Beyond Flesh and Blood:

Jewish Law and Ethics of Meat Consumption

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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DEUTERONOMY TEACHES,

"A PERSON CANNOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE,

BUT CAN LIVE ON ANYTHING THAT GOD PROVIDES."

FOR EVERYTHING I AM PROVIDED EACH AND EVERY DAY,

I AM MOST GRATEFUL AND BLESSED.

FORWARD: AUGUST 1, 2009

I stopped eating meat in the summer of 1998. I was traveling in Eastern Europe and Israel as a participant in NFTY's *L'dor V'dor* Summer Israel Program. The trip was extraordinary in three ways: First, I became a strict ideological vegetarian. Second, I became steeped in a new Jewish community comprised of people who would become some of my closest friends and colleagues. Finally, I came to the realization that I wanted to study to be a Rabbi. Each plays an important role in my journey, which first led me to vegetarianism, then to rabbinical school and finally to this thesis.

My initial reason for eating vegetarian was purely social. The girls I had become close to during the first few days of the trip were vegetarians. For reasons I never understood, certain tables at each meal were designated "vegetarian," perhaps to make easier the task of feeding 80 teenagers. Although I did not know it then, I was finding safety and security in the practice of kashrut, as my Jewish ancestors had done in Eastern Europe. Though they may not have phrased it in quite the same way as I do today, eating is the foundation of socializing. At the time, I was not aware that my decision to refrain from eating meat was part of a larger movement of Jewish vegetarians and others who would some day build a Green and New Jewish Food Movement.

Later that the summer, the social motivations for becoming a vegetarian became ideological. The transformation culminated while working at a dairy-producing kibbutz in northern Israel. I was assigned to be a "calf-catcher." Part doula, part-farmer, my job was to stand behind a cow in active labor and, when the newborn calf's back legs emerged, grab hold and pull gently to encourage the rest of the calf to follow. After a few

hours of actively observing the female-in-labor, I actually helped birth a feisty and very bloody calf. The newborn initially collapsed from exhaustion, but after a few minutes, she stood up on her toothpick-sized legs, took a few tentative steps and made her way to her mother's udder for her first meal.

Our next meal on the kibbutz was hamburgers. And I became a vegetarian.

Until my sophomore year of college, I remained a content and vocal vegetarian. I had not yet made any connections between my food choices and myself as a Jew, but I knew that both were important to my overall identity. Being a vegetarian made me feel that I was contributing to and improving the world. Along with giving *tzedakah*, going to Shabbat services, recycling or attending the March for Women's Lives, this action made me feel connected to the betterment of the larger world.

Strangely and suddenly, when I became involved with the active Jewish community in College, my status as vegetarian made me an outsider. While other Jewish students saw the Hillel dining hall as a safe-haven for kashrut, I felt only resentment and confusion. Why, I wondered, couldn't I have cheese on my vegetable sandwich or ranch dressing on my salad on a so-called "meat" day? Other Jews questioned why I didn't "*really* keep kosher." I explained that keeping kosher had never been on my menu. I grew up in a Reform Jewish household that was equally committed to Judaism and liberalism. We went to temple on Friday nights, used our yearly *tzedakah* collection to buy canned goods for a food bank, hosted a Passover seder and were active participants in synagogue life. But kashrut had nothing to do with our Jewish life; it was for "them"— Orthodox Jews who seemed to me to cling to ancient rules better suited to another time and place.

My family's meals consisted of bacon on Saturday mornings, chicken Parmesan during the week and, my personal favorite, post-Sunday school clam chowder.

My desire to fit in and be accepted by my new Jewish community eventually took a toll on my eating practices. First, I started eating chicken on Friday nights. I was told that, though it was not a *mitzvah* per se, eating meat on Shabbat was a *minhag* (custom) that shows honor and respect to God. The Chabad Rabbi even claimed that the souls of animals eaten on *Shabbat* rose faster to heaven—their sacrifice was the ultimate one, he said, and they were rewarded with a place in the world-to-come, beside the Divine throne. These arguments didn't resonate for me. After all, my desire to become vegetarian was rooted in my experiences in Israel–witnessing the vulnerability of animals and taking part in a community with shared values. But in this community, my values set me apart from others.

Cautiously, I began to eat meat. Eventually, I bought two sets of dishes and quickly became consumed by the laws and practice of kashrut. Keeping kosher, I believed, allowed me to be a more fully accepted member of both the insular Hillel community and the Jewish community at large. My vocabulary changed to reflect my changing understanding and acceptance of the role Judaism played in all aspects of my life, including food. Shabbat became *Shabbas* and even *Shabbos,* kashrut became *kashrus,* which included words like *milchig, fleishig, pareve* and *traif.* The more I learned about *kashrut*, the more extreme I became in my eating practices, yet Jewish ethics constantly nagged at me, reminding me of my former, meat-free existence. My vegetarian sensibilities were partially appeased by the notion that at least kosher meat was supposedly the cleanest, healthiest, and most ethically-killed meat one could buy. I felt

secure knowing that I was choosing what I understood to be an ethically Jewish way of eating. Although my family did not agree or fully understand, they were supportive of my newfound kosher palette and responded by buying kosher turkey for Thanksgiving and kosher brisket for Passover.

Upon moving to Israel for my first year of rabbinical school, I discovered that I was among the majority of students who kept some version of kashrut. Of course, Jerusalem is an ideal place to keep kosher, with its grocery stores stocked with kosher products and glut of *glatt* kosher eateries. One had to actively search for a restaurant that served shrimp or meat-and-milk on the same plate. I confess to feeling some pride in knowing that I didn't keep kosher *just because* it was easier in Israel, or I was studying to be a Rabbi—I kept kosher because I felt obligated to do so. I had taken on this responsibility, and it represented an important piece of my Jewish ritual life. I honestly believed that it was what God wanted from me, and what my future congregants would expect.

My understanding of commandeness came from the overwhelmingly Conservative and Orthodox Jewish community I was part of in college. Although I continued to identify as a Reform Jew, my practice moved to the right, as I took on many ritual *mitzvot* including Shabbat observance, *kashrut*, some elements of modest dress and regular Jewish learning. Returning to a community of Reform Jews caused me to rethink some of these *mitzvot* as well as the idea of obligation in general. For example, one of my classmates admitted that she intentionally bought non-kosher meat because she couldn't reconcile what kosher meat represented with what she personally believed. This was the first time I realized that keeping kosher was not necessarily synonymous with eating

ethically. Although my classmate's idea intrigued me, and part of me even agreed, I couldn't imagine keeping a version of *kashrut* that would separate me from *klal yisrael* – the Jewish community that I had previously been a part of and desired to return to.

By the time I left Israel and moved to New York, I had returned to a quasi-vegetarian diet, as well as a more liberal understanding of commandedness. I first lived in a vegetarian house and the only meat I ate was in kosher restaurants, but I continued to feel unsure about my eating practices and conflicted about *kashrut*. The next year I moved into an apartment with a kosher kitchen—hoping to re-make the boundaries of kashrut I had once enjoyed. I desired the kitchen and communal space to experiment with organic and local foods, but was restricted by the laws of kashrut, which were quickly coming into contradiction with my morals.

This contradiction became irreconcilable on May 13, 2008 when I learned that federal authorities had raided the largest kosher meat plant in the United States and discovered hundreds of illegal workers, many of them underage. Once in custody, workers divulged that they were forced to work up to 18 hours a day killing, separating and packaging kosher animals, while being grossly underpaid. Most of the employees were criminally prosecuted and jailed for months, before being deported.

The more I read about the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, the less I could stomach the kosher meat industry. I became enraged when I noticed a *heksher* on a package of chicken. I saw only hypocrisy and deception reflected in the names of Rabbis who gave their seal of approval. How could kosher meat, which claimed to adhere to Jewish values, de-value the lives of its workers? For the first time in many years, I decided to eat a vegetarian meal instead of the kosher lunch provided at a Jewish event,

in silent protest of the kosher meat industry. I became more belligerent shortly after, when I ate a non-kosher fast-food chicken sandwich. My kosher days appeared to be over.

And then I began to read. I devoured Michael Pollan's *An Omnivore's Dilemma,* which brought to light the political, ecological and economic realities of eating meat. I sunk my teeth into Barbara Kingsolver's memoir *Animal, Vegetable Miracle,* which chronicled a year in the life of her family in which they grew, raised or made everything they ate. What I was reading began to feel right to me. I started shopping at a local farmer's market and frequenting restaurants that advertised "organic, local meats." I read Pollan's *In Defense of Food,* which only intensified my desire to be a more conscientious eater. I put my money where my mouth was, spending more money on cage-free eggs, organic milk in glass bottles from a farm in upstate New York and locally-grown, seasonal vegetables.

But I had to face the fact that none of these endeavors had much to do with my Jewish identity. As my academic studies and rabbinic fieldwork intensified, my eating habits became further detached from Judaism. I felt guilty for not keeping kosher, and, at the same time, subversive and sneaky for eating traif.

During my third year of rabbinical school, in a near divine moment, I received an email from a classmate suggesting that I might like to read Hazon's food blog: "The Jew and the Carrot." Hazon, the Jewish environmental organization, had become part of the rapidly expanding conversation on sustainability, environmental responsibility and Judaism. I became acquainted with the New Jewish Food Movement- a worldwide group

of Jews who were equally dedicated to Jewish tradition and kashrut and universal food issues and challenges.

My passion for Judaism and food has been renewed. Although I don't currently keep kosher, I eat a primarily vegetarian diet. I care more about the life of the animal I'm eating than the religion of the person who killed it. I don't eat pork or shellfish but have mixed milk and meat with varying levels of after-dinner guilt. I'm vocal about my interest in Jews and Food, but quiet in sharing that I'm currently not keeping kosher. When pressed, I'll share some of my story, but more often than not, it's easier to say that I'm vegetarian or struggling with kashrut.

Last fall—10 years after the summer that ignited my passion for vegetarianism – I began considering topics for my rabbinic thesis. I knew I wanted to write on some aspect of the inextricable connections between Jews and Food. For the last few months I have piled my literary plate with all types of relevant works, such as Mary Douglas' *Leviticus as Literature*, Richard Schwartz's *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, Carol J. Adam's groundbreaking book *The Pornography of Meat*, newspaper articles like Samantha M. Shapiro's "Kosher Wars" and nearly everything on "The Jew and The Carrot."

My initial research has reminded me why I feel so personally connected to this topic. My interest in Jews and Food is a sustained one, a decade-long struggle with my eating practices and how and why they inform my life as a Jew and future Rabbi. I expect this thesis to allow my thoughts to marinate and my struggles to simmer, as I move toward a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Jews, meat, ethics and life.

INTRODUCTION:

KOSHER/KOSHER-STYLE/KASHRUT/"GREEN KOSHER"

We think of kashrut (i.e. Jewish dietary dicta) as a list of tersely-written laws. Do not boil a calf in its mother's milk. Only eat animals that have split hooves and chew their cud. Only eat fish with fins and scales. Never eat pork. Kill animals in a ritually-correct way. Do not consume their blood. Biblical verses on this subject found in the Book of Leviticus gave way to the elaborate set of laws that some Jews still consult in order to know how, when and what to eat, including the prohibition against mixing meat and milk products. Over time, Jews have further elaborated upon these laws through ethnic-specific *minhagim* [customs]. The most famous of these is the fact that Sephardic Jews will commonly eat rice and legumes on Passover, while Jews from Ashkenazic backgrounds will not. Moreover, depending on their ancestors' country of origin, some Jews will wait one to three hours before consuming milk products after meat, others six or more.

Frankly, we do not know the reasons for keeping kosher. Does it relate to physical needs? Medicinal purposes? Are they just arbitrary rules? Was, for instance, a pig, a contaminated animal? Did eating milk and meat together historically cause indigestion? No matter the motive, the term "kashrut" has come to be understood as the entirety of all Jewish dietary practices; "keeping kosher" indicates that one is observant of the totality of these laws. Until the recent past, these laws were not overtly associated with the environment or physical health or any specific ethical concern. Rather, these laws were seen as another element of *halakha*—the path by which an observant Jew understands and carries out God's will in the world.

Kashrut, like other aspects of ritual *halakha* is elaborate, specific, rigid and often, unforgiving. For instance, the rules concerning possible kashrut infractions play a

prominent role in both the Talmud and Codes as the Rabbis debated the dimensions of the metaphoric "fence" around the Torah. What was the status of a spoon dropped into a meat pot? Could one eat chicken off a plate used for dairy? Matters such as these seemed of great importance, and Rabbis presumably punished those engaged in infractions. These same Rabbis in no way regarded the promulgation and enforcement of kashrut as a means to an end other than Divine service. They used ritual observance as an outward expression of their fundamental theological position.

