittsburgh, this argument is a precise semantic antithesis of the original declaration, where *kashrut "obstructs spiritual elevation.".*

In 1999, a new Pittsburgh Platform is written. Richard Levy, then president of CCAR, intends this new document to present the Movement's new emphasis on religious commitment. The Platform states that *"we bring Torah into the world when we seek to sanctify the times and places of our lives through regular home and congregational observance."*

The motive of *Qedusha* / sanctification / holiness becomes central in the Reform vocabulary of this time, as evidenced in Platforms, guides and educational resources. For example, *Kashrut* and Holy Days are defined as moments when one can enhance *Qedusha* into one's life. What is truly meant by this vocabulary? The vagueness of the concept of sanctification gives rise to seemingly paradoxical expressions. For example, in an article entitled Qedusha in Diet[5], Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus writes: *"kashrut cannot be successfully imposed as a group discipline anymore than the observance of Shabbat can be legislated for the totality of Reform Jews...quite different is the ideal of Qedusha in diet...certainly adults and children should be encouraged, as they seat themselves at the table, to pause and to reflect upon how much they owe to the countless men and women who planned, toiled, produced ...the foodstuffs that maintain them and promote their well-being. ...the quiet moments at table will help us to bond more closely with our nearest and dearest,...to cultivate qedushah by means of diet. And the pursuit of that ideal is not restricted to Jews alone."*

To Dreyfus, diet is a means to attaining *qedusha*, a synonym of universal gratefulness, not the expression of a Jewish religious particularism.

In contrast, Richard Levy defined *qedusha* as been brought forth by Torah (i.e. through a particularistic Jewish path) into our homes and congregational practice.

- *KASHRUT* BUILDS SELF-DISCIPLINE

A classical Reformer, Bernhard Felsenthal (1861-1905), was one of the few who argued at his time in favor of observing the laws of *kashrut* in the movement. He perceived it to be an ethical practice simply because of the discipline it entailed. He wrote that "*dietary laws have a deeper ethical significance...they teach us the lovely virtue of self-discipline, and thereby assist us to become a holy people.*" [6]

This same motive is found in the words of another scholar, Jacob J. Petuchowski (1925-1991), a Professor of Theology at HUC Cincinnati. Petuchowski wrote many articles stressing the observance of the *mitzvot* / commandments as the major task facing Reform Jews. To him, *kashrut* is the embodiment of this challenge:

> *"Consider for example the case of the man who, after sober reflection has come to the conclusion that one of the ways which he can make God more real in his life is that of self-discipline. He cultivates the habit of saying "NO" to himself occasionally...Now if this man were a Jew, a moderately informed kind of Jew, he would find such a system of self-discipline ready-made for him in the pages of the Torah. This, he could adopt as a whole, or a part... Moreover, in addition to cultivating self-discipline for his own spiritual welfare, he would, at the same time, strengthen his links with the Jewish past and the torah*

[5] The CCAR Journal, winter 2004, p29
[6] quoted by Gunther Plaut, in the Growth of Reform Judaism, New York WUPJ, 1965, p26

tradition. Above all, he would furnish an example of how a cold letter of dietary legislation could become a living commandment" [7]

Here, Petuchowski regards *kashrut* as serving very different goals: spiritual, religious and historical motives, all together. By a practice of self-discipline, one approaches the divine and reaches spiritual elevation. Bringing to life a legal document and strengthening one's link with Jewish history are other justifications for maintaining the practice, according to the author.

IV- THE ETHICAL MOTIVE

• THE ETHICS OF PARTICULARISM

As discussed, the early Reformers denounced *kashrut* as a practice impeding relationships between Jews and Gentiles. Their concern for universalism impelled them to condemn such a particularistic ritual, as unethical. The extreme emphasis on universalism has recently waned, as seen in the new Pittsburgh Platform of 1999, which specifies that *"certain sacred obligations...demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our times"*. The document does not, however, specify which sacred obligations demand attention, whether or not *kashrut* is included in them and what this 'new context of our time' means. This lack of precision sounds like an invitation to free interpretation. I posit that this "context" refers to a new social reality, both a changed situation for Jews living in the American society and a new

[7] Jacob Petuchowski, in Ever since Sinai, New-York publication, 1961, p109

culture in the American society in general. Jews are well integrated into the society and need not fear anymore that *kashrut* might create divisions between them and the rest of society. The American society, generally speaking, has come to accept pluralism, not only religious ones but also ideological ones. American society tolerates and has a positive regard for 'different diet', such as vegetarianism or ethnical choices. As Richard Levy, former CCAR president explains:

> *"In today's society, separation, or diversity is becoming the norm, particularly in dietary preferences. These days, the host will ask 'are you vegetarian? Is there anything you can't eat?'* [8]

To a certain extend, having a 'special diet' is almost a manifestation of 'American-ness'. Given the high level of integration on the part of Reform Jews in America, the practice of *kashrut* is no longer perceived as harmful.

- **THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL**

At the 1976 CCAR convention in San Francisco, a new platform largely authored by Professor Eugene Borowitz, appeared. This document stresses the importance of Jewish peoplehood.

> *"Jews...constitute an uncommon union of faith and peoplehood ... throughout our long History our people has been inseparable from its religion with its messianic hope that humanity will be redeemed."*

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[8] quoted by Aaron Gross, in the CCAR journal, winter 2004, p11

Unlike the Pittsburgh Platform which stated that '*we are no longer a nation, but a religion*', here the authors perceive national and religious concerns as elements that cannot be separated. Thus, they trigger a possible 'reconciliation' between Reform theology and Jewish ritual particularism. In the case of *kashrut*, the ritual links us to our People, both religiously and historically.

In an article published in the Jewish daily, Forward on August 17th 2001, Rabbi David Forman expresses a similar point in a language uncommon to Reform Rabbis:

> *"By maintaining a respect for kashrut and incorporating some IF NOT ALL (*my emphasis*) of the rules governing a Kosher home into our lives, we have a good chance of holding on to our Judaism and contributing to the perpetuation of the Jewish people."*

The idea of keeping a ritual in the name of our link to past and future generations is emphasized. The notion of a transgenerational duty, rather than a pure individual choice, is incorporated in this new definition of the *mitzvah*.

This survival motive for *kashrut*, voiced by the author, is found again in other publications of the Movement. In 1979, Gates of *Mitzvah* reads:

> *" The fact that kashrut was for many centuries an essential part of Judaism, and that so many Jews gave their lives for it, should move Reform Jews to study it and to consider (it) carefully."*

For the authors of Gates of *Mitzvah*, history can indeed be a source of duty.

- **THE ETHICS OF "KLAL ISRAEL"**

Should Reform Rabbis eat *'davka'* (on purpose) non-kosher meals, as an identity statement? The question may sound like pure provocation. But, in fact, generations of Rabbis have debated this question in private conversations. One example was reported in an article of the Jewish Bulletin news of Northern California:

> *"Richard Levy* (former CCAR president) *remembers well a conversation he had with a fellow student in his first year of rabbinical school...the two rabbis-to-be were discussing Jewish dietary restrictions, and felt that Reform Jews should eat pork on principle."*[9]

Gross affirms that such stories are commonplace. This dietary choice was, for those Reform (future) leaders, a powerful tool to act according to their universalistic values and embody their rejection of any religious particularism.

Turning the universalism of classical Reform on its head, some of today's Reformers keep kosher with specifically 'other Jews' on their mind. *"Many opt to eat Kosher, not because they are commanded, but to make possible for all Jews to eat at their table."* [10]

This is especially true of institutions in which people with different levels of practice coexist. For example, on the New-York campus of HUC-JIR, all the official meals served to student

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[9] Jewish Bulletin News of Northern California, July 20th 2001, quoted by Aaron Gross, in the CCAR Journal, winter 2004 p.24

[10] Simon Maslin, in Reform Judaism Magazine, summer 1996

bodies and faculty are Kosher to ensure that all will be able to eat. Many Reform schools, whose faculty is composed of people with different affiliations and levels of practice, have adopted the same policy. This is the case at Rodeph Sholom religious school in New-York, as will be demonstrated below.

- **THE ETHICS OF ECO-*KASHRUT***

The nexus between diet and the environment has recently entered Reform discourse on *kashrut*. The term "eco-kashrut," coined by Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi in the mid-70's, was popularized by Arthur Waskow in the late 80's. Eco-*kashrut* is linked to four biblical or talmudic notions which are defined as criteria for *an* ethical behavior toward environment: Bal Tashch'it (excessive waste), Tzaar Baalei Chaim (cruelty to animals), Shmirat Haguf (Health) and Oshek (labor exploitation). But its definition can embrace larger meanings as well:

> *"Today, various Jewish and secular initiatives seek to further the connection by putting an 'eco-hecksher' on those products which are least environmentally damaging. And eco-kashrut's scope is still wider: today's world "consumes" not only food but paper, energy, land, species, societies."* [11]

The ethical question of caring for animal suffering as an integral part of a *kashrut* practice entered Reform discourse several years ago. In the summer of 1996, Reform Judaism

magazine included an article by Simon Maslin who wrote that *'some might define kashrut as abstaining from mammal meat entirely. Some might choose vegetarianism ... Are Jews who require a more painful method of slaughter, because they adhere to the method of antiquity, more authentic than Jews who, having studied the tradition and infused its spirit, have opted for a culinary regimen more consonant with contemporary understandings of a humane diet?'*

Two years later, Richard Levy wrote:

> *'A Reform approach to kashrut should also encourage concern for Tzar Baalei Chaim, the pain of living creature ... and might prohibit fruits and vegetables grown with pesticides or harvested under inhuman conditions."* [12]

Most recently, a rabbinical student devoted an entire sermon to this subject at the HUC campus in New York. Jared Saks' words were particularly well-received by the rabbinical and cantorial student body, as he said:

> *"...Just as those who keep kosher will not eat food if they are unsure of how it has been prepared; so, too, we cannot eat food if we are not fully aware of how it was treated before arriving at our tables. Even animals slaughtered in kosher slaughterhouses are treated cruelly. For me, the hechsher isn't enough to make this kosher meat..."*

Jared Saks explained, in this sermon, his own path toward dietary rules. He started to eat Kosher when he moved to Israel. Then, he read Eric Schlosser's Fast Food Nation, and

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[11] D. Teutsch, in A guide to Jewish Practice, RRC press, 2000, p.33
[12] R. Levy, in Reform Judaism magazine, winter 1998

discovered there that keeping kosher, a choice he felt *'connected (him) to God, was just as bad as not keeping kosher'* in terms of cruelty toward animals. This led him to stop eating Kosher. As he wrote:

> *"I would rather have free-range chicken at a health conscious restaurant than have a pastrami sandwich at a kosher deli. It seems to me that if keeping Kosher is about God's presence in even such ordinary acts like eating, then the meal that keeps the animal's treatment in mind is much more of a kosher meal than the one with the hechsher. Keeping Kosher was no longer enough because simply keeping kosher, to me, was Un-Jewish".*

Saks concludes his sermon with the following:

> *"Let's make organic, animal-friendly food a priority in our community. We should not be comfortable keeping kosher if kosher meat is not organic and not free-range. Be concerned about the animal products you eat. Our actions have direct consequences. There are consequences for partaking in food that ignores the presence of God. In order to serve God fully, we must respect God's creation..."*

The practice of eco-kashrut described here combines the ethical and spiritual meaning of the dietary practice. Caring for the environment and inviting God to our table are united under the eco-kashrut motive.

Those two concerns are also voiced in the Movement by those who see vegetarianism as a form of *kashrut*. A resolution advocating vegetarianism is currently being considered by the CCAR task force on *kashrut* . This resolution's project focuses on Biblical passages which

seem to advocate a vegetarian diet. For example, Genesis 1:29 is interpreted by some as a 'prooftext' that God's primary and ideal dietary command is vegetarian. Alternatively, some quote the talmudic sentence: *"A man should not eat meat unless he has a special craving for it."*[13]

The Reform vegetarian option is still very marginal and it is difficult to know if it will be implemented on a larger scale in the Movement.

- **THE ETHICS OF HEALTH/RATIONALISM**

As discussed, some classical Reformers argued that rationalism dictated a rejection of traditional dietary regulations. Their concern with health often brought them, too, to the same conclusion. For example, one of the first Reform cookbooks published in America opened with the following introducing sentence:

"Nothing is treif if it is good and healthy!" [14]

The desire to find a rational and a scientific basis for/against *kashrut* is not new. Many have argued already that traditional *kashrut* is empirically healthier and more hygienic than other diets. Maimonides, for example, in his Guide for the perplexed III:48 argues *that 'forbidden foods are injurious to the body'*. Largely unpersuasive by scientific standards, those attempts have lost their sway. But today, they are being used again, in a different context. Some Reformers who advocate vegetarianism often bring health considerations to their defense. Health is indeed one of the four central elements which define Eco-*kashrut* (see above) and in

[13] Babylonian Talmud, H'ullin 84a
[14] Kramer, Bertha, Aunt Babette's Cookbook, Bloch Publishing, Cincinnati, 1889

our society, the vegetarian option is often perceived as the 'healthy' one. Therefore, paradoxically, the new Reformers' view of *kashrut* as being an healthy practice is very close to traditional claims such as Maimonides'. One main difference, however, is that traditionally, Jews have argued that *kashrut* IS healthier, whereas a minority in the movement today argue that *kashrut* HAS TO BE MADE healthier through vegetarianism.

V- THE THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

In 1967, Arnold Jacob Wolf (1924-), a Chicago Reform Rabbi and a prolific theologian of the Movement, expressed a new Reform argument in favor of *Kashrut*:

> *"I do not think that "Jewish" means only peculiar to Jews, otherwise keeping Kosher would be a higher mitsva than loving one's neighbor. The point is that the Jew helps God by loving AND by eating. In our post-Freudian age, we know how closely eating and loving are linked, how profoundly they interpenetrate. None of us would be able to say with Jesus anymore, "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man" What goes in comes out! Distinctions between ethical and ritual commandments are invariably immature if not downright useless. Religion is not only a matter of being a good boy; in fact being a good boy is a lot harder than it looked to early Reform Judaism. The country of Kant and Herman Cohen produced the murder camps. Everyone knew what was good, but very few Germans risked doing it. The problem of religion is*

not saying good things but changing people. Kashrut may be as relevant to that task as Tzedakah; they are inseparable."[15]

Such a statement may stand as the most radical shift from the classical Reformers' stance. The theological argument that *kashrut* is a commandment just as important as any other, such as loving one's neighbor or giving *tzedaka* may surprise when it is expressed by a Reform leader. The emphasis on the duty component of dietary regulation, just as in any *mitzva,* is a relatively new emphasis in the Reform leadership's writing and it will be developed in the fourth part of this thesis.

VI- CONCLUSION OF PART I

We have studied the evolution of the Reform approach to *kashrut,* starting with a careful analysis of the Movement's platforms. While the first Pittsburgh Platform (1885) defined the dietary laws as *'totally foreign to our present mental and spiritual state',* yet the second Pittsburgh platform (1999) suggests that *'certain sacred obligations... demand renewed attention'* and calls us to study *'the whole array of mitzvot'* (which clearly includes the 'mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress', rejected in 1885). Despite the apparent discrepancy between the two documents, a close study of the various rationales for rejecting and embracing *kashrut* suggests a certain consistency in the Reformers' approaches to dietary regulation. Even in the most obvious changes in attitude toward *kashrut*, there exists an intellectual continuity in the justifications and interpretations of the issue.

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[15] Arnold Wolf in Unfinished Rabbi Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 1967, p21

Interestingly, the ethical, philosophical and rational impetuses which motivated Classical Reformers to reject *kashrut* are precisely the ones which support the positive approach to dietary restrictions by today's Reformers.

The classical Reformers rejected *kashrut* because they responded to an ethical call, as well as a universalistic one. *Kashrut* was viewed solely as a ritual practice, which impeded Jewish/gentiles relationship. Its rejection was not only possible, it was ethically just and philosophically right.

Today's Reform discourse no longer claims, as early Reformers did, that ethics and rationalism take precedence over rituals. Yet, the idea that one should follow *kashrut* simply 'because God says so' is almost never argued. The particular *kashrut* practice to which Reform seems to be returning today is indeed very different from traditional *kashrut*.

Today, as in previous eras, the discussion of *kashrut* is nurtured by ethical concerns. The fact that it may be a strictly ritual observance is sometimes suggested but is far from being the major rationale. *Kashrut* may be practiced BUT in the context of a reflection on its rational and Jewish ethical reason.

Today's motives to follow *kashrut* laws often put the emphasis on ethical/utilitarian considerations, contending that *kashrut* can create holiness in one's life and home, that it can strengthen solidarity within the Jewish people, support the environment or participate in Tikun olam ... Reformers today are therefore led by ethical motives, similar to the ones their predecessors valued. They still stand very far from a traditionalist/orthodox interpretation of *kashrut*.

In an article entitled A new freedom for Reform Jews, Richard Levy writes [16]

> *"The time has come to demonstrate how expansive the dietary possibilities might be for serious Reform Jews who want to deepen the spiritual content of their lives by transforming the act of eating into a celebration of the presence of God in their homes, and strike a blow for social justice in the field and factories where food is produced."*

Thus, Reformers seem to be faithful to their fathers' values, putting the ethical concern at the core of their rationale in favor of *kashrut*. But as they try to reconcile a spiritual claim with a purely ethical one, their question is not whether to choose the rite over the ethics, but how to reclaim the rites in the name of ethics.

[16] Richard Levy, The CCAR journal, winter 2004, p.46

PART II:

VESHINANTAM LEVANEICH'A...

And you shall teach your children...

I- FROM A VETO TO A 'WHY NOT?' :an historical overview of Educational resources

Now that we have traced the evolution of dietary restrictions in the movement's philosophy, we can analyze the way those approaches have been 'translated' into educational materials. Pedagogical resources, whether intended for learners or educators, undoubtedly reflect the theological standpoints of their time.

Throughout the movement's history, the educational message regarding *kashrut* has evolved. To understand this evolution, I will analyze the contents of five different guides, edited at different points by the UAHC Press. These guides, intended for a variety of demographics, share a similar goal: they offer a 'recipe' for Reform Jewish living. As such, they reflect religious ideologies of their time.

FIVE GUIDES TO LEAD A PRACTICE:

1- 1939- Markowitz Samuel H. **Adjusting the child to his world : Daily religion in the home**. *Committee on family education*, UAHC Press

2- 1955- Rabbi J. Folkman. **Design for Jewish Living, a guide for bride and groom**. UAHC Press, New-York.

3- 1967- Bial, Morrison David. **Liberal Judaism at Home**. UAHC Press, New-York.

4- 1988- Syme, Daniel B. **The Jewish Home, a guide for Jewish living**. UAHC Press, New-York.

5- 2000- Washofsky, Marc. **A guide for contemporary Reform Practice**. UAHC Press, New-York.

1 - 1939- Adjusting the Child to his World

This publication is geared toward educators in the movement and attempts to delineate a framework of Reform values to be taught. Its message on *kashrut* is clear, as it states:

> *" A kosher household, which was formerly perhaps the most concrete manifestation of Israel's faith, is out of the question, even if it were possible. Only those agencies and institutions which by their impressiveness and attractiveness are capable of contributing to Jewish life in the present are to be revitalized*

and restored. According to this criterion, kashrut is immediately vetoed. Not only is the observance of dietary laws difficult if not impossible in so many of our modern Jewish homes[17]*; it is unnecessary. There is nothing particularly attractive or inspiring in ritually prepared food."*

The rationale presented here for not keeping *kashrut* is both practical and spiritual. *Kashrut* is difficult for American Jews as it seems unsuitable their lifestyle in practical terms. It is also defined as "not inspiring" and the implementation of the *mitzva* is clearly taken into consideration. For the editors of the guide, educational religious tools seem to be valued only if they are easy to experience and spiritually inspiring. In the late 1930's, as Jews were still striving to integrate into American society (cf. part I), *kashrut* could not be part of "*Minhag America,*" the American Jewish way of life.

2- 1955- Design for Jewish Living, a Guide for Bride and Groom

This guide is edited with a specific audience in mind: the new Jewish couple. Future spouses, trying to define the place of Judaism in their new homes and lives, might find educational answers in this book. As the kitchen may be a central place in their lives, one might expect meals to be an important chapter in this guide. However, interestingly, there is absolutely no reference to *kashrut* in the entire

[17] This rationale fits the content of the Columbus Platform (1937) which states that "*some laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth*".

book. The chapter dealing with the Jewish home makes no allusion to this practice. The only suggestion on meals is the following:

> *"Mealtimes seems to be highly favorable for regular family worship...and an excellent opportunity for a meaningful religious experience on the family level. Awareness of the miracle of life and growth, divine bounty and grace that bring food from the earth for human needs, requires that every mealtime be inaugurated with some recognition of God as the source of life and the nourishment that sustains it. This simple benediction ought not to be neglected:* ***Baruch ata aolam eloheinu melech aolam hamotzi lechem min haaretz ,*** *praised be Thou, O Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who causeth the earth to yield food for all."*

Thus, this guide instructs that mealtime is a potential religious moment for the Jewish family. A ritual is therefore suggested to accompany this moment. Interestingly, there is no anti-ritual motive to explain a *kashrut* rejection, as one might expect from a 'Classical' Reform standpoint. On the contrary, the ritual itself is based on the traditional Jewish blessing, the *motzi.* But interestingly, this blessing, though traditional, is not translated literally. The presence of bread is not required to pronounce the blessing. Rather, this guide seems to suggest a more generalized acknowledgement of human gratitude to God for the earth's products. (One could argue that the author was a proto-environmentalist, or had a proto-Ecokashrut motive in mind when writing this passage).

3-1967- Liberal Judaism at Home

This guide presents a rationale for potentially following *kashrut* laws in Reform homes. It does not "veto" the practice (as in Markowitz' book), nor does it ignore *kashrut* entirely (as in Folkman's guide). Rather, *kashrut* is acknowledged as a positive practice in the name of pluralism.

> *"Liberal Judaism doesn't prescribe kashrut, neither does it condemn it. The guiding criterion is internal: whatever is meaningful to you, either spiritually, or as a link with the past, or with the whole house of Israel, by all means do! If kosher or partially kosher seems a true sign of a Jewish home, it is most important that the home be kept that way...Each liberal Jew must decide his own relationship to kashrut. Many Reform Jews consider kashrut peripheral to Judaism. If so, liberal Judaism causes them no difficulty. If you do not think that kashrut will add to the meaning of your experience as a Jew, you will find no problem confronting you as a Reform Jew. But please be aware that every reform synagogue contains many who disagree, and find meaningful satisfaction in the complete or partial observance of an age-old Jewish custom."*

This text does not prescribe one practice or another. No real guidance is offered to the reader. Rather, the author simply suggests that the scope of acceptable practices has enlarged to embrace the full spectrum of liberal Jewish observances.

As research shows, this pluralistic motive is still often referenced in contemporary resources.

4- 1988- The Jewish Home, a Guide for Jewish living

Although the majority of Reform Jews today do not follow traditional dietary regulations, many do practice a form of *kashrut*. However, the chapter dedicated to Jewish homes in this book (published in 1988) makes absolutely no reference to *kashrut* or any form of dietary regulation and ritual. While the guide deals at length with the meaning and symbolism of a *mezuzah*, there is no mention of particular features in the Jewish kitchen. (This same book has been revised in 2004 and this new version does not mention *kashrut* either.)

5- 2000- A guide for contemporary Reform Practice, by Marc Washofsky

Published in 2000, this guide is thought by many Reform Jewish professionals as today's 'Bible of Reform practice.' (Quotes from this book are often used in formal educational settings, such as the Chai Curriculum). Washofsky dedicates an entire chapter to the issue of kashrut, and argues the following:

> "*Each Jewish family should study kashrut and consider whether it may enhance the sanctity of their home...it is more reasonable for a movement which sees itself as an authentic expression of Jewish religiosity to urge its members to think about kashrut as*

an authentic mode of Jewish observance and to consider the value of bringing its practice into their homes and lives."

"There are many compelling 'reasons' that might motivate a Reform Jew to adopt kashrut. Some of these are: 1)identification with the contemporary and historical Jewish religious experience, 2)the authority of the religious tradition itself, both biblical and rabbinical, 3) a desire to have a home in which any Jew may feel free to eat, 4) a desire to place limits upon one's diet as an expression of ethical responsibility toward nature..."

The motives voiced here are varied in theme. The author refers to the ethical dimension of *kashrut* as well as to the ability of *kosher* practice to ground individuals in the Jewish community. The author also mentions the idea of submitting to "*an authority of the religious tradition*" (i.e. *Ol Mitzvot*), an unexpected motive expressed by a Reform leader. Washofsky concludes his chapter on *kashrut* with the following:

"Because kashrut can mean different things to different Reform Jews, and because no consensus has yet emerged within the movement as to the 'best' decision a Reform Jew can make about it, the level of dietary experience is largely a matter of personal rather than communal experience. This state of affairs may or may not change in the future. One thing, though, can be said with certainty: the question of kashrut is no longer irrelevant to the discussion of Reform Jewish religious life".

Affirming the relevance of *kashrut* in today's Reform discourse, Washosky's conclusion contrasts sharply with other recent publications of the UAHC Press (such as the revised Syme's guide –2004- which simply ignores the subject). I suggest that this discrepancy mirrors ongoing changes inside the movement. Different levels of home and synagogue practice, different rationales are recognized and validated. This pluralism of thought and practice slowly integrates the movement's literature. In the next section, the in-depth analysis of different textbooks used today in Reform classrooms will enlighten this pattern.

II- TODAY'S TASTE OF KASHRUT...IN OUR TEXTBOOKS

I have analyzed five major textbooks for teenagers, used in Reform formal settings today. I asked how each of them approaches the issue of *kashrut* : In which context are these lessons taught? Which lenses and language are used? What seems to be the pedagogical purpose? I focused my research on the five following textbooks because they are the most widely used in Reform settings for this specific age group:

1- Burstein, Chaya M. (1988)**The UAHC Kids Catalog of Jewish Living**, UAHC press, New-York.

2 - David J., Syme D.(1997) **The book of Jewish Life**, UAHC press, New-York.

3 - **CHAI, learning for Jewish life** (2003). *core curriculum, level 3*. UAHC press, New-York.

4 – Halper, Sharon D. (2000) **To learn is to do, a *Tikkun Olam* Roadmap**,UAHC press, New-York.

5 – Prager, J. and Lepoff, A.(1986) **Why be different? A look into Judaism**, Behrman House

This last book is not edited by the UAHC Press, but it is used in many religious congregational schools of the movement to teach teenagers about Jewish life and mitzvot.

1) WHEN DO WE TEACH?

IN WHICH CONTEXT DO WE TEACH ABOUT KASHRUT?

The theme of *kashrut* arises in various educational contexts. At the same time, educational resources discuss it differently in a clear separate chapter or within the context of a larger theme. As already mentioned, Kashrut is not always alluded to in contemporary Reform educational resources.

	Kids catalogue…	**Book of Jewish Life**	**CHAI curriculum**	**To learn is to do…**	**Why be different?**
The notion of kashrut appears	**NO**	**YES**	**YES**	**YES**	**YES**
There is a separate chapter on kashrut	**NO**	**NO** (in the context of Jewish Home)	**NO** (in the context of Leviticus 11 - Torah study)	**NO** (in the context of Parashat Shmini)	**YES**

Analysis:

- **Only one textbook makes no reference whatsoever to the theme of *kashrut*.** All the others deal with the topic, under a form or another.
- **In Reform publications (UAHC Press), *kashrut* is never taught as a separate chapter.** It is either mentioned in the context of Torah Study (such as Leviticus 11, Parashat Shmini), in the context of a broader reflection on *mitzvot* (*To learn is to do* dedicates an entire chapter to the question of *kashrut*, as a practice of *tikkun olam* (reparation of the world), or as part of the description of a 'Jewish Home' (in The book of the Jewish Life, explanations on *kashrut* follow the description of different Jewish artifacts, books, Judaica pieces, *mezuzah*).

2) WHAT DO WE TEACH?

	Kids' catalogue …	Book of Jewish Life	CHAI curriculum	To learn is to do…	Why be different?
General overview of the section on kashrut	**No** reference to *kashrut* whatsoever	1-Biblical quotes on dietary regulations 2-Explanation on different levels of practices 3-Section on *Ecokashrut*	1-Biblical requirements of kashrut 2-Blessings on food 3-Large section on *Ecokashrut*	1-Biblical requirements of *kashrut* 2-Blessings on food	1-Different moral messages of *kashrut* 2-Biblical definition of *kashrut* 3-Ritual content of traditional practice
Spiritual motives	X	NO	YES May 'help us feel closer to God	YES May 'help us bring holiness into our lives'+ emphasis on human gratefulness	YES 'bring *keshushah* in the act of eating'
Ethical motives	X	YES -Ecokashrut is presented as a alternative to traditional *kashrut*, equally valued by the authors (*)	YES -Teachings on Ecokashrut (but the word does not appear!)	YES -Large section on Ecokashrut. Students are asked to resolve moral dilemmas (*)	YES -*Mitzvot* 'make the Jewish people moral' -Teachings of *Ecokashrut* (but the word does not appear!)
Peoplehood motive	X	YES Large emphasis on pluralism of practice (*)	NO	NO	NO
Special Emphasis	X	-Many details given on the rituals of traditional *kashrut*	-Refers to meat /dairy separation, but no mention of separate dishes	-No reference to meat/dairy separation	-Long section on vegetarianism, prevention of animal suffering and respect for life

(*) see Analysis

ANALYSIS:

- All the books which address the theme of *kashrut* use the **biblical quotes of Leviticus 11** to define the basis of the traditional practice. There is a strong emphasis on 'Biblical requirements' (forbidden species) and sometimes no reference at all to Rabbinic/Talmudic interpretations of these rules (separation of meat/dairy).

- **Different books do not give the same details on traditional *kashrut.*** Why be different?, for example, defines forbidden species, meat/daily separation, *shch'ita*, (kosher slaughtering). To learn is to do does not mention separation of meat and dairy, nor slaughtering methods. Two books address the notion of separated dishes, the others do not. (The lack of details in the description of the *halachic* rules suggests that the practice is considered irrelevant for the population of learners.)

- The spiritual rationale for *kashrut* does not appear in one of the textbooks (the Book of the Jewish Life). However, **the ethical motive is referred to in all the publications**. It is clear from the readings that the ethical rationale is privileged.

Principles of *Ecokashrut* are also detailed in all textbooks, but **the word '*Ecokashrut*' is not always mentioned** (example: Chai curriculum, Why be different?). It is difficult to say if the authors avoided the term on purpose, or if it simply did not yet enter the mainstream vocabulary. In To learn is to do, an entire section of the lesson deals with ethical and *Ecokashrut* dilemmas, and asks the students to consider these dilemmas in their personal life. The section deals with questions such as:

" Veal can't be consider 'fit to eat' even though it is kosher, because the animals are confined to cages so tiny that they can't move around. Agree or disagree? Explain why."

"Foods that are raised or harvested by underpaid migrant farm workers can't be 'fit to eat' because the needs of the people who grow the food aren't considered. Agree or disagree? Explain why."