At the same time, however, the Rabbis did understand that kashrut in practical terms, was more than simply following rules about what one should eat. They understood that the very act of eating was a "Jewish" way to elevate holiday celebrations and joyful occasions. As in every other ethnic group, food and drink build and strengthen interpersonal relationships and communities. Jews who consumed trayf might have been seen as a threat to the future of the Jewish people. And in the case of kashrut, the outsize panoply of "shoulds" and "should nots" not only demarcated the Jews but led them to separate themselves from others. In that way, kashrut became another particularistic marker of identity; those who ate within the boundaries were accepted, those who consumed trayf were outsiders or dangerous. The laws of kashrut also expanded the responsibilities and authority of rabbis. Previously, rabbis served only as *shochtim*, performing kosher slaughter and checking internal organs for signs of disease or defect. Over time, this role grew to include the supervision of all foods deemed kosher and *mashgichim* [kosher supervisors] began working for kosher-certification companies who determined which food products would receive a *heckshe*r, the rabbinic-supervised kosher stamp of approval.

The increased rabbinical responsibilities vis-à-vis meat led to a hierarchy of control, changing the question of kashrut from "what?" to "how?" This hierarchy led to a monopoly of power as a small group of rabbis determined the kashrut status of most foods for all Jews, as the reputation of the *heksher* and certifying Rabbi became an economic and political, not to mention, religious role. The meaning of the term kosher also expanded—ultimately indicating that a certain food product or item adhered to Jewish law and that an appropriate Rabbinic figure had publicly attested that this was true. This status and marking implied ritual cleanliness and fitness of a food product. In the same way, food deemed "trayf," did not meet the standards of the laws of kashrut or had an unknown status. In some ways, this vision of kashrut was simple: a clear-cut differentiation between definitions of "kosher," and "trayf." A person who "kept kosher" in the past was not expected to consider ethical, environmental or health concerns, and the Rabbis did not mean to imply any connection to *tikkun olam, kedushat haguf* or *baal tashchit*—the Jewish values that modern "Jewish foodies" feel most closely connected to today.

According to the 2001 National Jewish Population Survey, 21 percent of American Jews keep kosher in their homes.[1] This number is dramatically higher than the commonly accepted 5-10 percent estimates. But no matter the number of Jews who today keep a strict rabbinic form of kashrut, the term has not been eliminated from the Jewish lexicon. In fact, "kosher" has become more prevalent than ever before, both in Jewish and mainstream popular culture. According to a recent *New York Times* article, 40

[1] This was calculated by Jews who self-identified as keeping kosher. More than likely, some of these Jews kept some form of what we would call "green kosher." From the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=33650.

percent of food sold in the grocery store has some type of kosher demarcation, which many consumers, including non-Jews, assume to be of a high standard, cleaner and safer to eat.[2] However, in some circles, "keeping kosher" has come to mean something completely different from its ancient meaning. The expression itself has been recycled, with some Jews emptying it of its original content and infusing it with a new contemporary meaning. Today, Jews use these words to indicate numerous types of dietary practices, many of which have a connection to the strict rabbinic structures of the past. Indeed, the presence of the word "kosher" indicates some kind of connection to the kashrut of the Rabbis and contemporary ethical eating practices—Yet this usage is, essentially, a transformation of the original meaning. Ultimately, there is a fundamental semantic difference between the Rabbinic conception of kashrut and what Jews today consider to be "fit to eat."

What do the words kosher and trayf represent for a Jew who cares about what and how they eat today? First and foremost, "kosher" symbolizes an ethical understanding of food—for food to be "kosher" it must adhere to a yet undefined list of ethical requirements including:

- The physical and financial well-being of the workers who produce the food,
- The chemicals used to grow the food or to replenish fields,
- The environmental impact and carbon footprint of the food's production and travel.

"Kosher" food must indeed be "fit" and "proper" to eat. Indications of a food's fitness are not limited to, or even based on a traditional rabbinic *heksher*, rather modern secular

[2] Kim Severson, "For Some, 'Kosher' Equals Pure," *New York Times*, January 13, 2010.

markings are seen as equally if not of a higher standard—these markings may be found on food products along with secular stamps of safety and traditional *hekshers*. These markings may include:

- Organic (Produce and Meat)[3]
- Cage-Free (Eggs)
- Grass-Fed (Beef)
- Hormone and Antibiotic-Free (Chicken)
- All-Natural
- Local (All foods)
- Seasonal (Produce)

However, for Jews who are ethical eaters, traditional markings of ritual cleanliness may no longer be seen as kosher but as trayf. Traditional notions of kashrut that do not take into account ethical and environmental concerns are no longer viewed as truly appropriate for a Jew to eat. For some, what was once kosher is now trayf. Some of this change is a result of the Jewish "green" movement, first championed by Rabbi Arthur Waskow at the end of the 20th century. Waskow emphasized the importance of a convergence of traditional Jewish law and ethics to create an "eco-kosher" movement in which kashrut and ethics were of equal importance. In the last decade, a secular green movement has sprouted, bringing the issues of sustainability, environmental responsibility and human consumption to the forefront of popular social activism. Knowing about out food sources is not merely a fringe interest; rather, it is the topic of an entire genre of literature, films and common conversation.

[3] Definitions of these terms and others can be found in the glossary.

This is especially true when it comes to the eating of meat, the subject of this thesis. For centuries, meat was viewed and understood as the sole food in which *kashrut* mattered the most. In fact, most of the biblical and rabbinic laws of *kashrut* discuss meat—its proper slaughter and separation from dairy foods. The ability to obtain meat also historically represented financial and territorial wealth—Jews who could afford to kill one of their own animals for consumption were allowed the privilege of doing so. Jewish immigrants to the United States understood that the streets were not merely paved with gold, but meat, as they could afford to purchase meat for more than Shabbat and special occasions. Meat was social and religious currency, and Jews had made it to the upper class.

However, a daily meat meal is not the aspiration of "green" Jews—meat is now seen as a less-than-desirable protein option, whose damage on our bodies and the planet outweighs any culinary desire. When meat *is* eaten, the only acceptable form is organically fed, locally raised and ethically killed. It would seem that a rabbi's seal is at most a secondary stamp of approval, and for some unnecessary altogether, which brings with it the problematic elements of politics, money and power. The body of this thesis will deal with the intricacies of these issues. In Part I, I present and interpret a selection of relevant Biblical and Rabbinic texts that wrestle with the historical issues surrounding the eating of meat, including the work of Rav Avraham Isaac Kook. In Part II, I focus on the Agriprocessors' scandal and the aftermath, which led to the formation of a still-evolving Jewish Food Movement.

In this context, it is crucial to underscore that the contemporary understanding of what makes food "kosher" [appropriate for consumption] is neither the intended nor

traditional meaning of this term. It would seem that "kosher" has been co-opted and infused with modern "green" ethics. Using "kosher" and "trayf" to describe foods that adhere to a particular set of ethical values is a subversion of these terms. While they still carry a Jewish resonance, in this new context, they no longer signify their original meanings.

In the same way, the canon of Jewish texts on the subject of food is also changing radically. While a learned Jew of the past might consult the *Mishneh Torah* and *Shulchan Aruch* in order to learn which foods were kosher, prohibitions against certain mixtures and how to run a Jewish kitchen; today, Jews may turn to Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* and Michael Pollan's most recent bestseller *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*. Although these authors do not draw on traditional notions of *kashrut*, they do take into account the wealth of scientific and environmental wisdom available today. In the same way that some Jewish food enthusiasts are more likely to value an ethical seal over a *kashrut* stamp, *Food Rules* is more likely to be the authoritative go-to work when making food choices.

In sum, Jewish words like kosher and trayf have insinuated themselves into common American vernacular to signify general cleanliness and appropriateness, as related to food and other aspects of life. These terms are no longer limited to the kosher deli or butcher shop; rather, they have been planted in the cultural landscape of America. Kosher has come to signify "good quality" or "first rate."[4] Trayf, which historically implied "unclean" in a religious sense, is now employed to refer to something that is taboo or inappropriate. As these words have morphed from a particularistic provenance to

[4] Severson, "For Some."

a broader universe of meaning, Jews have had to redefine them. This thesis too is an attempt for one Jew to understand and re-think the usage of these terms as they relate to the eating of meat. Ultimately, the kashrut of the Rabbis was an effort to reinforce the particularism of Jewish tradition and to keep Jews communally connected. What does it mean to "keep kosher" in 2010? What does it mean to eat as a Jew in moral terms?

PART I:

RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF EATING MEAT

The elaborate system of food practices known as kashrut is among the most widely known customs of Jews. Whether or not most Jews today continue to observe these food ways, the dietary laws found in Leviticus presume that the ancient Israelites had access to and ate the meat of animals. Yet, the fact of the matter is that Jews descend from vegetarians. Indeed, according to foundational myths in Genesis, human beings were initially only permitted to eat vegetation that grew from the earth. After the flood that wipes out all civilization save those creatures aboard Noah's ark, God made a covenant with humankind stipulating that they could forevermore eat the flesh of animals.

In these pages, we will explore why God ultimately allowed human beings to dominate animals and eat their flesh. How, according to Jewish tradition, did Jews come to be omnivores? What do the Bible and other key Jewish texts say about eating meat? Is it a sacred commandment—that is, a divine obligation or merely a custom? What assumptions underlie the laws of kashrut with regard to meat-eating among Jews?

These questions have become particularly compelling, given the prominence of the emerging "green" movement in America and the general cultural obsession many have with food and its sources. Concern for the global environment, and the ancillary issues around food as popularized in books by Michael Pollan and other contemporary writers, has provoked new thinking about the food we put in our shopping carts as well as the carbon footprint we create with each successive trip to the supermarket. Jews too, have jumped on the food bandwagon, creating "The New Jewish Food Movement"[5] championed by Hazon, the largest Jewish environmental organization in the United

[5] For more on The new Jewish Food Movement see Part II: Grassroots Responses to Postville.

States. Hazon seeks to connect Jews to food in a specifically Jewish way; its blog postings and events routinely link food, food politics and food justice to kashrut, eco-kashrut and Jewish values. As Jews begin to read labels more carefully, examine produce with new eyes and consider the implications of what they eat, Jewish eating is no longer limited to cookbooks and Shabbat dinner tables. For those involved in the green movement, the food we choose to eat is re-defining who we are as Jews. How much the more so for meat-eating among Jews. As bestselling novelist and vegetarian activist Jonathan Safran Foer suggests "Meat is bound up with the story of who [Jews] are and who Jews want to be, from the book of Genesis to the latest farm bill."[6] In this thesis, I will respond to the central question: What has been the relationship between Jews and meat and what might this relationship look like in the future?

In Part I, I present and analyze a selection of classical Jewish sources on the topic of meat consumption by Jews. I will show the evolution from vegetarian to omnivore to kosher omnivore, as depicted in the Bible and then elaborated upon in the Talmud. I will also distill the principles that seem to underlie kashrut in order to determine to what degree they are informed by ethical concerns, a topic that will be fleshed out in Part II.

THE GRAVES OF THOSE WHO CRAVE: THE BIBLE'S APPROACH TO HUMAN FLESH-EATERS

The Bible assumes that human beings have an innate desire, nearly as strong as a sexual urge, to consume animal flesh. The fact that such a craving exists is implied in the

[6] Jonathan Safran Foer, Eating Animals (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 32.

account of the flood in Genesis. In contrast to the vegetarian diet God allows Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, meat is permitted to Noah and his descendants, perhaps as a divine concession to the destruction that has been wrought.[7] God says to Noah: "Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these" (Gen 9:1-6). The Babylonian Talmud (BT Sanhedrin 59b) explains the introduction of carnivorous behavior in the following way:

> [Before the flood] God made animals and beasts equal to them [human beings] for food, and…did not permit Adam and Eve to put a creature to death and to eat its meat. But when the sons of Noah came, [God] allowed them meat, as it says, "Every moving thing that lives, like herbal greenery which I allowed Adam, the first man- I give you everything."