- **The notion of Peoplehood appears in one book only**. The book of Jewish life uses this motive to emphasize the pluralism of Jewish practices. It states that "*some Jews separate daily and meat, ...some actually have two separate sets of dishes...some Jews refrain from eating (Treif) foods...other Jews will eat only those foods stamped with a kosher seal of approval.*"

Interestingly, the categories of observance among Jews are always quoted from less *'halachic'* to more traditionalist practices, and the alternatives are clearly presented as equally valued. The same respect for pluralism of views is expressed when defining *Ecokashrut*. The section reads: *"people who are concerned with caring for animals and the environment do not eat veal or other meats normally permitted to Jews because they disagree with the way the animals are raised and treated."* This form of ethical *kashrut* is presented as a perfectly valid alternative to traditional *kashrut*.

3) REVOLUTION IN THE KITCHEN?

In analyzing these different textbooks, I was struck by the apparent discomfort on the part of the authors, as they defined *kashrut* practices. There seem to be a special concern with the question of different practices within the community. Some authors intend to define this pluralism and want to guard themselves against being 'judgmental.' The book of Jewish life, for example, puts a huge emphasis on the different levels of practice among the Jewish people. Thus, it lists "Some people do this...some others do that...Some believe this, ...or that". Interestingly, the examples given always go from less to more 'traditionalist', (from 'some people do not combine meat/milk in the same dish' to 'some actually have two sets of dishes'). The book, therefore, is a powerful example of a 'non-judgmental' writing: those who do 'less' are never defined as 'doing less than'.

On the other hand, Why be different? sounds much more directive: *"Jews should use two sets of cooking and eating utensils...Jews must wait a few hours before they can eat any milk products".*

The Chai curriculum is very cautious in the way it addresses *kashrut*. In the section dedicated to the theme, one of the described activities is to write a letter to the board of trustees about whether or not *Shabbat* meals at the congregation should be *kosher*. The curriculum encourages students to consider not only why it should be, but also why it should not be kosher, therefore recognizing opposition to *kashrut* as a valid standpoint.

The impact of teaching about *kashrut* on families' lives is also addressed, at length, in this publication.

One could argue that there is here an interesting paradox: When we teach about ethical *mitzvot* (such as *Tzedaka, Gmilut Chasadim*), we generally expect the children to implement those practices in their lives, at home, at school. But teaching about Kashrut seems to be a different issue. Most Reform congregants do not practice dietary laws at homes. Nevertheless, through the lessons, educators are aware they might motivate the children to create 'revolutions' in their parents' kitchen.

Anticipating the fact that such situations (family crisis?) could happen, the Chai curriculum includes a model-letter to its lesson plan. This letter is to be sent to the parents of kids involved in the program. The authors explain:

> *"It is important that parents understand that we are not asking their children or them to keep kosher. Rather, we want the students to explore the ideas of kashrut and why it is important that Reform Jews study the ideas of keeping kosher...observing kashrut might not be meaningful for a given family, and it should be made clear that we are not advocating that all Reform Jews keep kosher."*

This note to teachers very strongly emphasizes the fact that "we are not trying to...not advocating that..."...and reveals a high level of discomfort with what could be 'unpleasant consequences' in our congregants' life (i.e. students deciding to keep *kosher* even though their parents choose not to, or students condemning their parents' choice not to keep kosher).

I found this example absolutely fascinating. Indeed, we never send such a letter to parents whose children study about *Shabbat* or *tzedaka*. It is as if *kashrut* was a 'set apart' *mitzva* for Reform Jews - a potential 'trouble-maker' which necessitates extra-care. The letter ends with the following words:

"this is not a lifestyle choice that we are advocating, nor are we expecting it from you or your family. It is however an important lesson you might want to discuss with your child within the context of how our actions can make our lives holy, special, and closer to God"[18]

III- KASHRUT IN CLASSROOMS/ SETTINGS

In this section, I chose to study the dietary practice of two very different Reform educational settings:

- Congregation Rodeph Sholom, in New-York , and its Religious School .
- The Hebrew Union College, in New York

Those two examples present meaningful illustrations of evolving dietary practices, and offer an interesting snapshot of today's Reform standpoints.

Rodeph Sholom is a large congregation located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan (83rd street and Central Park West). First established in 1842 on the lower East Side, this 'classical' Reform institution became one of the 'leading' congregations in the New York Jewish scene : among other initiatives, it was the first Reform congregation to open a Day school.

Along its history, the congregation went though many adaptations and changes in terms of its *kashrut* policy. My interview with the principal of the Religious School, Tirza Arad, and the Senior Rabbi of the congregation, Rabbi Robert Levine, will enable us to reflect on the place of this practice in today's congregational life.

The Hebrew Union College (HUC) trains the new generation of Reform leadership. As we started our analysis with the account of the HUC Treifa Banquet episode, a study of today's *kashrut* policy in one of the campuses is particularly relevant. My interview with Saralee Avery, the purchasing agent at the New-York HUC campus, enriches our understanding of the evolution of the institution. Finally, a survey among rabbinical and cantorial students, in training, will analyze their current practice and shed light on the practice and values of tomorrow's leadership.

[18] The model-letter is reproduced in appendix

VIGNETTE N°1: TIRZA ARAD

Principal of Religious School at RODEPH SHOLOM - New York

CAN A LOUSY PIZZA BE AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL?

For the past five years, Tirza Arad has been the Principal of Rodeph Sholom Religious School. When I discussed my research on the evolution of the movement's statements about *kashrut* with her, she confirmed that *Rodeph Sholom* had undergone a similar pattern of change.

When Rabbi Levine took the pulpit at Rodeph Sholom fifteen years ago, he dictated that no *treif* food would be allowed in the building. Arad explains : "it doesn't mean that the food for congregational events needs to be *Glatt kosher*, the chicken doesn't have to be *hech'shered* (*kashrut supervision*), and some events are even not 'Kosher style'. You may find milk on the table at the end of a meat dinner. But, the agreement is that no 'obviously *treif* food should enter the congregation, i.e. no shellfish, no pork."

Today, there is a debate in the congregation. Rabbi Levine would actually like the congregation to work toward a more traditional type of *kashrut*. For instance, he would prefer the meat ordered for congregational events to be *kosher* (with *hechsher*). He would also like the kitchen of the congregation to follow more traditional rules of *kashrut*. Currently, there is no separation of meat and dairy dishes.

I asked Arad how the congregation has reacted to such initiatives for change. She responded Rodeph Sholom is "lucky to have a very pluralistic audience".

Some people are more traditionalist, some are more 'classically' Reform, and she thinks that people are willing to find a real path of co-existence and even to change their habits, when it comes to life at congregational life.

I then asked Arad more specifically about the religious school's *kashrut* policy. Interestingly, the leadership of the school decided that all the events organized by the school had to be glatt Kosher and this policy has been implemented since her arrival.

According to Arad, there are two majors reasons for this choice :

1- Many teachers and children at Rodeph Sholom originate from different backgrounds and have different levels of practice. As many streams of Judaism are represented inside the school, the decision has been made to order food which could fit every person's own practice. The choice of *glatt kosher* food is a choice of inclusion. Everyone should feel welcome and comfortable attending school meetings.

2- For Arad, it is also a clear educational choice. She explained, "the presence of *glatt kosher* food at school is an amazing educational tool for our children. They learn, this way, about different levels of practice, about pluralism in our midst, and of course, it gives opportunities to discuss rules of *kashrut.* Very often, the kids complain that the pizza is so lousy ! We often tell them: Well you know it's a kosher pizza ! Of course, this is a way of joking with them (not every kosher pizza is lousy...), but it's a powerful way to engage them in a conversation. In a way, this joke is an entry way to reflection about *kashrut.* It is an amazing way to trigger a discussion and to learn together, about ourselves and about each other.

From the moment the word kosher becomes part of their world (even if it's to emphasize how bad the pizza is), then we did something useful!"

I then asked Arad about the methods in which the laws of *kashrut* are taught in a formal setting, in classrooms. She admitted that *kashrut* is not currently part of the curriculum. It is not the subject of a given unit at any point in the educational program. In fact, *kashrut* is not even an official part of a unit, as it does not correspond to a formal teaching curriculum assigned for any specific grade. According to Arad, the subject of *kashrut* is rather taught, in the school, as a 'byproduct' of other teachings. For example, when *Pesach* dietary rules are defined, it's often a time to define more largely therules of *kashrut*. When teaching second graders about Jewish homes and symbols , the rules of *kashrut* are often alluded to in the classroom. Also discussions about *kashrut* is sometimes triggered by the study of certain biblical passages, such as in *Vayishlach* when Jacob wrestles with the angel or in Parashat Shmini when the laws of *kashrut.*are defined.

Ultimately, Arad's philosophy is that if you teach about *kashrut*, you need to teach about the traditional point of view on k*ashrut* (e.g. ritual slaughter, separation of meat and milk) prior to teaching about the meanings, ethics and interpretations of those rules. While some Reform schools, knowing that their population doesn't follow the laws of *kashrut* at home, choose to emphasize only the ethical aspect of *kashrut*, this is not Arad's view. Rather, she asserts that " Even if very few kids in our schools have any kind of practice of *kashrut* in their home, we need to provide them with the traditional views about *kashrut* : we need to show them the

traditional side, we need to show them that 'well of tradition' they can dig from, and teach them its 'core ideas'. Reform Judaism is indeed about informed choice and we are in responsible for giving them that information ".

At the close of our interview, I asked Arad larger questions related to my theme: How do we teach about *mitzvah* in a Reform setting? How can we manage to reconcile in our teachings the traditional idea of *mitsvah* (as being commanded), with the centrality of personal autonomy in our system ?

Arad responded that her faculty often uses the image of a love relationship. The covenant between God and Israel can indeed be perceived as a love affair. As any true love relationship, it requires a leap of action. It's not enough to say 'I love you', you need to act out of this love. Love is committing, love creates obligations. For Arad, this metaphor should nourish our teachings. We should teach about *mitzvoth* as a true commitment to our faith.

VIGNETTE N°2: RABBI ROBERT LEVINE

Robert Levine is the Senior Rabbi at Congregation Rodeph Sholom – New York

When I met with Rabbi Levine and explained to him the central theme of my research, he told me : " You know, the question of *kashrut* is a very relevant one today". When he said 'today', I naturally though he meant 'today' in a general sense. However, he responded ' I mean today, really today! Tonight we are having a meeting with the ritual committee of the congregation and part of the discussion

is going to be precisely on the issue of *kashrut.*' A helpful coincidence. Rabbi Levine then gave me an historical overview of the dietary policy at Rodeph Sholom. He explained that when he started his work at the congregation, fifteen years ago, there was no *kashrut* policy whatsoever; "shrimp take-out, and ham sandwiches were served at congregational lunches." As soon as he arrived, he implemented a change. From then on, the meals served in the building would not include any 'obviously treif' meat: no pork, no shrimp, no shellfish.
The kitchen of the congregation remains un-kosher and the meat does not have to be "*hech'shered*" but the meals need to be kosher style.

This policy remained intact until very recently. Currently, the congregation is seriously considering the following change: all the meals served and ordered by the congregation should be kosher, ie. the meats should have an *hech'sher.* This restriction will concern only the congregational meals. The meals organized by branches of the congregation, such as the brotherhood and sisterhood groups will not be obligated 'officially' (insists the rabbi) to this same restriction (but may be encouraged to follow it). Finally, when families rent a room or a space for their personal celebrations, they will be allowed to bring the food of their choice (no kosher caterer will be imposed as long as there is no 'obvious *treif*' food on the tables). Rabbi Levine considers that a family' choice should be respected as "for many people, this is part of what being a Reform Jew means, being autonomous in you decision." On the other hand, Levine thinks that people are willing to admit such dietary restrictions for official congregational meals, as the reasoning is presented as a way to include as many people as possible, as many different sensibilities and practices as possible, at the table.

Rabbi Levine perceives this evolution as part of the very definition of a covenantal relationship. *" Such a relationship evolves, changes and is renewed generation after generation*", he said. He also emphasized the idea that even if many Reform congregations change today (in term of ritual and practice), the change should not be too drastic. "People need to feel that their synagogue is still their synagogue," he insists, "the change should not be perceived from one day to another, it should be a long process, noticeable only after months, or years."

In any case, Levine continues, "the Reform approach to ritual issues will never be an 'all or nothing' consideration. Just as we do not expect our congregants to *halachically* keep *shabbat*, we do not expect them to have an all or nothing approach to *kashrut.*" But, he adds, the type of *kashrut* implemented in the congregation will enable people to reflect on the major components of a *kashrut* practice: the ethical questioning it creates, the sense of holiness it enhances, the sense of gratefulness it motivates, the respect for the living, a sense of peoplehood."

For Rabbi Levine, the issue of *kashrut* is deeply linked to the broader question of the place of *mitzva* in Reform Judaism. "Today, people are wrestling to define the notion of *ch'iuv*, of obligation in non-*halachic* Judaism. We are still in the process of creating an American Judaism, and reflecting on the relationship between duty and autonomy is part of this process".

VIGNETTE N°3 : SARALEE AVERY

Saralee Avery is the Director of administrative services at HUC-JIR , New York

KOSHER...WITHOUT KNOWING

For more than twenty years, Saralee has been the purchasing agent at HUC-JIR. As such, she is the person responsible for ordering food and meals for school and faculty meetings. Her testimony about *kashrut* issue and policy at HUC is particularly relevant for this analysis, as she clearly testifies to a process evolving over time. Avery explains that, from the moment she accepted the position, she decided that all the food and meals she would order for institutional meetings and meals would be *kosher*. As she said, *"I didn't receive instructions on that matter from anybody, neither to do so, nor not to do so. I simply decided to look for good Kosher food places around and to place my order there, preferably tasty places and not too expensive. The decision was entirely mine!"*

Avery's motive for implementing such a policy for the school came from her own background and level of practice. She wanted the school to be as inclusive as possible, to allow people with different levels of practice to feel comfortable here, though no one from the faculty or the student body ever turned to her 'officially' and asked for such *hashgach'ah* (dietary supevision). Interestingly, for many years, the food served at HUC was *kosher*, though most probably did not realize it. (Just as, in Moliere's Bourgeois Gentilhomme, M. Jourdain "makes prose without knowing," HUC-JIR did "Kosher meals without knowing"!)

Avery explains that within the last several years, she has perceived a change in the institution's attitude toward *Kashrut*.

Members of the faculty, and sometimes of the student body, started to ask questions about the source of the food. As more faculty members committed to a traditional *kashrut* practice joined the New York campus of HUC-JIR, the question of *kashrut* became more central. The school, therefore, decided officially that all meals served at HUC JIR - in meetings, discussions and official events - would be Kosher. The policy stands today with three major :

- The Soup kitchen organized by the student body, every Monday afternoon, doesn't serve *kosher* meals, therefore the kitchen of HUC is not *kosher*.
- The food at student meetings is left to the discretion of the students. For example, if the students decide to order pizza for a board of students' meeting, the choice of a *kosher* or *non-kosher* pizza is left to the Students board's decision.
- The institution does not interfere with students' personal choices insofar as food is concerned. Students can bring any type of food to the building and the classrooms.

Finally, Avery told me the following relevant story : each year the students organize a Beit Cafe, a fundraising event dedicated to the soup Kitchen. The board of students often ask her to order the wine for the evening. "For the very first time in our history," says Avery, " the students insisted this year that the wine should be Kosher. The funny thing," she added, "is that it had always been! I always ordered Kosher wine...but this time, the request came from the student body. It wasn't anymore my personal choice."

VIGNETTE 4 : HEBREW UNION COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Survey on *kashrut* for Tomorrow's Reform Leadership

The Hebrew Union College students are in training to become the future leaders of the movement. Undoubtedly, the *kashrut* practice of this setting is not the average one of today's Reform world. Rabbinical and cantorial students' commitment to Judaism cannot be representative of *klal* American Jewry. Nevertheless, the data found here informs us of existing trends in the movement and offers a fair prediction of the future of the movement with regard to dietary practice. Indeed, HUC students, as tomorrow's leaders and role models, will bring their own beliefs and praxis to their professional legacy.

Interviewing rabbinical and cantorial students about their own *kashrut* practice allows us to reflect on a number of questions including:

-What are their own backgrounds in matter of dietary restrictions?

-What is their personal practice?

-How do they teach about *kashrut* today?

Those questions will lead us to consider the future normative views of the movement with regard to *kashrut.*

I chose to interview the 2007 rabbinical and cantorial classes, as well as the current education students, and provided them with the following anonymous questionnaire:

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH KASHRUT

Please, check the right answer :

You grew up:

*REFORM

*CONSERVATIVE

*ORTHODOX

*OTHER :

your family practice was:

1) WHAT IS KASHRUT FOR YOU TODAY. I.e. WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF OBSERVANCE ? (What is your personal 'policy' with regard to *kashrut* ? Sum up the evolution of your practice, if there was. How did you grow-up ? Did something change since you join HUC ?)

2) TRY TO REMEMBER HOW/WHEN YOU LEARNED ABOUT TRADITIONAL KASHRUT RULES ? (Family ? Hebrew school ? Camp ? Readings ? Friends ?...)

3) IF YOU TEACH TODAY IN A REFORM SETTING, WHAT DO YOU TEACH ABOUT KASHRUT ? (traditional views and laws ? *Ecokashrut* ? ethical meaning ? *qedusha* at home ?nothing ?)

Results:

Twenty students answered the questionnaire; among them were 16 rabbinical students, 2 educators and 2 cantorial students.

BACKGROUND/CHILDHOOD PRACTICE

- 75% of surveyed (15 people) grew up in a Reform-affiliated household.
- Among those 'born and raised' Reformers, none of them grew up in a family practicing traditional *kashrut* (at least as they define it). The following scope of practice was presented :

  * 40% define their parents' household as "*not at all kosher*": *"I cannot even recall the notion of kashrut in the house"*, "No *kashrut* whatsoever".

  *60% bring interesting precision: *"not kosher...however never ate pork"*, *"not kosher... but we had no chametz in Pessach"*, or even *"never ate pork: escargot yes, ostrich yes, pork NOOOOOO!"* Someone even made interesting revelations in the context of this questionnaire: "*I thought we did not keep kosher. But for this survey, I asked my mother, she informed me she never served milk with meat. Obviously, it didn't leave much of an impression on me..."*

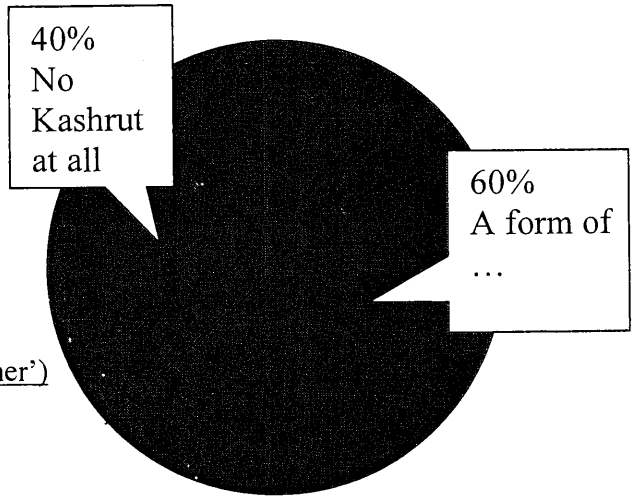
I grew up

:

BORN AND RAISED

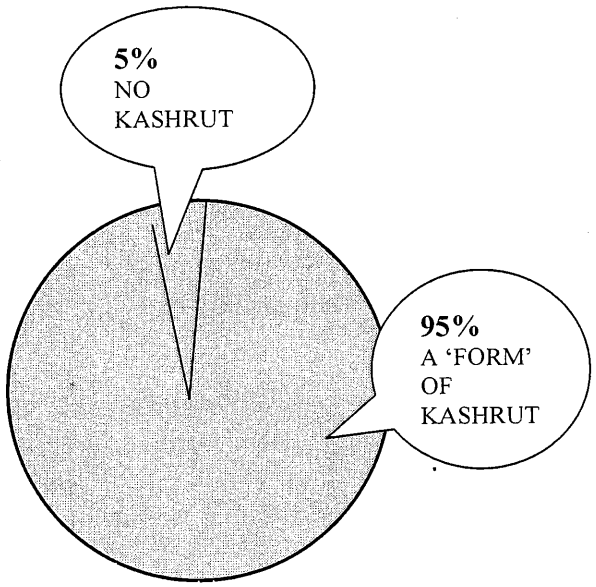
REFORMERS

(100% define their parents household as 'not kosher')



CURRENT PRACTICE

- **Only one person (5% of surveyed) defined himself as keeping "*no form of kashrut whatsoever*"** (this person grew up Conservative and abandoned dietary regulations a few years ago).
- **All the others defined their practice as a "*form of kashrut*" (95% of surveyed),** even if sometimes their ritual is very far from traditional prescriptions (I.e. 100% of the people who grew up Reform define themselves as observing today a 'form of kashrut')



Most students described their dietary practice as evolving over the years. 60% of people defined 'college years' as the starting point of their personal practice. Matriculating to HUC did not change the observance of anyone in the survey.

FORM OF KASHRUT

50% of surveyed defined their homes as kosher and gave different definitions to their level of observance, such as:

- *"kosher style: I don't eat treif food, and don't mix meat and milk, but do not have separate dishes"*
- *"kosher to some degree: only kosher meat, but I do not care about mixing dishes. I wait 3 hours after meat to eat dairy"*
- *"no separate dishes at home, I buy sometimes non-kosher meat. But I don't buy pork or shellfish, or mix dairy/meat in the same meal".*

10% use separate dishes, with the following restrictions: one writes "*we keep kosher but are not strict about finer point: we use dishwasher for meat and milk just not at the same time". Someone has a "kosher home with separate dishes, but no hechsher products. When I'll live alone (without roommates), I will only have hechsher foods".*

40% of the interviewed students admitted a different practice inside and outside their homes, such as *"kosher home, and I don't eat non-kosher meat outside, but eat in non-kosher places", "kosher home ,and only kosher meat outside home"*

Motivation

People brought different rationales to justify their choices, advocating or limiting their practice, such as:

***social** :

-"*I do not eat non-kosher meat ...but I go to non-kosher restaurant and order fish...: this is important, because I do not want to be socially limited*",

- *"My house is Kosher. Not only for myself but for guests. I have guests from all walks of Judaism and I want to make sure that whoever is in my home can eat everything I serve"*

***national:**

-"*for me, a 'symbolic kashrut' is an historical and spiritual link to our tradition, and our unique peoplehood*"

***'exemplar':**

-*"I have always felt that by being a rabbi, I needed to set an example for others"*

-*"I feel it is important for my future congregants to see that keeping kosher can be something spiritual and significant"*

-*"I will probably eat pork but not in front of congregants..."*

***ECOKASHRUT is defined as a *kashrut* motive in about 50% of the answers,** and is described as a growing concern by 20% of surveyed.

One defined himself as keeping *a "moderate form of eco-Kashrut...but still eat(s) pork and shellfish"*. Another person admitted that he has not " *eaten pork or shellfish since college...but as (he) thinks more about Ecokashrut, (he is) considering eating treif again"*, and admits he is *"VERY conflicted on this issue"*.

One person defined his own personal practice as follows: *"I eat everything, without really worrying about it...but I say a brachah over EVERYTHING I eat, including treif...for me, it is a serious sanctification"*

HOW DID THEY LEARN ABOUT KASHRUT?

The survey showed a high variability of answers. **People who grew up in Reform settings confirm they never had formal lessons on *Kashrut*.** They therefore learned from different sources as shown in the sampling of answers below:

-*"I never really learned formally about it"*

-*"I learned by myself, from a book"*

-*"At a camp, which was kosher style. I never had a formal class on kashrut"*

-*"I learned from Orthodox friends"*

-*"From family members who ate kosher"*

-*"I learned in different study institutions, as an adult"*

WHAT THEY TEACH TODAY ABOUT KASHRUT?

Among those who currently teach in Reform Educational settings, 80% answered that *kashrut* is not part of their curriculum and therefore, they have *"never been asked to teach about kashrut"*. Others commented:

"We don't talk about it at a subject, but if there is a question, I try to answer", "I teach the Eco-kashrut approach when I tutor kids for Bar/Bat-mitzva", " I teach about traditional ways and then discuss the possible reasons to do so (spiritual,

discipline, holiness)", "We look at Torah quotes and try to define possible reasons for those dietary restrictions" explained one of the students.

Conclusion: SOME THINGS CHANGE, SOME DON'T!

What changed? The relevance of *kashrut* in the Reform discourse seems to be a new trend. 95% percent of the students interviewed defined themselves as following of form of *kashrut*, even though most of them did not define their parents' household in this way. It does not necessarily mean that their dietary practice is objectively very different from their parents', but at least, their self-perception is (as well as the lexicon to define it).

The range of practice (from non-kosher homes, to separate dishes, to kosher at home/not outside…) seems to parallel the broader picture of the Reform world. A similar pattern of diversity is perceivable in other settings and described in educational materials of the movement.

The concept of *Ecokashrut* is very 'popular', and the ethical motive of *kashrut* seem to be the main rationale voiced by the students, not only for their practice, but as the central message they would like to convey in their teachings.

What did not change:

The students who grew up Reform do not recall any formal teaching on *kashrut*. Interestingly, even though they all define themselves as observing a form of

dietary restriction, very few are asked to teach about *kashrut*. It seems that the relevance of *kashrut* has impacted the Reform lexicon and self-perception…but not yet the curriculum!

It is as if there was a delay between what we do and what we teach, between how we define ourselves and what we put in our textbooks. Reform-raised students admit they learnt about traditional *kashrut* from external sources (books, orthodox friends, camp experiences). They also admit that, as educators, they are still not asked to teach about it today. Nevertheless, it seems that these future leaders do not expect the new generation to follow the same path: even though they are not asked formally to teach about it, many choose to trigger discussions on *kashrut* and answer questions in their classrooms. This would probably justify an official integration of *kashrut* in Reform schools' curriculum. What has not changed yet…is ready to!

4) CONCLUSION OF PART II

The interviews I conducted at Rodeph Sholom and HUC contained similar features. Both settings did reveal an evolution in the thinking about/ and practice of *kashrut*.

This historical evolution is perceived at different levels:

- **Leadership:** in both settings, the leadership did (or is currently trying to) implement a change in the policy of *kashrut*. A few years ago, HUC decided that all the meals ordered/served for faculty and students would be kosher. Beforehand, there was no official policy on the matter. At Rodeph Sholom, there is a current policy of 'limited Kashrut' (no 'obviously' *treif* foods, but no separation of meat/dairy), but the Senior Rabbi admits he would like to implement changes toward a more traditionalist approach.

- **Congregants / Students**

Both settings do testify that there is an increased practice of *kashrut* among the Reform population. According to Tirza Arad, Rodeph Sholom congregants are willing to accept changes in the *kashrut* policy of the place because they are aware of an important diversity of practice among congregants themselves. It is no longer surprising to imagine a Reform congregation where some keep *kosher* strictly and others do not at all (maybe the same way, some people put on *tefilin* and *tallit*, and others would not wear a *kippah*, inside the same sanctuary). At HUC, the purchasing agent's interview and the students' survey testify to a broader range of practice inside the campus community.

- **Faculty**

Both settings brought forward this argument of the faculty members' practice as being a strong motive in their choice of implementing Kashrut. Rodeph Sholom Religious school has a strict Kashrut policy in order to allow all its faculty members to feel comfortable eating there. Indeed, the school recruits many educators and teachers from all walks of Jewish life.

This is true of HUC as well: the presence of faculty members with a more traditionalist practice has caused the institution to officially instate a policy of *kosher* meals at communal meetings.

One might say that this will to be as inclusive as possible says nothing about an evolving Reform attitude. But I suggest it says much about the will to have a pluralistic teaching in those institutions. A pluralism of ideas and of practices, modeled by the faculty of those settings, tells something about the ideals those settings try to implement. The institution which trains future Reform leaders is thus consistent with the Movement's most recent statement of principles (Pittsburgh 1999) as it reads "We embrace religious and cultural pluralism as an expression of the vitality of Jewish life."[19]

Finally, I would like to point out interesting paradoxical statements expressed in the vignettes above.

[19] The second Pittsburgh platform (1999)-quoted by Michael A. Meyer in The Reform Jewish Reader, UAHC Press, 2001

- **Informed choice requires…information!**

One of the philosophical bases of Reform Judaism is the notion of informed choice. The individual is encouraged, through his/her ability to process tradition and his/her own sensibilities, to make authentic and honest choices for himself/herself. Analyzing the information (or sometimes lack of information…) on *kashrut* in different Reform settings and educational resources, I wonder how this basic principle might be implemented. In most Reform schools, *kashrut* is not officially part of the curriculum. There are no formal teachings on dietary restrictions. How can we, then, prepare individuals to make honest religious choices if we do not give them the analytical tools to exercise this basic right?

According to Piaget's developmental theory, one learns by both experiencing and processing new information. Religious education is probably the epitome of this consideration as it calls people to know and to act: we cannot learn about *kashrut* simply by eating *kosher* pizza, nor can we simply study this cold legislation without any kind of implementation.

As obvious as it may be, informed choice requires …information. If we are not, as educators, the ones who provide that information, through our words and deeds, how can we truly be faithful to our Reform principles?

- **Kashrut as an educational tool:**

Rodeph Sholom religious school has a strict Kosher policy, i.e. all the food/snacks given at school need to be Kosher. In fact, food is used as an educational tool. Eating kosher creates the opportunity to discuss it. It is a gate of entry and a way to engage students in a larger reflection about dietary regulations.

This justification nevertheless raises two issues:

1) Why isn't such a justification implemented in the larger congregation? Why should only children enjoy such a tool? How can we justify a limitation of this motive to children's education? (especially when we keep emphasizing that Judaism is a life-long learning!) Wouldn't adults too learn from eating kosher inside the congregation?
2) Interestingly, Rodeph Sholom Religious school uses food/meals as an educational tool to teach about *kashrut* in a great informal way but the school almost entirely ignores the formal setting. *Kashrut* is not a part of the curriculum at Rodeph Sholom Religious School, nor is it in the huge majority of Reform settings. A child can go through all his basic Jewish education without receiving any formal teaching on *kashrut*, as evidenced in our HUC Survey. Many people who grew up in Reform settings admit they never heard about traditional rules of *kashrut* in their formal studies until they read about it, heard about it from more traditionalist friends, etc.

I posit there is still a strong reticence to formalize the teaching of kashrut. The awareness that a majority of congregants do not implement those rules in their homes cannot be the reason for not teaching them. Indeed, Reform schools do

teach about *Shabbat* or holidays' customs that most families in the congregation do not 'traditionally' observe. *Kashrut* seems to be treated differently. I would like to suggest three possible explanations for this set-apart condition:

1- *Kashrut* is still perceived by many as a symbolic frontier between a liberal and an orthodox practice. Historically and philosophically, for many Reformers, *kashrut* is out of their 'religious frontier', standing almost as the last guardian of their liberal religious affiliation.

2- *Kashrut* is a 'hot topic' and can create a deep backlash. As it touches the heart of people's everyday living, this theme has the potential to generate very passionate reactions among congregants or even family members. Aware of what teaching *kashrut* can trigger in the congregation, educators and leaders seem to be reluctant to introducing it formally in the curriculum.