A thousand years later in his Biblical commentary, Rashi echoes this interpretation. Rashi and other commentators are interested in making a comparison between the diets of man, pre- and post-flood. According to the opening chapters of Genesis, since the world was created, humans and animals coexisted as complementary creatures; they lived in harmony, and neither harmed the other. Both humans and animals feasted exclusively on herbal greenery. Over time, the Bible narrates the descent of human society. Due to unflagging moral corruption, God determines to wipe out all life and start over again. By that act, it would seem, God also destroyed the harmonious relationship between humans and animals, and forced a new set of rules upon them. No longer would animals and humans exist on the same plane; instead humans would come to dominate and rule over

[7] When referring to God, I will attempt to use gender-neutral names and pronouns, without compromising the original meaning of the Hebrew. All citations from the Hebrew Bible are from the Jewish Publication Society TaNaKh.

the animal kingdom. In her commentary on Genesis, the Israeli scholar Nehama Leibowitz expands upon this idea. She suggests that the divine permission to eat the flesh of animals signified that:

> Adam and the animals were bidden to enjoy equally the fruits of the earth, though man himself was to be lord of creation. But he was to administer and regulate within the framework of a harmonious kingdom rather than *dominate and intimidate* [emphasis added]. In place of this we have in the blessing to Noah the ingredient of fear and dread, the world being divided into *two hostile camps* in which one intimidates the other. The chief difference therefore between the two blessings is the permission given to Noah's descendants to slaughter animals for food.[8]

The permission granted human beings to slaughter and consume animal flesh established a hierarchy of living creatures, with humankind at the top and animals beneath them. Leibowitz explains further,

> Man, *in spite of his being created in the image of God*, [emphasis added] ha[d] descended from his pinnacle and narrowed the gap and even intermingled with his brutish fellow creatures. Consequently, the animals were given up to man for food in order that man should know his unique place in creation as separate and above them.[9]

Leibowitz makes the case that humans eat meat to remind themselves that they are higher than animals and must act accordingly. Yet, this concession is merely a reminder that society is not as it should be. Eating animals is merely a symbol that humans are not animals, they are above them and should not interact with them as equals. Rav Kook, writing a generation before Leibowitz will later argue that it is this concession of eating

[8] Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Deuteronomy (Israel: Maor Wallach P, 1973), 76.
[9] Leibowitz, 76.

meat that should remind human beings of their unique status. At the same time, this inequality in status will change and revert back to a pre-flood model when human beings are able to reach a place of spiritual and moral perfection. However, in order to physically illustrate this theoretical supremacy, humans were finally allowed to satisfy and satiate their basest desire for meat by taking the lives of animals they once considered equals. In other words, God expanded the human diet as a regular reminder that humans and animals were not equivalent and thus, opened the culinary floodgates.

Meat-eating exists only theoretically in the biblical narrative until we meet up with the Israelites wandering in the desert in Exodus. Liberated from slavery, the new nation grows nostalgic for the meat they consumed in Egypt, belly-aching to Moses: "If only we had died by the hand of the Eternal 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" (Exodus 16:3). Their complaints are evidence of a carnivorous diet as biblical scholars understand "fleshpots" (*al sir habasar*) as a type of cookware used to prepare meat.[10] Their cries expose a weakness: They prefer eating meat and bread in bondage in Egypt to freedom in the absence of these delicacies.

To me, this passage links fear of starvation with the unknown. The Israelites desperation is palpable. Vulnerable in this new environment, they miss the familiar certainties of Egypt—a proactive God, a well-rounded omnivorous diet, and a knowable workday. Meat represents communal stability, dietary consistency and an ordinary quotidian existence. With no assurances of what the future will bring, let along their next

[10] The text does not say if the fleshpots contained food for all, yet we might assume that there was not always enough to eat for every person. This is in contrast to the manna, which we know was plenty enough to satisfy each person.

meal, the flight-or-fight response is triggered. Like adolescents, they verbally explode, wishing they had been killed in Egypt, forsaking the miraculous exodus from Egypt.

God responds to their complaints and grants them their wish: "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 Eternal am your God" (Ex 16:12-13). Yet, God seems to renege on this promise. Although quail [i.e. meat] falls from the sky, when the Israelites go to gather it, they find that it is a meat-free alternative. Initially termed "bread," it is later called manna— "…like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers in honey" (Ex 16:31). God has satiated the Israelites' appetites, but not in the expected way.

Notably, the vegetarian dish appears in such abundance that the Israelites collect in excess of what they need to be satisfied. To me, this passage illustrates, what we have come to know as the potential hazards of a meat-eating society. After all, animal meat is an expensive delicacy that many cannot afford. A vegetarian diet, on the other hand, is cheaper and more plentiful, allowing each person to eat and be satisfied. Contemporary Jewish vegetarian activists suggest that if the majority of the world's population was to eat a vegetarian diet, food shortages would shrink, and we could provide adequate nutrition to those who are starving.

The Israelites keep on complaining, as they gripe in the middle of Numbers: "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!"[11] Note that while

[11] Num. 11:4-6

they explicitly refer to their desire for meat, they delineate foods that are *pareve* – deriving neither from meat nor milk. No matter. The tedious manna pales in comparison to the Egyptian feasts of memory.

While Moses calmly approached God in Exodus, here he becomes accusatory, shouting: "Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all of this people by myself, for it is too much for me!" (Num.11:4-6). His panic and desperation are notable. Moses' concern for his people's appetites degenerates into annoyance with them and even God. His intolerance for them seems connected to their desire for meat—it is as if he cannot bear a people whose base urges lead them to desire a return to Egypt, the land of their bondage. God reassures Moses that there will be plenty of meat. In fact, there will be so much meat that they will come to regret their whining. Enraged, God makes quail appear, which the people greedily gather. Before long a plague descends upon those who ate the meat. As the text describes it: "The meat was still between their teeth, not yet chewed, when the anger of the Eternal blazed forth against the people and the Eternal struck the people with a very severe plague. That place was named *kibroth-hataavah*, because the people who had the craving were buried there" (Num. 11:33-34).

The explicit punishment for giving in to baser impulses is actually an implicit admonishment for not trusting that God will provide. The place name *kibrot-hataavah*, literally "the graves of the craving," underscores this lesson. Along with other biblical commentators, I ask, why does God punish those who desire meat, when that craving seems inborn and even "God-given"? Biblical commentator Jacob Milgrom responds: "The craving for meat expresses a disguised desire to return to Egypt which is tantamount

to a rejection of God."[12] Meat-eating is equated with Egypt—the site of idolatry and, presumably, gluttony. The Israelites' desert cravings are regarded as a betrayal of God. Puffed up with their sense of entitlement to eat meat, they refuse to trust that God will provide sustenance. The meat, like the golden calf of the infamous scene of unfaithfulness, shows the Israelites' breach of the Divine covenant.

In addition, I ask whether God was motivated in the quail episode by a desire to direct the Israelites toward vegetarianism, or was God merely testing their loyalty. Would the people be willing, in the end, to accept a leaner diet if their God demanded it of them? Which diet *did* God desire for the Israelites? And more specifically, if vegetarianism was the ideal, why did God create humans with an uncontrollable urge to eat meat [and even provide them with such in the desert]? I argue that meat signifies far more than food in these narratives**.** It represents God's power over the people to mandate their dietary practice for them, with the expectation that they will adhere to God's dictates. The act of carnivorous eating is a human impulse that can lead to gluttony, idolatry and rebellion.

MUCH ADO ABOUT MEAT: THE PRIVILEGES OF THE LAND

Although by Torah's end, God grants every Israelite permission to eat meat, in reality, meat-eating belonged only to the wealthy and scholarly elite. Before entering the Promised Land, only priests and those who made animal sacrifices ate meat with any regularity. Once they enter the land, laity of wealth or knowledge are allowed to join the

[12] Jacob Milgrom, Numbers Ba-midbar: the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 88.

ranks of meat-eaters. However, as I will discuss, the permission to eat meat is regarded as a concession, not a God-given right.

Sacrifice of animals naturally involved eating their flesh, as we learn in the Torah. When Moses instructs that all local sanctuaries be destroyed in favor of central place of worship in the Promised Land, there is an accompanying change in diet. Up to the moment of centralization of worship, when a person made an animal sacrifice at a local sanctuary, he was given some of the meat to enjoy; a person offering for his entire family would be granted a larger portion. Animal sacrifice was both a vehicle to praise God and to acquire food. Once a central place of communal worship is established, the sacrificial act falls into the hands of priests alone. Thus, ordinary Israelites come to be deprived of engaging directly with God through sacrifice and the animal flesh produced by this act. As Biblical scholar Gunther Plaut argues in his introduction to *Parshat Re'eh*: "Since such [meat] consumption had taken place in the context of sacrificial worship in various localities, which were at all times in reach of every person, a central sanctuary would prevent an Israelite from eating meat most of the time."[13] Thus, to safeguard the privilege of meat-eating to the ordinary Israelite, the Torah stipulated "at once that, while sacrifice would be centralized, the consumption of meat would not."[14] From now on, meat-eating was accessible to all, regardless of one's state of purity (priesthood) Moses explains this change in meat consumption:

> When the Eternal enlarges your territory, as [God] has promised you, and you say, "I shall eat some meat," for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish. If the place where the Eternal has chosen to establish [God's]

[13] Plaut, 1419.
[14] Plaut,1419.

> name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep that the Eternal gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart's content in your settlements. (Deut. 12:20-21)

This divine statement makes clear that people may from hereon eat meat, according to their desire. Nehama Leibowitz underscores the significance of allowing ordinary Israelite's to eat non-sacrificial meat.

> In the wilderness, our forefathers ate only the meat of the animals consecrated for sacrifice on the altar of the Almighty...Whoever wished to partake of meat would dedicate the animal and sacrifice it as a peace-offering *shlemim*, part of it being burnt on the altar as a sacrifice, part of it going to Aaron and the priests and the rest being consumed by himself and his family. Every meat meal constituted therefore an integral part of the sacrificial rites. No man enjoyed meat without the altar and priests also partaking of it.[15]

In contrast to their existence in the wilderness, in the Promised Land the Israelites may eat unconsecrated meat, simply for personal pleasure.

However, this permission is granted with one caveat: meat can only be eaten once God increases the borders of the Land. Enlarging one's territory is a sure sign of prosperity, a prerequisite to meat-eating Expansive land is a metaphor; it signifies that, you are wealthy enough to consume meat." An alternative understanding of "expansive land" is that only then will there be enough space to sustain the raising of animals (animal husbandry). In a related comment, Rashi notes that only a person who has sufficient cattle may slaughter it for meat (comment on Chulin 84a). In contrast, one who would suffer financial hardship by killing his animal should refrain from eating meat. The Talmud instructs that one is forbidden from killing the animal of a relative or neighbor; only

[15] Nehama Leibowitz *Studies in Deuteronomy* – Commentary on *Parshat Re'eh*

personal prosperity may be rewarded with meat. Rashi continues: "It might be thought that a person who desires meat should buy it at the market and eat it. [The Torah] therefore states: You may slaughter from "your" cattle and from "your" flocks, referring to one's own cattle and flocks" (BT Chulin 84a). Such commentary links meat with prosperity. The Rabbis, who wrote in a period of territorial uncertainty after the destruction of the Second Temple, interpret "enlarging territory" as broadening Torah knowledge and strengthening commitment to *halakha*. In their eyes, only those who engage in Talmud torah merit eating meat, as they say: "Whoever is occupied with the study of Torah is allowed to eat the meat of an animal or bird. But whoever is not occupied with the study of Torah is forbidden to eat the meat of an animal or a bird." (BT Pesachim 49b). The Rabbis seem to link the acquisition of knowledge with the consumption of meat. Perhaps they were implying that only the learned scholar who has mastered the numerous and intricate laws of kashrut, including of course meat-eating, is privileged to do so. More metaphorically, perhaps, only a Torah scholar, one "consumed" by text, requires the sustenance provided by meat. No matter the explanation, the dictum is clear: The eating of meat is reserved for the scholarly elite. Meat is a status symbol.

In his study of the eating habits of Israelites entitled *Eat and Be Satisfied*, the author John Cooper concluded: "In ancient Israel, the majority of the population lived on a diet of barley bread, vegetables, and fruit, supplemented by milk products and honey…Unless a family belonged to a section of the small priestly elite or court circles, meat was rarely eaten."[16] For the common Israelite, eating meat was a hope, a dream that could be materialized in the Promised Land, where no one would be deprived of this

[16] John Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food* (Northvale, N.J: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), pg. 3.

privilege. Though meat was not a regular part of the Israelite diet, the people would need to know the laws concerning it given the fact that, as Cooper indicates, meat "…was consumed at festive meals or tribal gatherings when the participants were given a share of the sacrificial feast, usually a portion of a domestic animal such as a goat or sheep."

With regard to meat-eating, Leibowitz emphasizes that such divine permission was not granted easily. She maintains that the grammatical structure of the dictum reinforces the ambivalence with which it was written: "If you cannot resist the temptation and must eat meat, then do so – seems to be the tenor of this barely tolerated dispensation."[17] Here, Leibowitz explicitly states what had been merely hinted at; namely, human beings have an innate and insatiable craving to eat the meat of animals. The Israelites—and their descendants the Jews—are not free of such base feelings. Jews may succumb to this primal urge, but only if one abides by the countless divine restrictions foisted upon this act.

WHY THE RESTRICTIONS? A LIVING SOUL CONSUMING A LIVING SOUL

Jewish tradition allows Jews to eat meat when done so in the proper manner. I argue that the seemingly endless list of rules related to meat exists as a reminder to us that, after all, the flesh on our plates was once a living creature. Note once again that the man and woman in Eden were limited to a vegetarian diet. Ultimately, when God grants humans permission to eat meat, it is with the caveat that it be done in a way that neither

[17] Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Deuteronomy (Israel: Maor Wallach Press, 1973), pg. 136.

diminishes nor denies the holiness inherent in all God's creatures, human and animal alike. Aware that all God's creatures are endowed with a living soul, the Biblical narrative expresses the moral dilemma of one soul consuming another.