3- The fact that many Reform leaders and educators do not implement traditional *kashrut* in their life makes them feel unable to teach about it, as they themselves do not model the behavior. One might argue that we teach about Shabbat even though most Reform educators do not have an *halachic* observance of Shabbat. Shabbat is indeed a good example: it seems to me that the Reform movement developed what it considers a 'legitimate' liberal observance of Shabbat (via rituals and individual interpretations of the concept of holy time and *menucha*, rest). Therefore, the movement enables educators to teach about Shabbat. The case of *kashrut* is different: concerning dietary practice, the movement did not reach yet a definition of what a 'Reform practice of *kashrut*' is. Without definition, the educator does not feel empowered to present a ritual he/she cannot model. If there is no Reform consideration of *kashrut*, there is no Reform curriculum on *kashrut*.

Therefore, I posit that the relevance of *kashrut* in the Reform discourse needs to be 'translated' to educational resources, curriculums and deeds. To enable educators to embody those principles, to 'model their lesson', the movement must develop a Reform reflection on *kashrut*, the way it developed a Reform reflection on Shabbat.

PART III:

A CURRICULUM ON KASHRUT

As we have shown in the precedent chapters, the evolution of the Reform Movement's relationship to *kashrut* has been expressed through different channels. The increasing literature on this theme, the release of educational resources and the evolution of many leaders' and congregants' dietary practice are important markers of the change.

Many congregations are willing to engage in a discussion about *kashrut*, in Judaism, in the Movement and within their community. Many are already implementing a form of dietary restriction inside the congregation or they are currently reflecting on the form such a commitment could take.

Therefore, I decided to develop an Educational curriculum, dedicated to this 'inquiring' population. This curriculum is addressed to the board of a Reform Congregation, considering the implementation of *kashrut* in their community. The following three lessons provide the ground for a larger reflection on kashrut, through:

- its place in our tradition
- its ritual and ethical implications for us today
- the possibility/condition of its implementation in a specific congregation

KASHRUT AS A FRUIT:

The three lessons of this curriculum are modeled around the metaphor of a fruit.

Let us imagine a grape, and its 3 components: the seeds, the flesh and the skin.

Our three lessons will enable us to explore those different components, along the following pattern:

From a general consideration of Kashrut in our **Jewish tradition** (the seeds), we will dive into an analysis on the evolving **Reform Movement's** ideology (the flesh) and finally reflect on this practice in a **specific congregation** (the skin).

PLAN

1- THE SEEDS : CAN WE EAT TORAH?

A focus on traditional sources… and eating.

2- THE FLESH: IS IT KOSHER TO BE KOSHER IN A REFORM SETTING?

A focus on Reform standpoints on Kashrut

3- THE SKIN: OUR CONGREGATION'S TASTE!

A focus on our congregation's vision and project.

LESSON I – THE SEEDS

CAN WE EAT TORAH?

Goal of the lesson:

-Initiate our study program about food with… food!

-Reflect on the role/symbolism of food in our tradition.

-Use Torah study to reflect on the relationship between food and knowledge, eating and understanding.

Core concept:

-What you eat can say something about your values and your identity

-Our sacred community is built and strengthened by Torah and food.

Activity:

Setting: a place with a set table and food (grape juice and alphabet cookies…)

1) **Introduction : the meaning of eating, the eating of meaning**

- Tell a Jewish joke: almost all the Jewish holidays can be summed up in three sentences : "They wanted to kill us, we won, now let's eat"…(through the examples of Channuka, Purim, Pessach…)
- Reflect on the popular concept: There is no Jewish meeting/celebration without food! Emphasize the centrality of food in Jewish celebration and religious life.

- **Group exercise**. Ask the group the following question: when you think 'Jewish + food', what comes to your mind? (list on the board the participants' answers. These will probably include: *kashrut, brach'ot, seder, kneidlech'*, dairy/meat separation, latkes, Jewish mothers…)
- Explain to the group that today we will not specifically discuss *kashrut* and its rules (they may hold this expectation, considering the theme of the entire program!). We will rather consider the question of the role and symbolism of food in our tradition. This in-depth study is a pre-requisite before we reach the reflection on the meaning of Kashrut and its implementation in our congregation. The idea is that you cannot truly discuss food policy if you do not reflect on the deep meaning of food in our tradition.

- Let's give examples: share with the group 'surprising' examples of **food symbolism in Jewish life**

Give the group the following examples:

-The most famous Jewish legal code is called the SHULCHAN ARUCH, set the table.

-The different tractates of the Talmud are called SEDER, just as the meal.

-In Hebrew, the word TAAM (taste) also means 'meaning': i.e. in Hebrew, words have a taste!

-At Pesach, we 'eat' our history: the food tells the story. You eat symbols of slavery, then you taste the liberation, you eat your past!

-At Rosh Hashanah, you eat your wishes for a new year: sweet honey for a sweet year, pomegranate seeds for a fruitful year…you eat your possible future!

-Our tradition teaches us that since the destruction of the Temple, the dinner table has replaced the altar. What happens around and on this table is as sacred as the holiest worshipping ceremony of the Temple.

Then, reflect with the group on all these examples. What do they suggest?

Emphasize through their answers that:

- Food is central
- eating is a process of meaning making
- eating can be a vector of sacredness

2) Inaugurate through tasting

Tell two Jewish stories (both of them tell about food and 'openings', beginnings):

- Every Jewish celebration starts with a blessing on wine/grape juice: BOREI PRI HAGAFEN! Not only is wine a vector of joy, it also symbolically reproduces the sacrifice ceremony at the Temple (the color of blood).

- The tradition teaches us that on the day a child enters religious school for the first time, he should come with cookies / food. The teachers write the Hebrew alphabet on those cookies, with honey letters. Then, the child eats the sweet alphabet and 'snacks' this very first lesson. The Jewish child starts his religious education eating and digesting the language!

TASTING TIME **Let's do the same!**

Each table (small groups of learners) should write with alphabet cookies what they wish for the community / expect from their study program (Fun? Torah? Ideas?...)

Together we raise our grape juice cups and bless wine and food... and have a snack!

3) Torah study

-There are many stories about food in our traditional sources, be they Biblical, Talmudic or Midrashic. We could have studied together today the biblical restrictions of Kashrut, in Leviticus (be patient…it is coming!) But we engage today in a broader reflection on the theme of Food/Eating. Therefore, we will study a passage which has to do with food and the meaning of eating.

This passage is very mysterious and not well known. It may surprise the learners: It is a story about 'eating a scroll'…

Split into *Ch'avrutah* groups. Each group receives a text and guideline questions.

*EZEKIEL 2:8 - 3:3

Context: This passage is found at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel. The prophet is going through a 'rite of initiation'. He will soon start his prophetic mission.

8 וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם שְׁמַע אֵת אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי
מְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אַל־תְּהִי־מֶרִי כְּבֵית הַמֶּרִי
פְּצֵה פִיךָ וֶאֱכֹל אֵת אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן אֵלֶיךָ׃
9 וָאֵרְאֶה וְהִנֵּה־יָד שְׁלוּחָה אֵלַי וְהִנֵּה־בָהּ
מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר׃ 10 וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אוֹתָהּ לְפָנַי וְהִיא
כְתוּבָה פָּנִים וְאָחוֹר וְכָתוּב אֵלֶיהָ קִנִים
וָהֶגֶה וָהִי׃ ס

8"And you, mortal, heed what I say to you: Do not be rebellious like that rebellious breed. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." 9As I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me, holding a written scroll. 10He unrolled it before me, and it was inscribed on both the front and the back; on it were written lamentations, dirges, and woes.

ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־תִּמְצָא
אֱכוֹל אֱכוֹל אֶת־הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת וְלֵךְ
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ 2 וָאֶפְתַּח אֶת־פִּי
וַיַּאֲכַלֵנִי אֵת הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי
בֶּן־אָדָם בִּטְנְךָ תַאֲכֵל וּמֵעֶיךָ תְמַלֵּא אֵת
הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן אֵלֶיךָ וְאֹכְלָה
וַתְּהִי בְּפִי כִּדְבַשׁ לְמָתוֹק׃ פ

He said to me, "Mortal, eat what is offered you; eat this scroll, and go speak to the House of Israel." 2So I opened my mouth, and He gave me this scroll to eat, 3as He said to me, "Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you." I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to me.

Guideline questions:

-What is the message of this passage for you?

-What particularly strikes you?

-How is it, if at all, relevant to your experience?

-What is the relationship between Ezekiel's mission as a prophet and the act of eating?

-Coming back together

Discuss each group's insights. Focus the discussion on the following ideas:

What if eating could prepare you for a holy mission?

Through the act of eating, you become what you eat, you ingest and digest it.

It becomes you! The idea of being, or becoming what you eat, is very present in our tradition.

4) Wrap-up :

We saw today that our tradition, through its texts, vocabulary and rituals tells us something about the relationship between food and words (i.e. eating and 'meaning')

-Food tells us something about our past (*Pesach)* and maybe about our future (*Rosh Hashanah)*

-The 'eating' can carry a 'meaning', it can teach you something, as in the Ezechiel story, or in the case of a young child discovering the alphabet. We can be 'initiated' to become something (a prophet or simply a student) through an eating ritual.

-Today, we ate together and shared food and blessings. Did this meal add something to the moment we were experiencing together, in your personal view? If so, how would you define it? (Spirituality? Reflection? Feeling? Sacredness?)

-Before next session, try to think about how the experience we just had could be ideally brought to our larger congregation? Any idea?

In the next two sessions, we will try to dive into this question.

LESSON II: THE FLESH

Is it Kosher to be Kosher in the Reform Movement?

Goal of the lesson:

-Help the group reflect on the evolution of the Movement toward k*ashrut*.

-Analyze the different motives put forward in favor of or against this practice, in the Movement's discourse.

Core concept:

As a 'living Judaism', the American Reform Movement evolved in its relationship to *Kashrut* but the issues of ethics and spirituality have always been at the core of its concerns.

Activity:

Setting: a room with a table (snacks and drinks): there should be some grape juice and 'animal cookies'!!!

1) A taste of the lesson.

Ask the participants how they 'digested' the last session.

Before we start our 'food' study today, we need to start with blessing and enjoying some food. We start with a little snack. We raise our cups and bless the wine/grape juice (BORE PRI HAGEFEN).

Then, open the animals' cookies boxes and distribute the 'different species' to the learners. Explain that this is going to be the first part of our study today. Ask them not to eat the cookies yet. First, we will study Leviticus 11, and afterwards, they should be able to define which species are *kosher* and which are *treif!*

2) Torah Study: Leviticus 11

Split into *Chavrutot*. Give an introduction to Leviticus 11: the Israelites are given a series of legal restrictions and laws of separation between what is pure/impure.

This passage is at the heart of the biblical kashrut restrictions.

LEVITICUS 11 (1-23)

יא וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן
לֵאמֹר אֲלֵהֶם: 2 דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֵאמֹר
זֹאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה
אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: 3 כֹּל ׀ מַפְרֶסֶת פַּרְסָה
וְשֹׁסַעַת שֶׁסַע פְּרָסֹת מַעֲלַת גֵּרָה בַּבְּהֵמָה
אֹתָהּ תֹּאכֵלוּ: 4 אַךְ אֶת־זֶה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ
מִמַּעֲלֵי הַגֵּרָה וּמִמַּפְרִיסֵי הַפַּרְסָה אֶת־
הַגָּמָל כִּי־מַעֲלֵה גֵרָה הוּא וּפַרְסָה אֵינֶנּוּ
מַפְרִיס טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם: 5 וְאֶת־הַשָּׁפָן
כִּי־מַעֲלֵה גֵרָה הוּא וּפַרְסָה לֹא יַפְרִיס
טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם: 6 וְאֶת־הָאַרְנֶבֶת כִּי־
מַעֲלַת גֵּרָה הִוא וּפַרְסָה לֹא הִפְרִיסָה
טְמֵאָה הִוא לָכֶם: 7 וְאֶת־הַחֲזִיר כִּי־
מַפְרִיס פַּרְסָה הוּא וְשֹׁסַע שֶׁסַע פַּרְסָה
וְהוּא גֵּרָה לֹא־יִגָּר טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם:
8 מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ וּבִנִבְלָתָם לֹא תִגָּעוּ
טְמֵאִים הֵם לָכֶם:
9 אֶת־זֶה תֹּאכְלוּ מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמָּיִם כֹּל
אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ סְנַפִּיר וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׂת בַּמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים
וּבַנְּחָלִים אֹתָם תֹּאכֵלוּ: 10 וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר
אֵין־לוֹ סְנַפִּיר וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׂת בַּיַּמִּים וּבַנְּחָלִים
מִכֹּל שֶׁרֶץ הַמַּיִם וּמִכֹּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה
אֲשֶׁר בַּמָּיִם שֶׁקֶץ הֵם לָכֶם: 11 וְשֶׁקֶץ יִהְיוּ
לָכֶם מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ וְאֶת־נִבְלָתָם
תְּשַׁקֵּצוּ: 12 כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לוֹ סְנַפִּיר
וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׂת בַּמַּיִם שֶׁקֶץ הוּא לָכֶם:
13 וְאֶת־אֵלֶּה תְּשַׁקְּצוּ מִן־הָעוֹף לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ
שֶׁקֶץ הֵם אֶת־הַנָּשֶׁר וְאֶת־הַפֶּרֶס וְאֶת
הָעָזְנִיָּה: 14 וְאֶת־הַדָּאָה וְאֶת־הָאַיָּה
לְמִינָהּ: 15 אֵת כָּל־עֹרֵב לְמִינוֹ: 16 וְאֶת
בַּת הַיַּעֲנָה וְאֶת־הַתַּחְמָס וְאֶת־הַשָּׁחַף
וְאֶת־הַנֵּץ לְמִינֵהוּ: 17 וְאֶת־הַכּוס וְאֶת־
הַשָּׁלָךְ וְאֶת־הַיַּנְשׁוּף: 18 וְאֶת־הַתִּנְשֶׁמֶת
וְאֶת־הַקָּאָת וְאֶת־הָרָחָם: 19 וְאֶת
הַחֲסִידָה הָאֲנָפָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־הַדּוּכִיפַת
וְאֶת־הָעֲטַלֵּף:

11 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them: 2Speak to the Israelite people thus:

These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals: 3any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews[a] the cud—such you may eat. 4The following, however, of those that either chew the cud or have true hoofs, you shall not eat: the camel—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 5the daman—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 6the hare—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you; 7and the swine—although it has true hoofs, with the hoofs cleft through, it does not chew the cud: it is unclean for you. 8You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

9These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales—these you may eat. 10But anything in the seas or in the streams that has no fins and scales, among all the swarming things of the water and among all the other living creatures that are in the water—they are an abomination for you 11and an abomination for you they shall remain: you shall not eat of their flesh and you shall abominate their carcasses. 12Everything in water that has no fins and scales shall be an abomination for you.

13The following[b] you shall abominate among the birds—they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; 14the kite, falcons of every variety; 15all varieties of raven; 16the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull; hawks of every variety; 17the little owl, the cormorant, and the great owl; 18the white owl, the pelican, and the bustard; 19the stork; herons of every variety; the hoopoe, and the bat.

Guideline for the reading:

Read the entire passage and define how you felt reading those words?

How did the group react? (Sometimes, people laugh reading this long list of unknown animals)

Do you feel it makes sense? Do you feel it needs to make sense?

Is there an explanation given for those prohibitions?

The group reconvenes

Reflect with the groups on the following points:

This text can generate mixed feelings. There is no explanation given in the passage as to why one should keep kosher (any clear ethical message is hard to find). Therefore, throughout history, different approaches have been taken. Some argued we should not even try to understand it, but simply perform those commandments (one of them is Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a German Orthodox Rabbi). Some argued that those laws have a hygienic background (Maimonides for example argues that forbidden foods are bad for your health).

What about the Reform Movement?

3) Reform Movement and Kashrut

A-THE ORIGINAL POSITION OF THE MOVEMENT: the 'Treifa Banquet'

- Tell the story of the Treifah Banquet. In 1883, the first class of American Rabbis is ordained at HUC-JIR, in Cincinnati. The banquet served at the end of the ceremony violates basically every possible *kashrut* prohibition, except Pork. It creates a scandal and the event is largely reported in the Jewish newspapers of the time. Some even argue that this episode accelerated the creation of the Conservative movement.

Was the menu served on purpose? Did the institution want to make a particular theological statement or was it simply a 'mistake' as the organizers claimed? In any case, it fitted the ideology of the movement at that time.

The Reform movement claimed to be rationalistic, ethical and universal. For its leaders and theologians, Kashrut was in absolute contradiction with all these principles, because:

a) *Kashrut* seems to have no rational justification (as many students probably noticed reading Leviticus 11)

b) This *mitzvah* carries no 'obvious' ethical meaning (unlike *tzedakah or gmilut chasadim*, for example). On the contrary, it seemed to strengthen Jewish particularism.

Eating Kosher would keep you separate from non-Jews, and this 'food-ghettoization' could possibly threaten Jewish integration into the American society.

B- THE EVOLUTION OF THE MOVEMENT'S STANDPOINT

The educator should choose 4 to 6 quotes from the list below and place them on the walls of the room.

1- "regulate diet ... originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely 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"

2- (Kashrut) "offers the possibility of sanctification"

3- "*dietary laws have a deeper ethical significance...they teach us the lovely virtue of self-discipline, and thereby assist us to become a holy people*"

4- *the person who eats Kosher "in addition to cultivating self-discipline for his own spiritual welfare, he would, at the same time, strengthen his links with the Jewish past and the Torah tradition. Above all, he would furnish an example of how a cold letter of dietary legislation could become a living commandment"*

5- *" by maintaining a respect for Kashrut and incorporating some IF NOT ALL of the rules governing a Kosher home into our lives, we have a good chance of holding on to our Judaism and contributing to the perpetuation of the Jewish people".*

6- *"The fact that Kashrut was for many centuries an essential part of Judaism, and that so many Jews gave their lives for it, should move Reform Jews to study it and to consider (it) carefully."*

7- *"Many opt to eat Kosher, not because they are commanded, but to make possible to all Jews to eat at their table"*

8- "*Reform Jews should eat pork on principle!"*

9- "*A Reform approach to Kashrut should also encourage concern for Tzar Baalei Chaim, the pain of living creature...and might prohibit fruits and vegetables grown with pesticides or harvested under inhuman conditions"*

10- "the hechsher isn't enough to make this kosher meat...".

11- " The problem of religion is not saying good things but changing people. Kashrut may be as relevant to that task as tzedaka; they are inseparable"

12- *"Not only is the observance of dietary laws difficult is not impossible in so many of our modern Jewish homes; it is unnecessary. There is nothing particularly attractive or inspiring in ritually prepared food".*

13- *"whatever is meaningful to you, either spiritually, or as a link with the past, or with the whole house of Israel, by all means do! If kosher or partially kosher seems a true sign of a Jewish home, it is most important that the home be kept that way."*

Ask the participants to take a moment to read the quotes. Then, ask them to stand under the quote they identify the most with, as Reform Jews.

Ask them which quote is according to them, ideologically, or theologically 'Reform'. Which one is probably not a Reform statement?

Outline the antithetical and seemingly irreconcilable statements presented. (*kashrut* is meaningless/relevant, anachronistic/a modern concern, not inspiring/able to enhance spirituality...)

Surprise them: **All those statements were made by Reform Leaders!!!**

Share with them the sources of the different texts:

*1*1885 - Pittsburgh platform*

2 1979 - Gates of Mitzvah*

*3** end of 19th cenury - B. Felsenthal, classical Reformer

4* 1961 J. Petuchowski, in Ever since Sinai, NewYork publication, 1961

5* 2001 – D. Forman, article in Forward (Aug. 17th, 2001)

6* 1979 -*Gates of Mitzva*

7* 1996 – S. Maslin, in Reform Judaism magazine, summer 1996

8* in CCAR Journal, winter 2004 : *"Richard levy (former CCAR president) remembers well a conversation he had with a fellow student, in his first year of rabbinical school".* The fellow student argued that, and then, it was a common statement"

*9** 1998 - Richard Levy wrote (Reform Judaism, winter 1998)

10* 2004 - Jared Saks, rabbinical student, HUC-JIR New York (in a sermon)

11* Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf

*12** Publication UAHC 1935

13* Publication UAHC 1967

List the different motives arguing in favor of or against *kashrut* in those different quotes, such as:

Spiritual Motives of *kashrut*, potential to enhance spirituality, to bring *qedusha*

Ethical Motives, *Ecokashrut* (describe that term for students), a way to express gratefulness, to show our respect for environment…

National Motives: ability to create a sense of peoplehood, to keep us alive as a people, to be faithful to our past.

4) WRAP-UP

-Where does the movement stand today?

The approach to the practice of Kashrut is undoubtedly different today than it was a century ago for American Reform leaders. Nevertheless, the principles which led the movement at its origin are still leading principles for us. There is still, in the movement, a strong concern for the **ethical message** of Judaism and the **spiritual power** of our practice. Interestingly, the reasons why early Reformers abandoned *kashrut* (considered not ethical and unable to inspire) are precisely the motives put forward today by some, in favor of a return to this practice (as being both ethical and inspirational).

However, as Reform Judaism relies on personal autonomy and freedom of choice, there is no will to compel people to implement *kashrut* in their home, nor is there a veto on this practice. Those who argue in favor of *kashrut* in the movement often do so in the name of Reform principles: ethical concern for others (able to eat at our table), for animals, for the environment,…spiritual concerns, for what *kashrut* rituals can bring into our lives, in terms of holiness and religious meaning. There is no 'all or nothing' policy on the issue of *kashrut*. Undoubtedly, *kashrut* is part of the movement reflection and is no longer an irrelevant question as it might have been at the times of the Pittsburgh platform!

Before the participants leave:

Ask them to take home the following hand-out and reflect on this excerpt from Marc Washofsky's guide (Guide of Reform Practice, UAHC Press, 1998), which summarizes up the Movement's positioning today.

> *"There is a number of compelling 'reasons' that might motivate a Reform Jew to adopt kashrut. Some of these are: 1) identification with the contemporary and historical Jewish religious experience, 2) the authority of the religious tradition itself, both biblical and rabbinical, 3) a desire to have a home in which any Jew may feel free to eat, 4) a desire to place limits upon one's diet as an expression of ethical responsibility toward nature..."*

Announce the theme of the next lesson:

'From the theologians to our congregants: what is our community's taste?'

LESSON III: THE SKIN

OUR CONGREGATION'S TASTE

Goal of the lesson:

-Reflect on the conditions of implementation of *kashrut* in different congregations

-Analyze the role of the leadership in the stages of decision making

Core concept:

Being in a leadership position, the board needs to have a vision and think ahead about the stages of implementation of *kashrut* in their congregation.

Activity:

Explain to the group that this time we will not start the activity with a snack, but we will close our session with a special concluding blessing and wine. (It should motivate them!)

1) **Torah Study**

We will study together the Manna story. This is a very well known episode in the Bible, but today we will try to read it through a different angle. Our frame is our theme: what can this text teach us about the implementation of a dietary policy in a congregation?

Split the group into Ch'avrutot. Ask each group to read carefully the text and try to answer the following question:

THE MANNA EPISODE

וַיִּלֹּונוּ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה
וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן בַּמִּדְבָּר: 3 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי־יִתֵּן מוּתֵנוּ בְיַד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל־סִיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאָכְלֵנוּ
לֶחֶם לָשֹׂבַע כִּי־הוֹצֵאתֶם אֹתָנוּ אֶל־
הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת־כָּל־הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה
בָּרָעָב: ס
4 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִנְנִי מַמְטִיר לָכֶם
לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם וְיָצָא הָעָם וְלָקְטוּ דְּבַר־
יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנַסֶּנּוּ הֲיֵלֵךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי
אִם־לֹא: 5 וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי וְהֵכִינוּ אֵת
אֲשֶׁר־יָבִיאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנֶה עַל אֲשֶׁר־יִלְקְטוּ
יוֹם | יוֹם: ס 6 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן
אֶל־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶרֶב וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי יְהוָה
הוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: 7 וּבֹקֶר
וּרְאִיתֶם אֶת־כְּבוֹד יְהוָה בְּשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־
תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם עַל־יְהוָה וְנַחְנוּ מָה כִּי תלונו
תַלִּינוּ עָלֵינוּ: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּתֵת יְהוָה
לָכֶם בָּעֶרֶב בָּשָׂר לֶאֱכֹל וְלֶחֶם בַּבֹּקֶר
לִשְׂבַּע בִּשְׁמֹעַ יְהוָה אֶת־תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־
אַתֶּם מַלִּינִם עָלָיו וְנַחְנוּ מָה לֹא־עָלֵינוּ
תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם כִּי עַל־יְהוָה:
9 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אֱמֹר אֶל־כָּל־
עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קִרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
כִּי שָׁמַע אֶת תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם: 10 וַיְהִי כְּדַבֵּר
אַהֲרֹן אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּפְנוּ
אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר וְהִנֵּה כְּבוֹד יְהוָה נִרְאָה
בֶּעָנָן: פ

In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death."

4And the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not. 5But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day." 6So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "By evening you shall know it was the LORD who brought you out from the land of Egypt; 7and in the morning you shall behold the Presence[a] of the LORD, because He has heard your grumblings against the LORD. For who are we that you should grumble against us? 8Since it is the LORD," Moses continued, "who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because the LORD has heard the grumblings you utter against Him, what is our part? Your grumbling is not against us, but against the LORD!"

9Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole Israelite community: Advance toward the LORD, for He has heard your grumbling." 10And as Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and

there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of the LORD.

11The LORD spoke to Moses: 12"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Speak to them and say: By evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; and you shall know that I the LORD am your God."

13In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp. 14When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"[b]—for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. 16This is what the LORD has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an *omer* to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent."

17The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18But when they measured it by the *omer*, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.

11 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר׃
12 שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּלוּנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דַּבֵּר
אֲלֵהֶם לֵאמֹר בֵּין הָעַרְבַּיִם תֹּאכְלוּ בָשָׂר
וּבַבֹּקֶר תִּשְׂבְּעוּ־לָחֶם וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃
13 וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַתַּעַל הַשְּׂלָו וַתְּכַס אֶת־
הַמַּחֲנֶה וּבַבֹּקֶר הָיְתָה שִׁכְבַת הַטַּל סָבִיב
לַמַּחֲנֶה׃ 14 וַתַּעַל שִׁכְבַת הַטָּל וְהִנֵּה
עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּדְבָּר דַּק מְחֻסְפָּס דַּק כַּכְּפֹר
עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 15 וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו מָן הוּא כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ
מַה־הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם הוּא הַלֶּחֶם
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לְאָכְלָה׃ 16 זֶה הַדָּבָר
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לִקְטוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי
אָכְלוֹ עֹמֶר לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת מִסְפַּר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם
אִישׁ לַאֲשֶׁר בְּאָהֳלוֹ תִּקָּחוּ׃
17 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְקְטוּ הַמַּרְבֶּה
וְהַמַּמְעִיט׃ 18 וַיְמֹדְדוּ בָעֹמֶר וְלֹא הֶעְדִּיף
הַמַּרְבֶּה וְהַמַּמְעִיט לֹא הֶחְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי־
אָכְלוֹ לָקָטוּ׃

- When does the crisis occur? How can we compare this situation to a moment in our congregational life?
- What is the role of the leader in this episode?
- What does Manna mean? How do you understand this meaning?
- What do you think of the food distribution policy described in this chapter? Try to extrapolate it to the question of Kashrut.

Reconvene the groups and share insights. Help the group to focus on the following issues:

- **A time of transition**: the episode of the Manna occurs at the beginning of the journey in the desert. The Israelites adapt to a new reality, an unstable situation, a time of transition. (Our congregation often has to do the same!) Just as the Hebrews, our congregation too is living changes in matter of dietary practices (the face of the congregation evolves, the relationship of the movement to dietary regulation is different, the congregants' practice and the general consideration of Kashrut too)

- **A critical question of food**: In the wilderness, the question of food has the potential to generate a rebellion in the congregation: it may be that kashrut, in a Reform congregation, has the potential to do the same… Inside our congregation, coexist people with different practices, different expectations as to what the standards in a Reform congregation should be. The reactions to the implementation of Kashrut in our congregation can be very different from one individual to the other.

- **The role of leadership**. Just as the Israelites turn to Moses in times of crisis, the congregation turns to us (board members, clergy, leaders…) to resolve the food policy issue: people expect their congregational leaders (us) to step in and design a food policy, to set the standards and define the way of living inside the congregation.

-**The individual versus the congregation**

The Manna distribution and picking takes into consideration the entire congregational needs: each one takes according to one's own need and is therefore aware of other people's needs. This could be a model for the implementation of kashrut in a congregation: we should ask

ourselves how we respect everybody's need / practice through our communal practice. Implementing Kashrut in congregational meals, even if many members do not implement Kashrut in their own houses, could set the tone for our community , as a place of inclusivity.

- **Eating the question!** MANNA literally means 'what is this'? Interestingly, the food, in the wilderness, is a question. The Israelites will be nourished on their journey by questions and the process of eating is accompanied by a questioning. The reflection we are engaged in about Kashrut should be the same: our Reform philosophy obliges us to permanently ask ourselves if our practice fits our beliefs, our commitments and our deepest questions.

"What is this" that we eat in the congregation?

"What is this" that we say when we eat/do not eat this?

"What is this" saying about who we are and what we believe in?

Sometimes it forces us to question our classical Minhagim (customs), our traditions and fathers' policy. Today, we are asked to question *kashrut*. Does our congregational practice fit our deepest beliefs?

Another point: concerning *kashrut*, as Reform leaders who believe in informed choice, we have a responsibility toward our congregants. Ask the group how they react to the following statement, in the light of their congregational practice:

"Even if our personal response to the Torah dietary calls is NO!, we restrict our people's freedom if we do not provide them with the information that will let them respond according to their own religious lights" [20]

[20] Richard Levy in 'kashrut, a new freedom for Reform Jews', CCAR journal, winter 2004

2) The case-studies

We split into three groups. Each group will receive a case-study. They should study together carefully each example presented (the examples are not 'real ones' but they are inspired by real situations). Each group should then reflect on a model and answer the following questions:

*How do you react to the case described?

*What concern do you share with/ disagree with in the case presented?

*Do you think the example (or part of it) is transferable to your congregation?

CASE 1: Congregation Beit Torah, Chicago

Five years ago, Rabbi Henry became the new Rabbi of Beit Torah, a middle sized congregation in Illinois. Rabbi Henry just graduated from rabbinical school and accepted this position as his first job. As of the first board meeting, he raised the issue of Kashrut in the congregation. The congregation had never been *kosher*, nor '*kosher*-style' (the food served at congregational meals included shrimps, pork…) Rabbi Henry insisted in this meeting that he would like the congregational policy to evolve toward a higher level of kashrut. The arguments he brought in favor of this evolution included the fact that it would allow everybody to share meals, it might even attract new members who "feel close to the Reform ideology but do not join our events because they cannot share our meals". He also insisted that some form of *kashrut* policy would provide an amazing educational tool for the entire congregation, primarily for children who had never heard of Kashrut laws at home, and would discover and experience this part of Judaism in the congregation.

The board of Beit Torah reacted very strongly. Some people agreed with Rabbi Henry's arguments but others violently expressed their disagreement.