In interpreting the creation stories of Genesis, the 13th century commentator Nachmanides, constructed a hierarchy of souls that bears on the moral dilemma of eating meat. He classified differing types of souls into three categories:

- *nefesh hatzomachat* [vegetative soul], which is found all living things that reproduce themselves, including plants, animals and humans
- *nefesh hab'heimah* [animal soul],which is found in both animals and humans and gives them sensation and mobility
- *hanefesh hamaskelet* or *neshama* [rational soul], which is found only in human beings and gives them the ability to speak and reason.[18]

Nachmanides divides the living creatures that abound in God's universe, according to the quality of their soul. One could argue that human beings are entitled to eat plants and animals because the latter possess an inferior soul. While both animals and human beings are God's creatures, they are not identical.

In the Bible itself, God gives animals a *nefesh chayah* [living soul] (Gen. 1:24) and creates human beings *b'tzelem Elohim* [in the image of God]. Like Nachmanides [Ramban], God is making classifications of living creatures. Humans, who are made in the divine image, are more God-like and presumably more privileged than the animals who merely possess a "living soul."

[18] Ramban, Note 229 to *Parshat Bereshit*

Additional commentators have added their voices to the debate. Rashi defines *nefesh chayah* as the "life force" within animals, citing *Bereshit Rabbah,* which translates *nefesh chayah* as "the spirit of a [human]." To him, animals are similar to humans in that they are living creatures and thus deserving of a life free from physical persecution. Ramban adds: "…like [a human] [animals] have the ability to exercise choice in matters concerning their welfare and their food, and they, like [a human], flee from threat of pain and death."[19] Quoting Ecclesiastes, he asks: "Who fathoms that it is the spirit of a [human] that ascends on high, while it is the spirit of the beast that descends down into the earth?"[20] Despite the similarities, animals are inferior to God's "perfect" creation (Gen 1:27). In fact, the first human did not simply receive a living soul, but was formed from the four corners of the earth and contains God's breath. As Rashi explains, human beings alone are created *b'tzelem Elohim*—they are born not by divine fiat like the rest of creation, but by God's very handiwork.

Despite the differences between the two, initially, neither human nor animal may eat flesh. God's first commandment is directed to all living creatures: Be vegetarians! God says: "See, I give you [human beings] every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life (*nefesh chayah*), I give all the green plants for food." (Gen. 1:29-30). As Rashi points out: God gave "to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life" all [and only] the green plants for food."[21]

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[19] Ramban on Gen 1:31.
[20] Ecc. 3:21.
[21] Rashi to Genesis 1:30.

But, if human beings are on a higher plane of existence than animals, why can't they eat animals? Puzzled by this question, the 19th -century Italian biblical commentator Umberto Cassuto, commented:[22] "You [human beings] are permitted to use the animals and employ them for work, have dominion over them in order to utilize their services for your subsistence, but you must not hold their life cheap nor slaughter them for food. Your natural diet is vegetarian…[23] Cassuto argues that the God-given hierarchy between human beings and animals was meant for the purposes of labor alone. He ignores the the carnivorous urge of human beings. To Cassuto, the "natural" human diet is a vegetarian one. Approximately 400 years earlier, the Talmud also claimed that a diet free of meat was intended for the original human being.[24]

Diets change over time, even in the Bible. As discussed above, in the post-flood era, when Noah and his descendants were the latitude to eat meat. Henceforth, Nachmanides' hierarchy is effectuated and acted upon. No more the utopian ideal of Eden. Rather, God's creatures will live in tension, animals fearing the humans who may kill them for food As author Jonathan Safran Foer contends in his book *Eating Animals*, "Nothing could seem more 'natural' than the boundary between humans and animals…[in our day.][25] Yet in Paradise, the lines are blurred.

God makes very clear to Noah and his descendants that though "every creature that lives shall be yours to eat," (Gen. 9:1-6), there is an important exception. As God says to Noah, "You must not, however, eat flesh *b'nafsho damo* [with its life-blood] in

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[22] Israel Abrahams and Cecil Roth, Encyclopedia Judaica, 2nd ed., s.v. "Umberto Cassuto," in Jewish Studies Portal, http://jsp.huc.edu (accessed October 31, 2009).
[23] Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part One From Adam to Noah (Jerusalem: The Hebrew UP, 1944), pg. 58.
[24] BT Sanhedrin 59a-59b.
[25] Safran Foer, 45.

it." (Gen. 9:1-6) *B'nafsho damo* can be translated as "with the blood of its soul in it," sharing the Hebrew root (*n-f-sh*) with *nefesh chaya* [breath of life] in Genesis 1:29. From the confluence of these terms, we learn that blood contains the soul and represents the life force of an animal. Thus, consuming animal blood would be consuming a (partially) live animal because its soul would still be intact. Rambam further explains the connection between the blood of an animal and its soul. "[God] gave [Noah and his descendants] permission to slaughter them and to eat their meat…yet, despite all this, [God] did not give them permission to 'eat the soul.'" It needs to be said that in our own day, too, some cling to the notion of "soul" to justify their actions, eating and otherwise. To take one example, Michael Pollan writes of a farmer at Polyface Farm in Swoope, VA who raises all sorts of animals and vegetables.[26] In the course of conversation, when asked about how he is able to kill a chicken with his bare hands, Salatin responded: "That's an easy one. People have a soul, animals don't…Animals are not created in God's image, so when they die, they just die."[27]

But Rashi is far more concerned about an animal's soul than the Virginian farmer. He proposed proofs for two general restrictions on meat eating. First, he explained the prohibition against eating live animals by saying: "God forbid they would eat a limb which was attached from a living animal," so the text makes it plain: "All the while that its soul is in it, you shall not eat the flesh."[28] The second proof relates to the prohibition against ingesting blood of a dead animal. Like the Rambam after him, Rashi explained

[26] Michael Pollan, The Omnivore's Dilemma A Natural History of Four Meals (New York: Penguin, 2007), 125.
[27] Pollan, 331.
[28] Rashi to Genesis 9:4.

that blood represents an animal's soul, and thus is prohibited. Cassuto provides a detailed rationale for not consuming the liquid life force of an animal:

> Apparently the Torah was in principle opposed to the eating of meat. When Noah and his descendants were permitted to eat meat this was a concession conditional on the prohibition of the blood. This prohibition implied respect for the principle of life ("for the blood is the life") and an allusion to the fact that in reality all meat should have been prohibited. This partial prohibition was designed to call to mind the previous total one.[29]

In order for animal flesh to be considered kosher *all* blood must be removed from it. The process is painstaking and laborious and necessarily so, as it forces one to give the proper respect to the *nefesh chayah*, who was killed for human (culinary) pleasure. Despite their superior status, human beings must never consume animals in a way that takes their life for granted.

Besides spelling out the process of blood removal, the rabbis of the Talmud elaborated upon the categories of acceptable and unacceptable (kosher and treyf) animals found in Leviticus to create the system known as kashrut. They made distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" animals based on new criteria like cleaved hooves and chewing of the cud, and turned Leviticus 11:22 ("you may not boil a kid in its mother's milk") into one of the most widely-known restrictions of kashurut: the separation of meat and dairy products.

The ban on combining meat and dairy is driven by the moral instinct to respect animal life and honor its feelings To cook an animal in its own sustenance, which in turn derives from its mother, seems cruel and dishonorable. In this case, the life force – milk –

[29] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part One From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew UP, 1944), pg. 58.

would become the catalyst for death. Such a powerfully distasteful image, we might imagine, led the Rabbis to manufacture such a detailed set of law to prevent such an occurrence.

It would seem that ethical concerns undergird the laws of *shechita* [ritual slaughter] as well. Kashrut dictates that animals killed for food must die in the most humane way possible. The desire to minimize animal suffering derives from the notion *tza'ar ba'alei hayyim* [the prohibition against unnecessarily hurting a living creature]. Although all slaughter presumably causes pain, the Rabbis determined that a single cut to an animal's throat is minimized the suffering. In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides explained that this method allows death to come quickly.[30] Those who perform s*hechita* a [*shochet*=ritual slaughterer] are trained in uniquely humane ways of slaughter. For many who keep kosher, ritual slaughter trumps concerns regarding animal pain and suffering. But others ask: even if *shechita* is found to be relatively painless, can we consider only the final minutes of an animal's life? What about the tremendous cruelty inflicted upon animals during the in the entire process of raising and transporting them?[31] As Jonathan Safran Foer asks, "Is it even possible to eat meat without 'causing pain to one of God's living creatures?"[32]

For some the moral dilemma is palpable: Can we eat meat to satisfy an innate human craving knowing that to do so requires killing one of God's creatures? Should we consider retreating to the "natural" vegetarian diet of our biblical ancestors? Simply put,

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[30] Elijah Judah Schochet, *Animal life in Jewish tradition attitudes and relationships* (New York: Ktav, 1984), pg. 262. More explanation on *shechita* can be found in Part II-Religious Vegetarianism.
[31] Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*. (New York: Lantern Books, 2001), 110.
[32] Safran Foer, 70.

do we give in to our base desires or resist on moral grounds? The selection of Biblical and Rabbinic texts presented above gives no clear-cut answer: ultimately, a range of possible interpretations emerges. In the next section, I will turn to a final voice from the Jewish past —the sound of a fierce advocate for the humane treatment of animals, namely Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook.

A Mystical Perspective: Rav Avraham Isaac Kook

Jewish mystics too, have taken an interest in what Jews consume, though for reasons unlike those of the Biblical authors and Rabbis. Champions of vegetarianism and animal rights hold one mystic in particularly high esteem—Rav Avraham Isaac Kook, whose writings on human perfection and the sanctity of all life have made him a household name among Jewish vegetarians.

Rav Kook (1865-1935) was born in Latvia and received a tradition Jewish education. Propelled by his remarkable curiosity and intellect, he became a student of Bible, Hebrew, mysticism and Jewish philosophy. In 1904 he made *aliyah*, and is best known for advocating and founding a movement known as Religious Zionism in the early part of the 20th century. In 1921, he was appointed the first Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of pre-State Israel. Kook wrote sporadically on the topic of vegetarianism, and two such writings were collected by his student, Rabbi David Cohen, and appeared as a single work by the name *Hazon Hatzimchonut veShalom* [A Vision of Vegetarianism and

Peace] in 1961.[33] [34] While *Hazon* is made up of two of his works—*Afkim baNegev* [Streams in the Desert] and *Talele Orot* [Dewdrops of Light] published in 1903 and 1910, respectively—it is important to note that Kook did not set out to write a definitive work on this topic. Rather it is Cohen, himself a vegetarian, who was responsible for the amalgamation of these two works, along with the sequencing, chapter divisions and title of *Hazon*.[35]

For modern Jewish vegetarians, *Hazon* has become like a Bible, for it reinforces their arguments for treating animals humanely and aspiring toward a meat-less diet. While some have assumed that Kook himself was vegetarian, his son Tvi Yehuda Kook dispelled such a rumor.[36] No matter his diet, Rav Kook was dedicated to the ideal of vegetarianism on moral grounds, as I will demonstrate by discussing three passages in *Hazon.*[37]

Kook could not imagine that the Creator of all living things would grant human beings limitless permission to consume the meat of living animals.

> …it is all together impossible to conceive of the Blessed Ruler of all creation, who is merciful to all creatures, Praise God, imposing an eternal decree such as this [i.e. the routine slaughter of animals for food] upon this most excellent

[33] Cohen is also known as the Nazir of Jerusalem because he followed Nazarite laws
[34] Richard H. Schwartz, Judaism and Vegetarianism (New York: Lantern Books, 2001), 172.
[35] Jonathan Rubenstein, "None shall hurt or destroy" (thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1986).
[36] Alfred S. Cohen, "Vegetarianism From a Jewish Perspective," *The Journal of Halacha* 1, no. 2 (1981): pg. 44.
[37] Much of this section is based on the research and thesis work of Rabbi Jonathan Rubenstein whose rabbinic thesis focused on the philosophy of Rav Kook and a translation of the entirety of *Hazon*

> creation: that the human race would maintain its existence by going against its moral sensibilities through the shedding of blood, albeit the blood of animals.[38]

As a mystic, Kook imagined that a divine spark inhered in all living things.[39] Thus, he found the eating of animal flesh by human beings problematic for two reasons. First, Rav Kook understood the divine as *El rachum v'chanun,* a compassionate and merciful God, incapable, therefore, of allowing human beings to fashion a diet based on cruelty to living creatures. He employed the verse from Psalms "…God's tender mercies are over *all* his works" [emphasis added][40] as proof. Secondly, Kook argued that the a compassionate and merciful God would not wish for human beings to exist in a state contradictory to their internal moral compass.. Kook imagines human beings as the most superior of God's creatures because they are born with the capacity to choose between right and wrong. By eating animal flesh, human beings would cross an ethical line. Kook challenges the notion of a God who allows human beings to act in such an inhumane way.