Mark, who had been a member of the board for many years said: "*This is not our custom here! This has never been. Why should we implement something for educational purpose when none of us consider this practice as relevant in their home?"*

Someone else argued: *"the rejection of kashrut is for me precisely a heritage of the Reform movement. We respect people's autonomy and let them do what they want at home… but the congregation does not impose on its entire group the custom of a few".*

After a few weeks of strong discussions in the congregation, it was decided as a temporary solution that a few kosher meals, ordered at a local caterer, would be provided for each congregational meals. This way, the kosher option would be given to the minority of the congregants who was willing to follow dietary restrictions.

CASE 2: -Congregation Beit Avodah, Los Angeles

When Rabbi Tom joined Beit Avodah twenty years ago, there was no *kashrut* policy whatsoever in the congregation. Soon, he designed a new policy: the meals should be kosher style. No obvious *Treif* food should appear on the tables during congregational meals, meat and milk should not be served on the same table but the meat did not need to be *hechsher*. The congregation accepted this change without opposition. People perceived it then as a symbolic change. Recently, Rabbi Tom has started to feel the need for a new change in the dietary policy of Beit Avodah. New members have joined the congregation. Some of them have a more traditional practice than others. The Rabbi also felt that , generally speaking, the movement is moving toward a higher level of ritualization and a general reflection about *mitzvot* and tradition. Therefore, at the last board meeting, he suggested that the meat ordered for community meals should be kosher (with hech'sher). The majority of the board accepted the idea. A few objected that this was not the Reform custom and that the fact there is no imposed policy on *kashrut* might have been the reason why some members had chosen to join this congregation rather than another. Indeed, the congregation often rents space for private events, bar mitzvah, weddings. People who choose to organize their celebration there know that the congregation will not force them to order their food from a kosher caterer.

The solution found in Beit Avoda is the following: all the meals served by the congregation should be kosher. However, meals ordered by people who rent space for private events do not have to be strictly kosher as long as they are 'kosher style' (no obvious treif food should be served)

Case 3: Congregation Beit Gmilut Chassadim, New York

Rabbi Laura has been the leader of this congregation for the past ten years. She is a strong advocate of *Ecokashrut*, as she believes it fits the ethical message that Judaism is committed to. There is no traditional k*ashrut* policy in the congregation but a few years ago, the board decided that the food ordered for congregational meals needed to fit certain standards of Ecokashrut: the chicken had to be free range, the coffee needed to follow fair trade standards…

Lately, new members have joined the congregation. A few families observe a more traditional kashrut. They have asked the Rabbi if the meat served in congregational meals could have an hech'sher. Problem: it is very difficult to find kosher free range poultry in the United States!

At the last board meeting, the Rabbi came up with a new idea: maybe the congregation should be vegetarian. No meat would be served in congregational meals. This way they would resolve the issue of traditional *kashrut* and be faithful to their ethical concern for Tzaar Baalei Chaim, caring for animals' suffering. The board is now considering this option.

3) Reconvene the groups and give a summarizing task!

Now that the different groups have discussed the cases, they are ready to present to the other groups their own analysis of how a Kashrut implementation could be made possible in their congregation. Each group is asked to present their conclusion in the form of a cooking recipe!

Example: .**RECIPE for our k*ashrut* practice** (in congregation X)

Fits ….persons (number of congregants)

1 cup of courageous leadership

1 cup of vision

2 cups of Manna (!)

First, mix 1 cup of 'minhag of the place' with 1 cup of 'how long has it been this way?'

On the side, prepare a bowl of 'what has changed in our congregation', and one of 'here is what we believe in'.

Warm slowly and then add:

-a spoon of ecokashrut

-two cups of 'we want everybody to be able to share our meals'

-three large spoons of 'kashrut as an educational tool'

How should it be served.?

*with care, slowly preparing people to the change

*by stages. Should it concern first the religious school? Only official congregational meals? Any kind of meal served in the congregation?

Ask each group to present its receipe to the other groups.

4) Close the program.

Remind the group of each step they went through together. Use the metaphor of a grape (take one in your hand to demonstrate)

Day 1: THE SEEDS (at the core) we have studied together the meaning of food in our tradition: its symbolism, its power to convey meaning. We have studied Ezechiel : how food initiates his holy work and is the opening tool for prophecy. In our tradition, we eat what we believe in, we tell stories through food and we think about the future with food.

Day 2: THE FLESH (what envelops those core principles). We have reflected together on the Reform approach to *kashrut*, how it evolved throughout its history, from a rejection to a possible reconciliation/redefinition. We studied Leviticus 11 and reflected on our own feeling toward biblical dietary restrictions.

Day 3: THE SKIN (our color, our shape). Today, we have reflected on our role as leaders in the development of our congregational policy. What should be taken into consideration? What are the possible reactions it will generate? What is our vision for our congregation's future?

The discussion and reflection will probably go on in the coming months (years?), but in every step we take we should remember that our decisions need to be influenced by those three layers: the core of our tradition, the layers of our Reform commitment and the shape and color of our very own congregation.

Those three layers are used in the preparation of wine and are part of the fermentation process. Together we raise our glasses of wine and say the blessing.

May what we have studied together in the past days feed our ongoing journey and brings its fruit to our community's life.

LECHAIM!!!

PART IV :

A NEW REFORM DISCOURSE ON MITZVA

KASHRUT : A TEST FOR THE REFORM MOVEMENT

In this thesis, the analysis of the Movement's approach to dietary regulation revealed a clear evolution. The different sources addressed *kashrut* in light of the philosophical / theological contexts of their time. For example,

- a rejection of religious particularism among early Reformers drove them to distance themselves from *kashrut*
- a growing awareness of the environment in today's society nourishes the current concern for EcoKashrut in our movement.

Indeed, the varying philosophies of a particular of a period impacts, or even creates religious discourses and praxis. Therefore, I posit that the recent re-consideration of dietary practices in our movement is a byproduct of a broader theological debate. As Rabbi Peter Knobel wrote in 1990, *"The history of Reform Judaism's attitude toward kashrut should be viewed within the context of its attitude toward Jewish religious practice in general"*[21] If the Reform Movement's approach to *kashrut* is indeed an illustration (or byproduct) of its relationship to *mitzvot* in general, we need to ask ourselves the following question:

What is the new approach to *mitzvot* which allows the *kashrut* (r)evolution to take place?

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[21] Peter Knobel, in Reform Judaism and *kashrut*, Judaism 39:4, 1990, p488

I – MA NISHTANA : What's New in Reform Judaism?

- CHANGE IN REFORM PRACTICE

Change in Reform practice has been the theme of many recent books, speeches, and sermons: The Reform Movement today seems to reflect a new openness to tradition. The customs of many congregations have evolved toward a growing acceptance of traditional practice. To take an example, the wearing of *talit* and *kipot* is no longer an exception. Even *Tefilin* are often seen in sanctuaries. Hebrew prayers have been re-introduced to services. Ancient rituals are considered anew alongside new ones recently created. In other words, ancient customs are no longer off limits within a congregants' spiritual journey. Reform repertoire is expanding through new ceremonies, folkways, ritual practices... While Reformers are still free to choose, they now face a larger repertoire of *mitzvot*.

Those practical changes reflect an evolution in the majority of congregants' practice and sensibilities. But the change, which is welcomed (even expected) by many, is at times denunciated by others. Some regard these new practices as outside Reform *minhag* and even a threat to their principles. It may therefore be important to emphasize that this new repertoire of *mitzvot* does not challenge the centrality of freedom of choice and autonomy in the Reform philosophy.

One could argue that Judaism has always changed and evolved, as has the Reform movement. This may, in fact, be the reason why it is called "Reform" and not "Reformed" Judaism. The way to be faithful to Reform philosophy may precisely be by allowing this change !

- CHANGE IN REFORM DISCOURSE AND VOCABULARY

In his opening address, as the new president of the Reform Movement, Eric Yoffie declared his belief in a Movement "*grounded in principles of autonomy and pluralism.*" He then delineated his will to " *talk of obligations, to call for an observance that is regular and consistent, and assert that our actions need not always begin with our own impulses*".

The president of the Movement, Eric Yoffie, places *mitzva* and observance as a supreme priority of the movement This speech perfectly illustrates this new priority at work in the Reform leadership discourse. In a recent collection of essays Duties of the soul, Yoffie writes *" we all know that the tenuous bonds of anti-Semitism, a sense of shared history, a feeling for ethnicity and a concern for the welfare of Israel and the safety of the Jews elsewhere are each insufficient to insure the community of the Jewish People ... it's* ***the mitzva-intoxicated Reform Jew*** (my emphasis) *who will be the agent of a serious revival in our movement...it is a Reform Jew who observes precepts of Torah because they are commanded by God."*

The author goes on defining *mitzva* as *"a religious act, drawn from Torah, carried out by Jews who believe that these acts have been transmitted to us by a commanding God and that they are indicative of the commander's power to command"*[22]

Similar ideas are expressed in the last platform of the Movement, edited in Pittsburgh in 1999. The document calls Reform Jews to be open *to 'the whole array of mitzvot, which demand renewed attention.'*

Obligations, observance, *mitzvot* - this vocabulary appears time and again in many writings of the Movement in recent years. The emphasis on the word 'commandment' refutes in its wake any attempt to define *mitzva* as a 'good deed.' It seems that doing a *mitzva* in the new Reform vocabulary, is not about 'choosing to do good' but 'doing what you ought to!'

II - OXYMORONS OF (AMERICAN) REFORM JUDAISM

- **Autonomy versus Obligation**

From its origin, Reform Judaism put the notion of individual autonomy at the core of its principles. Religious practice is a matter of personal choice, and autonomy has an authoritative power. But those founding principles for Reform Jews seem to counter other principles of Judaism:

The idea of *mitzva* , as a commandment, seems to imply an obligation toward an 'Other,'beyond the individual self. *Mitzva* suggests a sense of obligation to God and to the community...i.e. an authority which transcends the self!

There seems to be permanent and irreconcilable tensions between Autonomy, on the one hand, and a sense of obligation (*Chova*) toward a transcendent authority, on the other.

- **Voluntarism versus Commandment**

Reform Judaism values freedom of choice and voluntarism of action over adherence to fixed and unquestioned rules. This philosophical statement seems to counter a traditional approach to *mitzva*, stated in the Talmudic principle of BT Kidushin 31a: *'Greater is one who is commanded to do something and does it, than one who is not commanded to do something and does it.'*

This principle appears as antithetical to Western values, where the motivation for an action is more valued than the duty itself. Voluntarism is highly regarded in American culture, built as it is around freedom. In America, there is no centralized state-church compelling affiliation, or a particular religious practice. An individual's affiliation is made on the basis of

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[22] Goldstein N. and Knobel P, Duties of the soul, UAHC press, 1999, p28

voluntarism. This system impels religious institutions to base affiliation upon the needs and desires of lay people rather than adherence to a traditional legalist system.

- **the Individual versus the Community**

Reform Judaism puts the individual at the center. He/she is autonomous and responsible for the decision and practice he/she chooses to follow/perform. Strengthened by the inherent individualism of the American society, this principle seems to counter other values expressed in traditional Judaism. Many religious Jewish experiences have to be lived as communal experiences. Prayer is probably the supreme example as a *minyan* is needed for key parts of the service. Many rituals remind us of collective encounters with the divine, or with the past (e.g. Pesach and Channuka) . How therefore can an individual choose for himself/herself and not be bound by communal prescription?

III - REDEFINING FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

1- AUTONOMY: Is There Such a Thing?

The limit of reason

Immanuel KANT (1724 1804) is probably the philosopher who had the most influence on the development of Reform Judaism. According to his theories, people have to free themselves from oppressive rules imposed by others, especially by institutions and power structures. For Kant, human beings were to follow only the dictates of reason, to discover a supreme and universal moral law which was embedded in the individual…and which bound you. In a phrase, for Kant, autonomy begot obligation!

In other words, autonomy is based on the fact that through reason the individual can discover a universal moral law and chooses to be morally bound by it

So for Kant and for early reformers, morality and autonomy are inextricably linked to a human strong sense of obligation.

More than two centuries after the reign of Kantian theories and as heirs to his philosophy, we need now to distance ourselves from it, in a number of ways:

- We do not live in a repressive, morally forbidding or restrictive society, as did Kant. We live today in a Western, post-modern society where the prevalent leitmotiv is 'I do what I want, who are you to judge me?!' rather than 'I would like to free myself from a despotic power'.
- In our post-modern era, we no longer believe that reason is pure. We are aware that our thoughts are affected by culture, gender, experience...we doubt that the 'dictate of reason alone, freed from passion and emotion' would lead us to a pure and universal morality (after all, the rational twentieth century did not prevent a genocide!) The theory of pure reason cannot today give us absolute legitimacy to be autonomous.

-the Limit of Individualism

In many ways, American individualism contributed to the Reform approach of placing the individual at the center of any religious decision. Today, many leaders of the movement question this approach. The great theologian, Eugene Borowitz, speaks of a 'Jewish covenantal communal self', emphasizing the fact that the obligation toward the community should be balanced with Autonomy.

Echoing these views, Eric Yoffie writes *"our movement has elevated the individual to a position of supreme importance, and we have enshrined the individual conscience as our final*

authority...nonetheless I believe we need a crucial shift in emphasis". [23]The shift Yoffie talks about is a shift toward collective commitment and responsibility. He then writes 'a la Kennedy': "*in the eyes of too many, Jews do not exist to serve Judaism, Judaism exists to serve the needs of Jews...of course, Judaism should serve the needs of Jews but can't it be a two-way street?*"

2- INFORMED CHOICE

Reform Judaism has always championed informed choice. Today, many theologians of the movement reflect on the limits of this notion for two main reasons.

***Learn It First**

The first criticism voiced against this founding principle is the fact that, by definition, informed choice requires …information! Herbert Bronstein writes:

> "*as a youth I was taught, and as a young man I taught others, that it is even more difficult to be a Reform Jew than a traditional Jew because in order to exercise personal choice we have to know a good deal more than the 'blindly accepting' orthodox...who of us will claim that we , or our children are taught more or know more about Judaism than a comparable Orthodox or Conservative Jew? How can we be certain that our choices are made more on the basis of knowledge and principle ... than out of convenience, or lack of knowledge or other reasons that are self-serving.*"[24]

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[23] Duties of the soul, UAHC Press, p32
[24] Goldstein N. and Knobel P. Duties of the soul, UAHC Press, New York, 1999 p 79

***Do It First!**

The second consideration voiced in the movement today has to do with the power of the rite itself as a transformative educational experience. How can you know if something is good for you until you try it, until you consider its implementation in your life ? Some Reform leaders nowadays are seriously considering this question. Aaron Petushowski, for example, develops the idea that modern Jews should try to experience the commandments. The Jews should "*try out those practices and observances which might contain God's commandments to him. Here practice is the only way to find out. Only by actually trying to observe it, will he be able to discover if he is dealing with a « commandment » or just with another item of what is still only legislation to him.*" [25]

[25] idem p 110

Experiencing the *mitzva* is, for the author, the only way to define if a certain law has the value of a commandment...for you! This suggests that different commandments will or will not bind different individuals. This view is close to Buber's and Rosenzweig's philosophy of *mitzvot*, as laws calling for individual responses. For them revelation includes both divine/heteronomous and human/autonomous dimensions. As Buber writes: *"in a moment of revelation you feel both that you are being summoned and that everything is up to you."* Does this law binds you? You can't know until you try it and consider if it calls YOU for a response! Eric Yoffie describes the same idea in the following terms: "*Why did Moses respond as he did to the divine command? Why did he hear what he heard at Sinai?...we realize that different Jews at different times will necessarily respond in different ways to the Metzave, the divine commander. You and I will respond differently than Moses responded. We are different people, with different experiences, backgrounds and spiritual qualities.*" [26]

3 – FREEDOM

In fact, any Reform theologians warned of the possible misinterpretation of the principle of freedom in the movement. According to them, freedom is often misunderstood to mean the opportunity to do whatever we want.