Kook brings a passage from Deuteronomy to make the case that the divine permission to eat meat is provisional. About the words "[when] you say, 'I shall eat meat,' for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish" (Deut. 12:20-21), he explains:

> There is here a wise, yet hidden rebuke and a restrictive exhortation, namely that as long as your inner morality does not abhor the eating of animal flesh, as you

[38] Rubenstein, 53.
[39] Rubenstein, 29.
[40] Ps. 145:17

> already abhor [the eating of] human flesh,[41] then when the time comes for the human moral condition to abhor [eating] the flesh of animals, because of the moral loathing inherent in that act, you surely "will *not* have the urge to eat meat," and you will not eat it…[42]

Kook's comparison between the consumption of human and animal flesh is significant. He assumes that all agree that human consumption of human flesh is utterly immoral and heinous; whereas any human aversion to the consumption of animal flesh is trumped by the innate human desire to eat meat—and thus God gives permission for the latter. In other words, humans are genetically wired, it would seem, to eat meat, despite their moral repugnance to such. At an ideal level of human morality, Kook proposes, humankind will come to have as much disdain for the eating of animal as human flesh. Such a pinnacle of moral perfection is obtainable only in the time of the Messiah.

As Kook instructs, "…you can only inhibit your appetite for meat by an act of moral self-control, and the time for the exercise of this power of self-control has not yet arrived."[43] Once this time arrives, human beings will no longer desire meat, thereby eliminating the need for killing animals for food.[44] Liberated from of this primal urge to consume meat, all human beings will return to the vegetarian diet of Eden, as prophesized in the Book of Isaiah: "The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox…"[45]

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[41] Rav Kook notes here that: since human beings would not think of eating human flesh and therefore they do not desire it; there will be come a day when human will also detest animals flesh and also not desire it.
[42] Kook, p. 59.
[43] Leibowitz, 138.
[44] Roberta Kalechofsky, Rabbis and Vegetarianism: An Evolving Tradition (Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, 1995), 3.
[45] Is. 65:25.

In the meanwhile, Kook looks to *shechita* [ritual slaughter] as a way of preventing the wholesale corruption of those who would kill animals for their meat. *Shechita* tempers the cruelty of killing, as he asserts:

> Accordingly, the very act of slaughtering for food (shechita) needs to be sanctified by means of a special characteristic, "…as I have commanded you" (Deut 12:21) that is, through minimizing the suffering of the animal in order to implant in the human heart, through this [special characteristics], the awareness that this is not an encounter with some ownerless thing, which consists of nothing but automatic reflexes, but rather with a creature which lives and feels, and whose senses and even whose emotions, including sentiments for the life of its family and compassion for its offspring, must be taken into consideration. [46]

For Kook, the routine eating of animals in the here-and-now can persist only so long as animals are treated with mercy and compassion. The heroic efforts required by the s*hochet* and those who consume the products of *shechita* serve to limit the suffering of animals while raising human-awareness of the act of killing God's creatures. However, ee must be mindful, from the moment of *shechita* to the moment of eating, that this being was once alive and gave its life for our sustenance and pleasure.

MEAT AS A JEWISH SOURCE OF JOY AND WEALTH

Before concluding this survey of Jewish texts that bear on the question of meat-eating, I wish to raise a sociological consideration regarding animal consumption among Jews. There is a custom, practiced by Jews worldwide, that meals on special occasions, whether it be Shabbat, a festival or a *simcha*, must feature meat. This is supported by the

[46] Kook, 14.

Talmudic dictum, "When the Temple was in existence, there could be no joy without meat" (BT Pesachim 109a). Temple or not, Jews still concur that eating meat elevates celebrations. Consider, for instance, standard Ashkenazi *z'mirot* [Shabbat songs] that wax poetic on the abundance of meat served on Shabbat. As Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote in his well-known lyrics of *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*, "Shabbat is an honored day, it is a day of pleasures, bread, wine, *meat* and fish."[47] *Birkat HaMazon* [Grace after meals] also contains a reference to "the gifts of flesh…" Meat sanctifies time, it would seem, symbolizing the use of "our very best" to elevate the day. For some, it is a weekly reminder of abundance bestowed upon us by a caring God.

But meat is a luxury, expensive and unavailable to many a Jew, as witnessed in our earlier discussion of Israelites who could not afford to raise their own animals for consumption. What happens today for those who expect chicken soup on Friday evenings, *cholent* [traditional meat stew] for Shabbat lunch, a carving board at a wedding? Even today, meat serves as a sign of plenty and a source of joy.

Scholars have made the claim that the in part, the association of meat with wealth started in Eastern Europe when impoverished Jews idealized meat as the idyll meal for the weekly Shabbat. Despite their meager means, meat was the ultimate expression of *oneg* [the joy of] Shabbat.[48] Once in America, it would seem, the prophecy of Sholem Aleichem became a reality: "…in America you could have chicken soup and challah in the middle of the week!"[49]

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[47] Limmud bentcher, 109
[48] Hasia R. Diner, Hungering for America Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the age of Immigration (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2001).
[49] Diner, 177.

America held the promise of full pockets and full stomachs. After eating his first American meal, Romanian Jew Marcus Ravage exclaimed, "In New York, every night was Friday night and every day was Saturday as far as food went!"[50] With each successive generation of Jews in America, meat became more and more a staple of daily meals. While meat-and-potatoes became de rigeur for the meals of American Jews, the Shabbat standards, including meat dishes like pot roast and brisket, were clung to with tenacity, perhaps as reminders of the *Alte Heim* of yore.

Even today, amid the rise of vegetarianism and meat-minimalism, American Jews, for the most part, maintain their carnivorous customs. Meat is still regarded as an entitlement for those who have "made it," an outward sign of prosperity. "Meat meals" are still "put on a pedestal," even as kosher meat becomes exorbitant and ethically problematic, as discussed in the next section of this thesis.

[50] Diner, 180.

PART II:

THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EATING MEAT FOR JEWS

No matter one's eating habits, it is hard to deny the stream of disturbing news related to the kosher meat industry that surged at the turn of the 20th century. Although ethics violations at factories are a timeworn cliché, it had seemed that a Jewish-run facility involved in the production of kosher food would be as committed to ethical as religious standards. But, sadly, as we learned from the news media, even the kosher-meat industry is not immune from infractions of an ethical and even criminal nature. Writer Shmarya Rosenberg has covered the kosher meat scandal on his blog since 2004 when the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) released tapes showing atrocities being committed in the now-infamous factory of Agriprocessors in Postville, Iowa.[51] Renowned for both his accuracy and consistency, Rosenberg insists on holding both the Jewish community at large and the Orthodox community specifically accountable. He asks, "Can meat produced through a modern form of indentured servitude be [considered] kosher?"[52] His prophetic question reverberates throughout the Jewish community. While most would likely answer with a resounding "no," different segments of the Jewish community voiced their disapproval at varying levels of strength. For many Jews, these scandals have lifted the veil on kosher certification, exposing the fact that an industry owned and run by observant Jews is not always observant of Jewish values. After describing the scandal itself, we will turn to the responses of various Jewish groups and individuals that galvanized a movement. Though disparate in composition, the Jewish Food Movement, as part of the larger "green" movement, shares in the goal of

[51] Rosenberg's blog, "Failed Messiah" began out of his disillusionment with Orthodoxy and his ex-communication from his own Orthodox community. http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/

[52] Shmarya Rosenberg, "Agriprocessors: The Gift That Keeps On Giving," Jewcy, web log entry posted November 30, 2008, www.jewcy.com (accessed December 1, 2008).

investing traditional notions of kashrut with modern, ethical meaning. In so doing, they are radically changing the meaning of "keeping kosher."

THE BEGINNINGS OF A REVOLUTION, 1960-2000

Jews' renewed interest in how and what we eat began on account of neither Agriprocessors' misdeeds nor the wild success of mainstream publications like *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Over two decades ago, the author and activist Rabbi Arthur Waskow spoke out on issues of food responsibility from a Jewish point of view. In his groundbreaking 1988 article in *Tikkun*, he admonished liberal Jews, who had previously rejected the rabbinic canon of kashrut, to use a Jewish lens of when determining what kind of food to buy and eat.[53]

However, this connection between food and ethics first began in the 1970's within the Jewish Renewal Movement. One of its leaders, and founder of the P'nai Or Religious Fellowship, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi coined the term "eco-kashrut," by publicly suggesting that the food we eat should have an explicit connection to the earth and Jewish ethics.[54] Waskow popularized this term, acknowledging the tension inherent between the particularity of kashrut and the universality of social food values. Ultimately, he preferred a "Both/And" approach instead of an "Either/Or." He then made specific suggestions for

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[53] Arthur Waskow, "Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Sex and Money," *Tikkun* 3, no. 1 (Jan. & Feb. 1988): 19.

[54] Joshua Waxman, "Eco-Kashrut: You Are What You Eat," BeliefNet, web log entry posted August 20, 2007, http://blog.beliefnet.com/virtualtalmud/2007/08/ecokashrut-you-are-what-you-ea.html (accessed January 26, 2010).

an "ethical kashrut"[55] practice, an expansion of "eco-kashrut," which would include a personal commitment to Torah learning in order to make appropriate decisions what one should eat. Such a process of individual autonomy would necessarily lead to multiple interpretations of the same verses and thus different conclusions concerning a certain food product. As Waskow put it,

> For example: some will treat the principle of *oshek* (not oppressing workers) as paramount, and will choose to only eat foods that are grown without any oppression of food workers...Others may make the principle of *leshev ba'aretz* (protection of the environment) paramount, and put *oshek* in a secondary place—perhaps applying it only when specifically asked to do so by workers who are protesting their plight.[56]

He spoke of an era when kashrut and Jewish ethical values would be held in balance; it would seem that Waskow's conception of kashrut is now coming to fruition.

THE CRISES OF AGRIPROCESSORS, DECEMBER 2004-MAY 2008

In 1987 a group of Lubavitch Jews, led by Aaron Rubushkin of Brooklyn, bought a defunct meat processing plant near Postville, Iowa with the idea of creating a kosher meat empire. Calling itself Agriprocessors Incorporated, the company began producing and packaging large quantities of kosher meat—beef, lamb, chicken, turkey, duck and veal. This large-scale, industrial plant was a completely new stage in the development of

[55] This is the earliest I heard of the term "ethical kashrut" although it is unclear who coined the term.
[56] Waskow, 22.

the kosher-meat industry in America. With a large supply of product (animals), a staff of almost 1,000 workers and a Jewish population eager for easily-accessible kosher meats, before long Agriprocessors was producing a huge percentage of the kosher meat consumed in America—nearly 60 percent of beef and 40 percent of chicken.[57] Little did they know that, within a few years, Agriprocessors and its executive officers, which included many members of the Rubushkin family, would face nearly-constant legal trouble, climaxing with a Federal raid of its Postville facilities in 2008 and the subsequent arrest of those who knowingly employed underage and undocumented workers.

In December 2004, the radical vegetarian organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) released videotapes of Agriprocessors' slaughterhouses, which documented inhumane, but technically kosher treatment of animals in the moments before and after slaughter.[58] For instance, the tapes showed cows, which appeared to be alive and in distress, even after the *shechita* [ritual slaughter], had occurred.[59] In one especially graphic scene, cows already "slaughtered" were attempting to stand up. Following these allegations, leaders from across the Jewish spectrum voiced their concerns, urging Agriprocessors to employ more humane slaughtering techniques that would not alter the kashrut status of the animal. In another much publicized reaction, Shimon Cohen of Shechita U.K., a British organization that routinely defends the practice

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[57] Stephen G. Bloom, Postville A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America (New York: Harvest Books, 2001).

[58]Donald G. McNeil Jr., "Videos Cited in Calling Kosher Slaughterhouse Inhumane," *New York Times*, December 1, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/01/national/01kosher.html?_r=1&oref=login&pagewanted=print&position= (accessed January 10, 2010).

[59] Binyamin L. Jolkovsky, "Radical vegetarian group seeking to slaughter one of the world's largest kosher meat processors," Jewish World Review, web log entry posted November 29, 2004, http://jewishworldreview.com/1104/peta_undercover.php3 (accessed January 10, 2010).

of Jewish ceremonial slaughter against groups like PETA, responded after viewing the tapes: "[I] felt queasy…I don't know what that is, but it's not *shechita*." He concluded, "…AgriProcessors' meat could not be considered kosher."[60] Mr. Cohen's remarks illustrate the tremendous tension between the ritual aspects of kashrut, which include a precise definition of *shechita,* and the ethical values presumed inherent in such laws. Declaring Agriprocessors' meat, ritually slaughtered according to Jewish law, as *not kosher* [emphasis added] raises the standards of kashrut along non-Rabbinic lines.

In short order, Rabbi Ezra Raful, head of the Israeli Rabbinute's international *shehita* supervision department, determined that Agriprocessors' animal killings would not be considered kosher even if the slaughter was "technically kosher."[61] His use of the word "kosher," like Mr. Cohen's use, raised the possibility that "kosher" could and should be interpreted in multiples ways, some of which may even run counter to tradition. For some, the term "kosher" should represent not only a steadfast commitment to *halakha* but also an unwavering devotion to ethical values.

Two years later, Nathaniel Popper, a writer for *The Jewish Daily Forward* added salt to Agriprocessors' wound. In a provocative and heartbreaking critique of the treatment of Agriprocessors' workers, he described the travails of three of its hundreds of Hispanic factory workers. First, Popper noted that these employees, all of whom are new immigrants, are paid far less than workers in non-kosher plants, despite the fact that kosher products are sold at a far higher profit. Secondly, Popper revealed that these

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[60]McNeil Jr., "Videos Cited"

[61] Shmarya Rosenberg, "Rabbinute: Rubashkin Shechita Not Acceptable," Failed Messiah, web log entry posted December 1, 2004, http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/2004/12/rabbinute_rubas.html (accessed January 10, 2010).

factory workers, although disgruntled and dissatisfied with their current employment, have limited options. After all, Postville is a small town with few opportunities beyond the plant. Indeed, many of these workers came to Postville from their native countries for the distinct purpose of working at Agriprocessors' factory. For those who are able to secure work, a job at the factory is grueling—long shifts, minimal training, and the possibility of losing a job upon injury or illness. Workers were also prevented from unionizing and do not receive health insurance and other benefits. In fact, at the very time of Popper's article, Empire Kosher, the second-largest producer of kosher poultry in the United States, was cutting costs by eliminating jobs because "…Empire pa[id] its lowest-ranking unionized employees close to $3 more an hour… than AgriProcessors' lowest [paid] employees, and provide[d] full benefits."[62]

One might assume that a slaughterhouse run by clergy would strictly adhere to both federal law and Jewish ethics. Orthodox Rabbis, especially, might be regarded as paragons of virtue given their punctilious attention to religious law. Yet those who make this assumption have been largely disappointed. Because of their small size, kosher plants "…have escaped the scrutiny of labor conditions that the larger industry has received,"[63] and the Rabbis who ran these plants took advantage of the lack of oversight. Along with their greedy desire to make a profit on the backs of their underpaid workers, these rabbinic figures have used their control and power to dominate and abuse animals. The 2004 scandal exposed the realities of a kosher slaughterhouse, run by clergy assumed to be "held to a higher standard." Yet, the worst violations were still to come.

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[62] Nathaniel Popper, "In Iowa Meat Plant, Kosher 'Jungle' Breeds Fear, Injury, Short Pay," *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), May 26, 2006, http://www.forward.com/articles/1006/ (accessed January 10, 2010).
[63] Popper, "In Iowa."

Two years after the article appeared, Federal law enforcement officials including agents from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Department,[64] raided Agriprocessors' kosher meat slaughterhouse and packaging plant. Called the largest raid in the history of the ICE, over 500 Federal agents executed the raid, which required months of planning in conjunction with 16 Federal, state, and local agencies. They issued warrants for 697 of the plant's 968 employees.[65] A nearby fair ground functioned as a detention center where questioning of the employees ensued. School attendance at Postville's public schools fell to 60 percent when parents kept their children home as authorities searched for underage children who may have been forced to work. Ultimately, 389 workers were arrested in the raid, most of whom were deported to their home countries [66] Agriprocessors was ultimately charged with more than 9,000 child labor violations, along with harboring undocumented aliens for profit and bank fraud.[67] Individual charges were handed down to Sholom Rubashkin, the plant operations manager, his son Aaron, owner of Agriprocessors, and three members of their management team. The ICE also indicted two non-Jewish plant managers.[68] In November

[64] Shmarya Rosenberg, "US Immigration Police Raid Agriprocessors," Failed Messiah, web log entry posted May 12, 2008, http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/2008/05/breaking-us-imm.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[65] Jewish Daily Forward (New York), "The Raid in Postville," editorial, May 22, 2008.
[66] Trish Mehaffey, "Agriprocessors Official's Trial Still Set for Jan. 19 | KCRG-TV9 | Cedar Rapids, Iowa News, Sports, and Weather | Local News," Local, http://www.kcrg.com/news/local/80922982.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[67] Lynda Waddington, "Agriprocessors, Five Postville plant Managers indicted by grand jury," *The Iowa Independent*, November 21, 2008, http://iowaindependent.com/8844/agriprocessors-five-postville-plant-managers-indicted-by-grand-jury (accessed January 10, 2010).
[68] Shmarya Rosenberg, "The Heretic: Stop Whispering, Start Shouting," Jewcy, web log entry posted September 11, 2008,

2008, Agriprocessors filed for bankruptcy, unable to make payroll for its remaining workers. The plant was closed shortly thereafter.[69] In July 2009, the Postville plant was bought and reopened under a new name, Agristar. However, the legal fallout from the raid on Agriprocessors persists: Sholom Rubushkin was convicted of 86 of 91 charges and the current plant manager of AgriStar (and former Agriprocessors' beef supervisor) will stand trial in a United States district court for similar charges.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

The North American Reform Movement's response to the events in Postville reinforces its time-honored commitment to social justice. In September 2008, its Commission on Social Action passed a resolution stating: "Those who produce kosher meat are engaged in sacred work and therefore are expected to adhere to the highest standards and values of Jewish tradition. Those who keep kosher, including the growing number of Reform Jews who are embracing the observance of kashrut, should not be forced to choose between their ritual observance and their ethical values."[70] In addition, the resolution explicitly acknowledged the general community's presumption that kosher

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http://www.jewcy.com/post/heretic_stop_whispering_start_screaming# (accessed November 25, 2009).

[69] Shmarya Rosenberg, "Agriprocessors: The Gift That Keeps On Giving," Jewcy, web log entry posted November 30, 2008, www.jewcy.com (accessed December 1, 2008). http://www.jewcy.com/post/agriprocessors_gift_keeps_giving

[70] Union of Reform Judaism, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, "Worker Rights, Ethical Consumerism and the Kosher Food Industry," press release, URJ.org, http://urj.org//about/union/governance/reso//?syspage=article&item_id=1909 (accessed January 10, 2010).

food embodied Jewish values: "Abusive labor practices constitute a *hillul haShem*, a violation of God's name…and are particularly egregious here because the kosher food industry is seen by the general public as representing the Jewish community and its values." In November, 2009, at the movement's biennial conference, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, was more blunt: "[Reform Judaism] is an ethically-based tradition, and Reform leaders [of the past] saw no connection between the intricate rules of *kashrut* and ethical behavior. Sadly, for too much of the *kashrut* industry, this disconnect still exists; in recent years, *kashrut* authorities have failed in their duty to treat workers, immigrants, and animals with compassion and justice."[71] Indeed, since eating kosher meat is not essential to the food practices of most Reform Jews, the Agriprocessors' scandal only served to alienate them further from kashrut.

It is unclear how many Jews within the Brooklyn-based Lubavitch community rallied around the Rubushkin family. Yet many defended Agriprocessors' claim that no Federal or Jewish laws had been broken at the plant. Rabbi Seth Mandel, head *mashgiach* of the Orthodox Union responded shortly after the raid: "Although Agri makes mistakes, one is obliged also to take into account the good that Agri does…Agri is no worse than other large meat packers….The position of the OU is that we require owners of meat businesses to be *shomrei mitzvos* and also abide by the law."[72] Some supporters of the Rubushkin family picketed the Iowa courthouse during the trials and continue to this day to support Agristar by purchasing its products. Others raised the "flag" of anti-Semitism,

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[71] Eric Yoffie, "Rabbbi Yoffie's Shabbat Sermon" (speech, Union for Reform Judaism Biennial, Toronto, ON, November 7, 2009).

[72] Ben Harris, "OU gets more detailed on Agri," The Telegraph- odds and ends from the staff of JTA, web log entry posted June 23, 2008, http://blogs.jta.org/telegraph/article/2008/06/23/1000055/ou-gets-more-detailed-on-agri (accessed January 10, 2010).

insisting that Iowa residents were, at most, unwelcoming to the *Hasidic* Jews who arrived in Postville to open Agriprocessors. In Stephen Bloom's book *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America*, he elaborates upon the tense relationship between the Postville locals and the Orthodox Jews who arrived in the late 1980s. Although his narrative describes events pre-2004, Bloom accurately presents the difficult dynamic that emerged in Postville not long after the Jews' arrival.

In contrast, the group *Uri L'Tzedek* [Arise to Justice], composed of Orthodox Jews, has been the most vocal critic against Agriprocessors. *Uri L'Tzedek* calls itself "an Orthodox social justice organization guided by Torah values and dedicated to combating suffering and oppression."[73] Using a three-pronged approach of community-based education, leadership development and action, *Uri L'Tzedek* endeavors to combat a long list of social problems including racism, gun violence, health reform and poverty. But in the wake of Postville, its name has become synonymous with a commitment to ethical kashrut, environmental justice and immigration reform. Leaders of *Uri L'Tzedek* took action during the Agriprocessors' scandal, writing Aaron Rubushkin, traveling to Iowa, raising funds for displaced workers and ultimately meeting with Agriprocessor's management.[74] They urged the company "to uphold the *halakhic* requirements, both ritual and ethical, of the food we eat,"[75] and threatened to boycott it and the restaurants it supplied until worker's compensation and benefits were addressed. Adherents of *Uri*

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[73] "Mission & 3 Pillars," Uri L Tzedek, Our Mission, http://www.utzedek.org/whoweare/mission-a-3-pillars.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[74] Ari Hart and Shmuly Yanklowitz, "Repairing a sacred relationship," *Haaretz.com*, August 10, 2008, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1009627.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[75] "Letter to Aaron Rubashkin from Uri L'Tzedek," letter to Mr. Aaron Rubashkin, May 23, 2008, Press, http://www.utzedek.org/news-archive/39.html (accessed January 10, 2010).

L'Tzedek commit themselves to what they call *yashrut*, or ethical values, and have developed an ethical seal known as *Tav HaYosher*, which they award to kosher establishments that maintain a commitment to ethical values alongside ritual precision.[76]

The Conservative Movement, too, has expressed disapproval of Agriprocessors' conduct. After the Postville raid, both its lay and rabbinical bodies released a statement "…calling for a thorough evaluation by kosher consumers of the appropriateness of purchasing and consuming meat products produced by the Rubashkin's label."[77] Though horrified with the actions of Agriprocessors, they shied away from declaring an official boycott because they feared that such a move would result in less available kosher meat for its constituents, leading to the unwanted result of Conservative Jews purchasing non-kosher meat in its stead.[78] Over time, the Conservative Movement has been exceedingly active in taking on the challenge of kosher certification. Under the leadership of Rabbi Morris Allen, the *Magen Tzedek* movement has emerged to ensure that kosher food adheres as well to high ethical values.[79]

With all this being said, though the mainstream Jewish movements responded vociferously to the Agriprocessors' scandal, it was independent Jewish groups who catapulted and transformed the tragedy into a broad-based movement committed to righting the wrongs and enlivening the debate over what makes meat "kosher."

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[76] The development and specifics of *Tav Hayosher* will be discussed in greater detail in section four.
[77] Leah Koenig, "Conservative Movement Wavers on an Agriprocessors Boycott," The Jew and the Carrot, web log entry posted May 23, 2008, http://jcarrot.org/conservative-movement-waivers-on-an-agriprocessors-boycott (accessed January 10, 2010).
[78] JTA, "Conservatives back off boycott," press release, Jta.org, http://jta.org/news/article/2008/05/21/108688/bnoboycott (accessed January 10, 2010).
[79] A more detailed description and explanation of *Magen Tzedek* can be found in section four.

GRASSROOTS RESPONSES TO POSTVILLE

In the last decade, the Jewish food movement has exploded. Initially consisting of a miniscule number of concerned Jewish vegetarians in the 1960s, it has grown into a prolific force of thousands who today constitute a Jewish food movement. The Jewish community's largest environmental organization, known as Hazon ("vision"), is regarded as the unofficial umbrella for the scores of groups devoted to environmental concerns from a Jewish perspective. Founded in the year 2000, Hazon originally sought to enable Jews to remain faithful to an ancient and often particularistic tradition while being part of a diverse postmodern world.[80] Its original New York-area bike ride has mushroomed into 18 Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) sites, the Jewish food blog, "Jew and the Carrot," an annual Food Conference, the Jewish Food Educator's Network (J-FEN) and *Food for Thought*, a sourcebook on Jews, food and contemporary life. Hazon's food work is cutting-edge, constantly expanding and relevant to Jews and foodies alike.

These projects, campaigns and efforts are a part of what Hazon deems, "The New Jewish Food Movement." It speaks to the amorphous and undefined nature of the movement that no specific definition exists. Yet as described on its website:

> Over the past few years, a growing number of Jewish foodies, farmers, rabbis, chefs, teachers, students, families and many others have brought meaning to the words, 'New Jewish Food Movement,' asking why and how one can eat in a way that is both deeply Jewish and deeply sustainable.[81]

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[80] Hazon 2000 mission statement. http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/about/z_originalMissionStatementIn_2000.html

[81] "Vision and Mission," Hazon.org, http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/about/visionAndMission.html (accessed January 10, 2010).