As Eugene Borowitz writes in Liberal Judaism, "*the freedom to choose became for many license to do as little as possible... Personal convenience is often substituted for Jewish commitment and responsibility*" [27]

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[26] idem p34

[27] Eugene Borowitz, Liberal Judaism, UAHC press, 1984

Following a similar idea, Rabbi Michael Feshbach of Temple Shalom (Chevy Chase, MD) affirms that "*a blank check, a hech'sher to do 'whatever you want' does a disservice to the Jews and Judaism today.*"

Limiting the individual's freedom is being advanced as a means to reach different religious ends:

-Limiting Your Freedom as a Spiritual Enhancer

One's choice to restrict one's freedom can have a particular spiritual meaning for this individual. At times, fulfilling a *mitzva* because you feel it is the 'right thing to do', not because you want to do it, gives a sensation of holiness and wholeness. More than that, according to Eric Yoffie, *"Reform Jews aspire to be commanded. Failing to be commanded, they cannot be religiously fulfilled or religiously complete...Reform Judaism is a religious discipline that requires a great deal of us and in return promises to transform our lives."* [28]

-Limiting your Freedom as an Ethical Practice

As we have studied, ethical considerations prevailed over rituals for classical Reformers. A new leitmotiv is emerging among Reform theologians, emphasizing the idea that we should "*ritualize the ethics, and ethicize the ritual.*"

Arnold Jacob Wolf is strongly advocating for the reconciliation of the ritual and ethical sides of the Jewish message, as illustrated by the following: "*if you understand kashrut, it has obvious ethical implications, ecological implications, implications for the nature of the human body, and so on. If you ritualize ethics, then you are not just a Jew who does Good, you are a Jew who has to do good. That's why the mitzva is always better than the person who*

[28] Eric Yoffie in Duties of the soul, UAHC press, 1999, p 32

chooses." Wolf suggests that if one's actions are strengthened by a sense of (religious) duty and not simply by individualized choice, one's commitment to ethics might be more systematic.

-Limiting your Freedom as Part of a Relationship

Eugene Borowitz has developed in books and articles the concept of a "Covenantal relationship". In Borowitz' mind, the relationship between God and the Jewish People implies a renewed commitment, and an ongoing responsibility. This metaphor of human relationships implies various possible understandings of God:

- GOD AS A PARTNER: the love metaphor

This metaphor compares *mitzva* to the commitment one takes in a love relationship. Being in such a relationship implies that you surrender part of your freedom in the name of a greater goal and an emotional connection. Love, by definition, is a limitation of your freedom. Being attached to someone makes you dependent in many ways, and creates binding commitments. It implies acting a certain way, speaking a certain way, refraining from certain things...This metaphor can easily be transposed to explain the notion of *mitsva*. Our special relationship to the divine may imply performing certain acts, and refraining from others, as an expression of our commitment to this special connection. This metaphor of *mitzva* as a love relationship is often used today. As we have seen in some educational settings, this is used to explain to students the notion of *mitzva*. (See Tirza Arad's interview in Part II).

- GOD AS A MASTER: the hierarchical metaphor

From a Reform standpoint, the idea of an heteronomous power, commanding us from above, has been problematic. This hierarchy of powers seemed irreconcilable with the precious

element of autonomy and freedom at the core of the movement's philosophy. Nevertheless, in recent years, this metaphor of 'God as a Master' found a new life in our leaders' discourse. Arnold Jacob Wolf , for example, criticizes those in the Movement who think that *"obedience is largely a matter of pick and choose."*[29] Wolf disagrees with those who say that " *We will decide which mitzvot we accept and which we don't. We are in charge of our own religious lives.*" For Wolf, this is "*the original sin of Reform Judaism: by definition we cannot freely choose to be commanded!"* Eric Yoffie goes even further and claims: *"if mitzvot are done to please God, we must be prepared, at least some of the time, to please God before we please ourselves*"

- GOD AS THE OTHER: the idolatry of the self

Freedom is undoubtedly the emblem of America. We tell and retell our meta-narratives in the light of freedom (this is indeed how the way many American Jews tell the Passover story: let my people go!). But we tend to forget that in this story, freedom is not simply a **freedom from** (the enemy), but mainly a **freedom to** (worship and serve god): God doesn't say 'Let my people go that they may be free' but rather 'let my people go that they may serve me!' The goal is not a freedom per se but a freedom to worship a true God, which implies obligation and duty. How do we explain, then, as Reform Jews our belief in the value of Autonomy? Where is autonomy and freedom of choice in the story of exodus?
At first glance, it seems that our emphasis on autonomy and freedom of choice is antithetical to that idea : over-emphasizing freedom, in our society, often leads us this notion of 'I can do

[29] 'Rediscovering *mitzva*' in Duties of the soul, UAHC Press, p19

whatever I want' . Feeling obligated only to ourselves and our desires leads us to worship our wills (rather than God). This type of worship isn't but an idolatry of the self !

Herbert Bronstein is aware of this threat and writes : '*Idolatry is ultimately reducible to the worship of self or an aspect of one's self no longer connected to anything beyond the self*' .

Autonomy, when worshiped, leads to idolatry. But being aware of this threat should not lead us to reject altogether the concept of autonomy. Bronstein proposes a fascinating way to reconcile freedom and duty. He writes: *"Autonomy is a doctrine salutary for Judaism, for religion and for human well-being, in my view only if we understand autonomy as a choice against idols."* In the author's view, there is room for autonomy in our narrative, as long as autonomy is the freedom to leave a state of idolatry (of the self) to authentically serve God.

In the classical Reform discourse, one needed freedom to find in one's self a universal morality. In this new Reform discourse, a limitation of freedom is inextricably linked to one's ability to serve God, transcending one's self.

IV - CONCLUSION of PART IV

As seen through the words of different theologians presented in this chapter, the Reform movement today is redefining its approach to *mitzvot*. Undoubtedly, all agree we cannot/should not return to a religion of coercion. *« No pork police will knock down your doors, or stop you in your car for a treific violation »*, said with humor in one of his sermons Rabbi Michael Feshbach, from Temple Shalom (Chevy Chase, MD).

Nevertheless, as committed Jews, we need today to confront honestly three crucial questions :

What do we do with our freedom?

What is the meaning of our autonomy?

Is God truly at the center of our religion or do we tend toward worship of ourselves?

The old paradoxical ghosts of autonomy versus duty, which inhabited Reform philosophy since its birth, are still 'haunting' the Reform discourse today. Will we ever be able to resolve these original tensions? Maybe, if we accept that Liberal Judaism cannot simply be a Judaism that chooses autonomy over authority. The issue may be, not whether to be both, but how to be both!

In Liberal Judaism, Eugene Borowitz defines two overlapping periods in Reform theology[30]:

1- a time of 'negative freedom', where liberal Jews emphasize their right NOT TO DO what prior Jews had considered mandatory.

[30] Eugene Borowitz, Liberal Judaism, UAHC press, 1984, p.324

2- A time of 'positive freedom', where liberals use religious self-determination to add to their religious observance. They are, then, **free to** adopt previously neglected traditions, and not simply **free from** certain observances. They can also create new traditions to express their growing Jewish religious sensibilities. Today, as the movement combines reconciliation and creation of rituals, we may simply be at the heart of this period.

The movement is engaged in building new *minhagim* and strenghening old ones. An example of such an initiative is the will to encourage Jews to study Torah on a daily basis. "Torah –10 minutes a day" is a project initiated by the Union, and one of the priorities advocated by the movement.

Interestingly, the movement has no problem telling 'people SHOULD study torah'…but is still reluctant to use the same vocabulary for other *mitzvot*. Is the *mitzva* of Torah study less committing than others ? Does it constitute a less threatening, a more largely accepted activity, so that the movement can easily request such a commitment from its members? Or is it simply the first step, a "gate of entry", toward a larger expectation from our congregants? Our tradition teaches us that 'from text study emerges praxis', as stated in *Pirkei Avot*: "And the study of Torah leads to them all…". As time passes, Torah study communities may become more and more *mitzvot* doing communities.

PART V –

FROM THE TREIFA BANQUET

TO TODAY'S CLASSROOMS,

A CONCLUSION

From words to deeds : M*itzva* is a Call for a Response

As we have shown , the new Reform discourse on *mitzva* emphasizes the notion of commitment, duty and the idea of being 'commanded'. Because language shapes reality, I am convinced this new approach should and will ultimately impact our actions. These words will undoubtedly be translated into deeds, both in individuals' and congregational lives.

As a pluralistic movement which values freedom of choice, those 'deeds' will not necessarily be the same for everyone. A Reform conception of *mitzvot* calls for personal responses. In the example of *kashrut*, one might choose to follow a traditional form of dietary restriction, whereas someone else might decided this is not an appropriate response for him/her. Whatever an individual response may be, I believe we simply cannot refuse to engage in a serious and deep questioning. In a word, one's answer might be 'yes' or 'no', but it cannot simply be a rejection of the question. Lately, I witnessed a conversation where someone explained that, as he had been 'caught' while eating on Yom Kippur, he simply answered to his 'prosecutor': "well, you know I am Reform!". I deeply believe we cannot tolerate 'Reform' to be the apologetic for simply doing 'whatever one has on his mind'. Of course, a Reform Jew can choose to eat on Yom Kippur. However, his/her decision needs to be nurtured by

honest introspection and a personal response to the call of a *mitzva*...not by a 'do-whatever-you-want' ideological roof.

From deeds to words: real life versus curriculum

Our research has shown a certain discrepancy between elements of 'real life' and curriculum contents. On one hand, leaders and future leaders admit that *kashrut* is a relevant question in their life, and a theme they are willing to address as educators. On the other hand, *kashrut* almost never appears formally in Reform curriculum, and there seems to be a high level of discomfort with possible consequences of its teaching. I suggest that for *kashrut* to be officially 'taught about', it needs to be officially 'thought about': educators often feel they are not untitled to teach about something they do not themselves practice. If the movement recognizes their (existing) dietary practices as an authentic form of *kashrut*, or if the movement officially defines what it considers to be possible Reform practices of *kashrut* (whether it be traditional, ecokashrut...), educators would then feel empowered to teach that behavior to their students. If the leaders reflect on *kashrut* and formulate more clearly what a Reform implementation may be, their words would be translated into educational deeds and curriculum. The example of Shabbat might be a powerful model to consider. Just as the Reform movement officially developed a liberal approach to Shabbat observances, k*ashrut* could be the new movement's project.

The question of consistency:

Starting with the Treifa Banquet and the first Pittsburgh Platform, the historical overview of the movement's approach to *kashrut* might be perceived as inconsistent. Indeed, in term of discourse and practice, the movement went from an absolute rejection of *kashrut* to a new

embrace of the practice. Nevertheless, as I suggested throughout my thesis, it seems to me that the main motives behind the movement's different expressions were the same. Leading sometimes to opposite practices, ethics has been, throughout the movement's history, the major rationale motivating its choices. In a word, yesterday's rejection of kashrut or today's choice of eco-kashrut are motivated by similar motives. In this way, today's reformers are faithful to their predecessors.

However, I posit that the new discourse on *mitzvot*, which puts duty and commandment at the core of our decision-making process, is a new one. The limitation of freedom and autonomy, advocated by our leaders, might be understood as an absolute break from yesterday's Reform values. One might then ask: is this new discourse on *mitzvot* truly faithful to our Reform heritage? I would answer with the following chasidic story:

> *After the rebbe died, his son replaced him. However, for each decision the rebbe took, his son ruled the opposite. One day, a chasid came to the son of the rebbe and asked him: "how is it that you are so different from your father?" The other answered: "No , I am not: I am just like him! Just as he did not imitate anymore, I do not either!"*

We may today take decisions our Reform predecessors would not have taken. We may engage in a path they did not intend to follow. However, as they did not imitate, we do not either. As we strive to be true to our deepest ethical convictions, as we struggle authentically with our religious commitments, we are faithful to their heritage.

APPENDIX N°1:

THE CCAR TASK FORCE ON *KASHRUT*

In the summer of 2000, a number of Reform rabbis attended a summer rabbinical program at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. One day, in the cafeteria, a few Reform participants started to discuss diet and Qedusha as it applies to the new statements of the second Pittsburgh platform[31] .

Benett Miller was among them. He remembers : *"we said to ourselves: if someone in our movement wants to eat Kosher and reflect on his/her practice, he currently has no real resources to turn too".*

Out of that discussion, was born the Task Force on *kashrut*, under the auspice of the CCAR. (under Charles Kroloff's presidency). The mission of the Task Force is to provide opportunities for study and learning about Judaism and diet in order to look at the issues related to *kashrut* from a variety of perspectives.

[31] The new Pittsburgh platform, written in 1999, specifies that the "*great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition...it also invites all reform Jews to engage in a dialogue with the sources of our tradition".*

Tasks:

1-make recommendations for a *kashrut* policy for CCAR MEETINGS

2-develop guidelines and approaches to *kashrut* for the movement as a whole

4-set-up subcommittees responsible to work on:

a)recommendations for CCAR

b)recommendations for the Movement

c) Reflect on *Eco-kashrut*

d) preparation for presentation at UAHC Biennial

In the fall of 2001, The CCAR task force on *kashrut* held of a two-day conference, in Boston. There, participants explored different approaches to diet in Judaism (many participants are quoted in this thesis). The task force then invited a number of people to write papers on the theme and they edited a written symposium for Reform Jews. This symposium was then edited and published in the CCAR journal,, winter 2004, under the title: A contemporary approach in Reform Judaism to the Spiritual and ethical dimensions of eating.

APPENDIX N°2: MODEL LETTER from the CHAI CURRICULUM

In a lesson on *kashrut*, the Chai Curriculum advises the educators to send the following model-letter to the parents of the students :

CHAI: Learning for Jewish Life

When you give the homework assignment, send home the letter to parents on page 30 that you can sign, or rewrite in your own words. It is important that parents understand that we are not asking their children or them to keep kosher. Rather, we want the students to explore the ideas of kashrut and why it is important that Reform Jews study the ideas of keeping kosher. These ideas are part of the category of mitzvot/commandments whose study and observance can make us feel closer to God. However, observing kashrut might not be meaningful for a given family, and it should be made clear that we are not advocating that all Reform Jews keep kosher.

Dear Parents,

Today we studied the mitzvot/commandments regarding keeping kosher. There are several aspects that we discussed. We learned about certain foods that are permitted and forbidden to eat under the laws of kashrut/keeping kosher found in Leviticus 11:1–23 and Deuteronomy 14:21, as well as a variety of blessings Jews say over the different types of foods we eat. The students had an opportunity to learn and review four blessings and then they determined which types of foods fit with each blessing. Most importantly, we again spent time discussing the idea that studying and following mitzvot/commandments can make us, as Reform Jews, feel closer to God. This is an ongoing discussion we have had over our last few lessons together. The responsibility of Reform Jews is to learn about different mitzvot and decide if they will enable us to feel a connection with God. Many modern liberal Jews who choose to keep kosher do so because it makes them think about the foods they are about to eat. It reminds them to be grateful for what they have, and that eating is a holy act. Mark Washofsky, in his book *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), says:

> There are any number of compelling "reasons" that might motivate a Reform Jew to adopt *kashrut*. Some of these are: 1) identification with the contemporary and historical Jewish religious experience; 2) the authority of the religious tradition itself, both biblical and rabbinic; 3) a desire to have a home in which any Jew might feel free to eat; 4) a desire to place limits upon one's diet as an expression of ethical responsibility toward nature. (p. 184)

This is not a lifestyle choice that we are advocating, nor are we expecting it from you or your family. It is, however, an important lesson you might want to discuss with your child within the context of how our actions can make our lives *kadosh*/holy, special, and closer to God.

Sincerely,

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