Furthermore, Hazon's New Jewish Food Movement is connected to the *shmita* cycle and has set seven-year goals that will coincide with the next *shmita* cycle (5776/2015).[82] However, the "Jewish Food Movement," as I refer to it here, is not a cohesive group of people or organizations; it has no overall mission or goals and often contradicts itself. Instead, it signifies dozens of mini-movements—some independent, others in partnership; some large and well organized, others that exist merely as websites, facebook groups or small groups of interested individuals. Hazon and The New Jewish Food Movement serve as a base, partner and advisor for many of these smaller groups and organizations. It is the annual Hazon Food Conference that has become the central meeting place for Jews who are passionate about Judaism and food. Despite the wide diversity of these groups, they can be broken down into four broad categories: Religious Vegetarianism, Ethical Labeling, New Conceptions of Kosher Meat and Meat Minimalists.

RELIGIOUS VEGETARIANISM

There is no one reason why a Jew would choose to adopt a vegetarian diet. For some, it is a protest against the kosher-meat industry. For others, it is the fulfillment of a Biblical dictum. While others regard it as a necessary means for keeping the laws of *kashrut* in conjunction with Judaism's ethical values. No matter the specific reason,

[82] "Vision and Mission," Hazon.org.

religious vegetarianism is one of the ways to respond to the notion of eating animal meat generally and the events of Agriprocessors specifically.

I use the term "religious vegetarian" to designate Jews who refrain from eating meat on religious grounds, acknowledging that they are part of a larger vegetarian movement. Jewish religious vegetarians base their meat aversion at least partially on values derived from traditional Jewish texts and thus differ from vegetarians who happen to be Jewish and base their diet on ethical, environmental or health concerns. PETA, in a pamphlet entitled, "A Case for Jewish Vegetarianism," argued that "Jewish dietary practices have always aimed to elevate eating to a spiritual level and to use our daily actions to make a statement about our deepest values." In other words, this publication argues that Jewish law concerning food has, from its inception, attempted to make eating more than simply a physically satisfying experience. Rather, by being thoughtful of and religiously acknowledging what is on our plates, Jews raise a simple meal to a sacred level. For religious vegetarians, making food sacred involves this acknowledgement as well eliminating meat and poultry. In his 2001 groundbreaking book *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, Richard Schwartz spearheaded the notion that Jews ought to be vegetarians for reasons that include care for animals, health benefits, environmental concerns, and an overall understanding of religious ethical obligation.

Religious vegetarians use Biblical and Rabbinic concepts to anchor their eating philosophy in Jewish tradition. They emphasize compassion for living animals as the primary reason for refraining from eating meat. Bestselling novelist and vegetarian advocate Jonathan Safran Foer tells of his vegetarian awakening when as a boy his

teenage babysitter asked him: "You know chicken is chicken right?"[83] While Jewish tradition does not, of course, condemn eating animal meat, the Biblical notion of *tz'ar baalei hayyim* [eliminating pain to living creatures] reinforces the Jewish vegetarian's diet. Religious vegetarians will often quote from the opening chapters of Genesis, including the classification of *nefesh chayah* [animals with a living soul] and *b'tzelem Elohim* [humans made in God's image] to illustrate the ideal relationship between humans and animals. Schwartz explains: "While the Torah states that only human beings are created "in the Divine image," animals are also God's creatures, possessing sensitivity and the capacity for feeling pain. Hence, God is very concerned that they be protected and treated with compassion and justice."[84] For him, the current practices of factory farming, including those of kosher meat plants, make the eating of meat impossible. Thus, he argues, the vegetarian diet of Adam and Eve ought to be the model for human beings today.

In refutation of Schwartz and others, Jewish meat-eaters have long claimed that the numerous, complicated laws of *shechita* were intended to minimize the animal's pain and suffering during slaughter. According to *halakha*, the *shochet* [ritual slaughterer] is instructed to kill the animal as quickly as possible so as to provide a painless death. In order for a chicken to be considered kosher, for example, it must be killed with one slice to its neck, resulting in an almost instantaneous death. Thus, it is said that kosher meat is a preferred and compassionate food choice. Various scientific studies conducted over the last century have tried to prove that *shechita* was a less painful form of slaughter, and therefore, concerned with an animal's well-being. In a study entitled, "Medical Aspects

[83] Safran Foer, 6.
[84] Schwartz, 16.

of Shehita" from the Veterinary-Physiology Institute of Zurich University, Dr. I. M. Levinger concluded that: "in comparison with other methods of slaughter, *shehitah* [sic] is at least as humane as any other method..."[85] The study also indicates that "the process of pain perception [at the moment of *shechita*] requires a given amount of time, but by that time [of pain], the activity of the brain has been greatly impaired if not completely paralyzed."[86] Religious vegetarians reject these arguments, claiming that the act of slaughter always causes pain, no matter one's attempts at compassion. They also point out that the days and moments leading up to that first cut are not dictated by *halakha*. As Schwartz asks: "But [should] we consider only the final moments of an animal's life? What about the tremendous pain and cruelty involved in the entire process of raising and transporting animals and forcing them into the slaughterhouses…?"[87] The painless death promised by *shechita* is no guarantee for humane treatment; the life of animal destined for ritual slaughter is no better off than that of one that is not.

Roberta Kalechofsky, a colleague of Schwartz, has pointed out a challenging complication to the notion of "ethical" religious slaughter. It turns out that a 1958 Federal law known as the Humane Slaughter Act mandated that an animal must be "stunned" before slaughter to ensure a humane death. However, *shechita* was exempt from this law "…as long as the animal's neck is cut swiftly and no 'carcass dressing' is done before the animal is insensible."[88] The exemption was a capitulation to *halakha* that instructed that

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[85] Schochet, 285.
[86] Schochet, 286.
[87] Schwartz, 110.
[88] Donald G. McNeil Jr., "Inquiry Finds Lax Federal Inspections at Kosher Meat Plant," *New York Times*, March 10, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/10/national/10kosher.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all (accessed January 10, 2010).

animals must die by the specific act of slaughter, not actions beforehand (such as stunning).[89] What is more, the stunning could cause unknown physical changes in the animal, ultimately rendering the animal treyf.[90] Despite this exemption, it was discovered that Agriprocessors violated the Humane Slaughter Law by executing a two-step slaughter process. First, a *shochet* would perform the ritual cut, which would *possibly* result in an animal's instant death. Then, a second worker would "…use a knife to open the animal's neck further and reach in with a hook to pull out the trachea and esophagus, with the carotid arteries attached."[91] This second step violated the Humane Slaughter Act's kosher meat exemption, as well as Jewish law, since animals could still be conscious after the *shechita* and were thus technically alive during the "second cut." For these reasons and numerous others, Kalechofsky concludes: "Meat today is a violation of every aspect of *shechitah* [sic]…[and] violates the most fundamental of Jewish concepts: …concern for the animal…" [92] Many religious vegetarians agree with Kalechofsky that there is no "most compassionate" way in which to kill an animal for food. Simply put, animals should not be raised for food. Human beings should subsist on a vegetarian diet.

To that end, there are religious vegetarians who believe the only way to be in authentic harmony with animals is to remove all animal products not only from one's diet but from one's life. Such hyper-vegetarians, known as vegans, rid their diets of all animal products, including fish, eggs, dairy products and honey. Others remove all non-food

[89] McNeil Jr., "Inquiry"
[90] Halal meat, slaughtered for religious Muslims, was also exempt from the Humane Slaughter Act.
[91] McNeil Jr., "Inquiry"
[92] Kalechofsky, 6.

animal products from their lives altogether, such as leather shoes and belts, fur coats and hats with exotic bird feathers.

Critics of Jewish vegetarianism have voiced concern that the broad acceptance of a meat-free diet among Jews would undermine kashrut, rendering many of the laws moot, especially those regarding *shechita*, of course, not to mention the separation of meat and dairy products. Even Schwartz acknowledges that eating a vegetarian diet makes keeping kosher less burdensome and could possibly attract greater numbers of Jews to kashrut. In a personal letter to Schwartz, Rabbi Robert Gordis, late Professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote: "Vegetarianism offers an ideal mode for preserving the religious and ethical values, which kashrut was designed to concretize in human life."[93] In other words, Gordis is declaring that the underlying spirit of kashrut is ethics. Despite the fact that being vegetarian renders so many laws of kashrut moot, Gordis essentially *kashers* a vegetarian diet, confirming its viability as a Jewish choice. The punctilious observance of every jot and tittle of every law ought not motivate a religious Jew's diet. In a different vein, Schwartz argues that eating a vegetarian diet helps prevent accidental infractions of kashrut, many of which relate to meat. As he wrote, "…a vegetarian is in no danger of eating blood or fat, which are prohibited, or the flesh of a non-kosher animal."[94]

[93] Schwartz, 113.
[94] Schwartz, 112.

There are Jews who wish to eat ethically but do not embrace vegetarianism and are thus redefining and even expanding the notion of kashrut. *Magen Tzedek* is just such a venture—Initiated shortly after the Agriprocessors' debacle by the Conservative Movement, though not directly related to it. Rather, according to Rabbi Morris Allen, "it provided an urgent context and need for us to develop our initiative, proclaiming publicly our belief that keeping kosher is inextricably linked to leading a life of ethical integrity."[95] Once completed and tested, the *Magen Tzedek* seal will appear on food products that meet additional standards of production, related to ethical treatment of animals, including "…labor concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, consumer issues and corporate integrity."[96] Unlike the standard Jewish *heksher*, which certifies that the traditional laws of kashrut have been observed in the manufacturing of a product, *Magen Tzedek* will ensure that religious, ethical laws have also been followed. The seal, like a *heksher*, will only be given to companies who apply for and are awarded it. Companies must show that they keep kosher according to a recognized kashrut authority in order to be eligible for the *Magen Tzedek* seal. Companies must also adhere to another set of standards including "…employee wages and benefits; health, safety and training; humane treatment of animals; the company's environmental impact; corporate

[95] Morris Allen, "Statement from the Heksher Tzedek Comission Regarding the Conviction of Sholom Rubashkin," Magen Tzedek, web log entry posted November 13, 2009, http://rabbimorrisallen2.blogspot.com/2009/11/statement-from-hekhsher-tzedek.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[96] "Mission Statement," Magen Tzedek, About Us, http://magentzedek.org/?page_id=17 (accessed January 10, 2010).

transparency and, consumer information."[97] Although the process for assigning the seal is still in process, the larger significance is already being felt. According to Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Executive Vice President of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly, "Magen Tzedek [is] a catalyst for a changed consciousness about the relationship between ritual observance and the ethical underpinnings of Jewish law…I am confident that it will renew the Jewish community's focus on the ethical teachings of our tradition and provide a roadmap for ethical renewal within the Jewish community and beyond."[98]

A second "ethical" kosher seal is percolating among adherents known as *Uri L'Tzedek* and derives from the famous words of the 20th century Orthodox Rabbi Yosef Breuer: "Kosher" is intimately related to "Yosher [Uprightness]."[99] According to *Tav HaYosher's* mission:

> God's Torah not only demands the observance of Kashruth [sic] and the sanctification of our physical enjoyment; it also insists on the sanctification of our social relationships. This requires the strict application of the tenets of justice and righteousness, which avoid even the slightest trace of dishonesty in our business dealings and personal life.[100]

Uri L'Tzedek is the only Orthodox social justice organization to offer the *Tav*, a sign indicating that a kosher restaurant holds itself to a higher ethical standard. Like the

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[97] United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, Magen Tzedek, "Revised Standards For the Magen Tzedek Service Mark Released by the Hekhsher Tzedek Commission," press release, Magen Tzedek, http://magentzedek.org/?page_id=670 (accessed January 10, 2010).
[98] United Synagogue, "Revised Standards"
[99] "What is Tav Hayosher," Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice, http://www.utzedek.org/tavhayosher/what-is-tav-hayosher.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[100] "What is Tav Hayosher," Uri L'Tzedek.

Magen Tzedek, only certified kosher establishments are eligible to apply for *Tav* certification. Restaurants must also adhere to *Tav's* threefold ethical-requirement: fair pay, fair time and a safe work environment.[101] *Tav* requires that all workers receive minimum wage—irrespective of their immigration status, legally-mandated breaks and appropriate time off. Establishments must also adhere to fair hiring practices, which prevent a person from being discriminated against on the basis of race, color, religion, language, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, sexual orientation, alienage or citizenship status. Employees must also be properly trained for tasks, work in a clean and safe space and have the freedom to organize, if they so desire. These expectations derive from existing local, state and federal law, though local establishments have not always enforced them. *Tav* employs Compliance Officers who visit potential establishments to determine certification and ensure compliance.

Unlike *Magen Tzedek*, *Tav HaYosher* does not make ethical claims about the food being served in their certified restaurants. Rather, it is concerned exclusively with preventing worker abuse at kosher restaurants. As the organization declares:

> It is critical we stand up for *tzedek* [righteousness] and *mishpat* [justice] as a Jewish community! *Tav HaYosher* is an opportunity to harness some of the power and influence we have as an observant community to strengthen *tzedek* in our world and create a true *Kiddush Hashem* [sanctification of G-d's name]."[102] [103]

[101] "Tav Hayosher Standards." Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice. http://www.utzedek.org/tavhayosher/standards.html (accessed January 10, 2010).
[102] "What is Tav Hayosher," Uri L'Tzedek.
[103] To date, *Tav HaYosher* has certified nineteen eating establishments and grocery stores in New York and two in Maryland.

CHANGING THE SOURCE: KOL FOODS, MITZVAH MEAT AND THE GREEN TAAM

While organizations like *Magen Tzedek* and *Tav HaYosher* have taken strides to ensure that kosher food production and service are held to ethical standards, altering the sources of food, especially meat, seems an insurmountable goal. Given the difficulty of locating kosher meat raised along ethical lines, many kosher omnivores have resorted to vegetarianism rather than eat industrialized meats. Others have decided to eat ethically-raised and killed non-kosher animals in order to remain true to their values. Until recently, it was near impossible for carnivores to remain loyal to both kashrut and ethical values. However, three local organizations have entered the green Jewish world, who are dedicated to raising and processing organic, grass-fed kosher meat: KOL Foods of Silver Spring, Maryland, Mitzvah Meat of upstate New York and the Green Taam, of Cleveland, Ohio.

In 2007, Devora Kimelman-Block realized that kosher meat consumers were being forced to choose between Jewish and ethical values. In partnership with Tifereth Israel, a Washington, DC synagogue, Kimelman-Block founded KOL (Kosher, Organic-Raised, Local) Foods, the first and currently largest producer of non-industrial, grass-fed, kosher beef, lamb and poultry.[104] Unlike most factory-farmed meat that is raised on corn-based feed, given antibiotics preemptively, over-fed to gain weight more quickly and spends most of its life indoors, Kimelman-Block's animals eat grass their entire lives, are never given antibiotics or hormones, spend most of their life outdoors and naturally gain weight. As a former vegetarian of 16 years, she had boycotted the factory-farm kosher

[104] "About Us," KOL Foods - Glatt kosher grass-fed organic meat - https://www.kolfoods.com/shopcontent.asp?type=aboutus (accessed January 10, 2010).

meat industry while desiring still to eat meat.[105] After a year of planning and organization, KOL Foods held its first slaughter of three Maryland-raised cows. With only minimal advertising to a targeted audience,[106] KOL sold $11,000 worth of meat in less than a week and soon had "…waiting lists in four Northeastern cities, as well as about 100 unsolicited e-mail messages from eager customers scattered around the country."[107] In keeping with its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, today KOL Foods only ships meat to the East Coast and Midwest.

Like Kimelman-Block, Maya Shetreat-Klein, a physician and mother, was on a mission to feed her family organically raised kosher meat. After locating farmers, a slaughterhouse and a *shochet*, she founded Mitzvah Meat in New York. However, Shetreat-Klein's reach is limited. Operating as a cooperative, meat is only available periodically and thus supply is minimal. As she puts it:

> Ultimately, bringing kosher meat to consumers is an unbelievably complicated process… We also believe that local food should be a grassroots endeavor, and that it [our cooperative] promotes community…we want to create a community of Jews… that believe in eating sustainable, local agriculture.[108]

The newest of the kosher-meat entrepreneurs are Ariella Reback and Amalia Haas, co-owners of the Ohio-based business, The Green Taam. The website explains the dual-meaning behind its name:

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[105] Samantha M. Shapiro, "Kosher Wars," New York Times Magazine, October 9, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12kosher-t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine&oref=slogin.
[106] Members of her CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and synagogue listserv.
[107] Shapiro, 3.
[108] "Frequently Asked Questions," Mitzvah Meat, http://www.mitzvahmeat.com/FAQ.html (accessed January 10, 2010).

> Taam means both "taste" and "meaning" in Hebrew. We endeavor to offer a new taste in kosher food: the taste of pasture-raised chicken, duck and turkey. We also seek to elucidate the meaning - the Taam - of the sun rather than petroleum; of local, ongoing relationships with farmers and workers, rather than distance and anonymity; of small scale rather than industrial production; and of sustainable foods in healing ourselves and our environment.[109]

Haas purchased 14 ducklings and raised them in her backyard with access to fresh air, water and organic feed. She then located a *shochet*, who killed the poultry, which was served to family and friends. [110] Pronounced delicious, her she has since transformed the one-time experience into a business after meeting an investor at the 2008 Hazon Food Conference.

LESS IS MORE: MEAT MINIMALISTS

Jewish carnivores who embrace both religious and ethical values can rest assured that consuming animals raised by KOL Foods, Mitzvah Meat or The Green Taam will meet their needs. But a new type of "ethical" Jewish meat-eater is emerging on the scene: the Jew willing to eat standard kosher meat, but with less frequency and thus less quantity. Aaron Potek, a student at Pardes in Jerusalem, is the founder of MOOSHY [Meat only on Shabbat, Happy Occasions and Yom Tov], a philosophy of meat-eating whose name explains itself. As Potek elucidates, "The idea behind [MOOSHY] is simple: limit the amount of meat you eat and sanctify the meat you do eat."[111] Drawing on the

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[109] "The Green Taam," The Green Taam, http://sites.google.com/site/thegreentaam/home (accessed January 10, 2010).
[110] Arlene Fine, "Changing the world … one chicken at a time," *Cleveland Jewish News*, August 14, 2009.
[111] Aaron Potek, "Mooshy: Balancing Morals and Morsels," *Presentense*, Winter 2009, pg. 20, http://issuu.com/presentense/docs/pt7/22?mode=a_p (accessed January 15, 2010).

Talmudic principle of *ein simcha elah basar* [there is no joy without meat], Potek follows a "meat-minimalist" diet, eating meat only on Shabbat, Jewish holidays and *simachaot* such as weddings and b'nai mitzvah.[112] Potek acknowledges that the MOOSHY movement is a small one, and that small actions won't necessarily create systematic change in the meat-production industry. Yet, attention to the frequency and type of meat eaten is the first step toward the larger promise of "…improv[ing] our world and act[ing] in a way I believe God intended."[113]

Although many of MOOSHY's followers define themselves as Conservative and Orthodox Jews, the religious meat-minimalist perspective is pluralistic. In fact, a "meat-light" diet similar to MOOSHY was one of the centerpieces of Rabbi Eric Yoffie's 2009 URJ Biennial Address. Before 3,000 Reform Jewish lay and professional leaders, Yoffie made the bold statement, "…let's make a Jewish decision to reduce significantly the amount of red meat that we eat."[114] Yoffie went on to explain why reducing meat-consumption is indeed a Jewish issue: while meat consumption has dramatically increased, the natural resources necessary for the production of meat is rapidly being depleted. At the same time, Yoffie raised the health axiom that a diet heavy in meat products is more likely to lead to health problems such as heart disease and cancer. According to Yoffie, Jews consume too much meat on account of the assumption that the only way to honor Shabbat and holidays is through the eating of meat. He concluded,

[112] See Part I: Meat as a Jewish Source of Joy
[113] Potek, 20.
[114] Yoffie, "2009 Biennial Shabbat Sermon."

"…for the first 2,500 years of our 3,000 year history, Jews consumed meat sparingly, and we can surely do the same."[115]

Across the Jewish spectrum, whether one decreases one's meat intake because of religious, environmental or health concerns, a commitment to consume less meat is emerging as another thoughtful and important way for Jewish omnivores to remain true to both religious and ethical imperatives. This phenomenon is also becoming popularized within the larger "green" movement. In his newest food instruction manual, Michael Pollan suggests that one should "treat meat as a flavoring or special occasion food."[116]

THEORY IN PRACTICE: THE FUTURE OF JEWISH MEAT EATING

In many ways, my attendance at the 2009 Hazon Food Conference was the culmination of a year's worth of research and thinking about kashrut and its implications for me intellectually, religiously and personally. I was anxious to observe how those most committed to greening our planet from Jewish perspectives use food to live out their ideals. Would meat be served at the Conference? If so, under whose certification? Would non-seasonal vegetables and fruits be forthcoming? Hazon stated its commitment to making "eating" at the conference both healthy and sustainable. Indeed, every meal was kosher,[117] seasonal, organic and not processed.[118] In their conference materials, Hazon explained: "We want to demonstrate—ideally—that these values [food that is delicious,

[115] Yoffie, "2009 Biennial Shabbat Sermon."
[116] Pollan, 53.
[117] Supervised by the *Vaad Hakashrus* of Northern California
[118] Emily Freed, *The 2009 Hazon Food Conference* (New York: Hazon, 2009), pg. 10.

consciously-prepared, local, organic, healthy, ethical and kosher] can all be attained. If or when they can't be, we want to explain why."[119]

Despite their promise and earnestness, the leaders of Hazon could not plan for every exigency. In the months leading up to the Conference, the management of the center where the event was to be held changed hands, resulting in ARAMARK taking over food services. Just days before the Conference, ARAMARK, a nationally known, large-scale food services company informed Hazon that some local produce and meat was unsafe and did not meet its rigid standards of quality.[120] The result was devastating to the many local farmers and kosher providers who had intended to furnish supplies for meals to the Conference participants. In one case, the local, organic meat that was supposed to be served on Friday night was rejected, resulting in the alternative: Empire kosher chickens, raised and killed in Pennsylvania and flown frozen to California.

I was interested to learn and understand why Hazon would choose to serve meat, contrary to their values instead of a vegetarian meal. However, they explained: "Understanding that meat is an important part of many participants' traditional Shabbat celebration we decided instead to serve Empire organic kosher chickens on Friday night."[121] As might be expected, Shabbat dinner conversation focused on the chicken or vegetarian alternative on our plates. Many participants ate the chicken without complaint, grateful to have a both kosher and organic meat meal on Shabbat. Others chose not to eat the chicken, as it did not reflect the entirety of values that Hazon ascribes to. But a third group, of which I was a part, ate the meat even though it caused some internal conflict.

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[119] Freed, 10.
[120] In 2008, ARAMARK grosses $13.5 billion dollars in sales and over $1 billion in profits.
[121] Freed, 11.

Ultimately, Friday night dinner illustrated the logistical and practical issues associated with eating meat that both adheres to Jewish law and a set of larger ethical principles. In his Shabbat evening remarks, Hazon's Executive Director, Nigel Savage publicly recognized the "incredible disjunction" that occurred at our Shabbat dinner tables and the impossible dilemma Hazon faced in their decision whether to serve meat at all. He reiterated Hazon's mission and Hazon's commitment to "*shlemut*—being whole with ourselves while returning to our tradition."[122] While it seems easy to write a set of values to which one believes and speak of, they become exponentially more difficult in practice when these values are applied to a large group of people and must abide by other rules and values.

My experience at the Hazon Food Conference has left me hopeful for the future of a New Jewish Food Movement, yet realistic about the limitations of an emerging grassroots organization. Certainly, the movement is large, young, energized and organized, but will this initial energy be sustainable? Will it last after the "green" movement has gone out of fashion? Will this movement make a systemic change in the ways Jews think about food? Will rabbinic notions of kashrut continue to have a place in the movement? These questions only serve to invigorate the community, although their answers seem daunting.

Even more so, eating meat has become an increasingly complex act. No longer can a Jew give a simple statement about his or her eating habits: "I keep kosher." "I'm a vegetarian." This is not necessarily a change for the worse—in fact, the time, effort and thought that goes into each bite of meat contributes to a larger conversation as Jews

[122] Author's own notes. From 2009 Hazon Food Conference, Nigel Savage, Friday night remarks.

attempt to answer our first question: What should my relationship with meat look like? We shall see the answers.

CONCLUSION: WHAT DO I EAT NOW?

Throughout its history, the Jewish people has vacillated between the poles of particularism and universalism. Today, in every community of the Diaspora and in the Land of Israel, this struggle plays itself out in the seemingly trivial, daily choices Jews make about language, clothing and food. In these pages, I have examined such tension around meat consumption at a time that Jews, like other Americans, are being influenced by the Food Movement, a loose conglomeration of folks devoted to conscientious eating.

In Part I of this thesis, I brought to light the myths and morals that surround meat-eating as understood by classical Jewish texts, ranging from the vegetarians in the Garden of Eden to meat-worshipping immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. These texts and experiences show that from the beginning of our history, meat has often signified something larger than itself, whether it be security, power, a special dispensation, or status. The Israelites cried out for meat in the wilderness when what they desired most was the security of the knowable, even if that meant longing for enslavement. Both the Biblical writers and the Rabbis limited meat consumption to those who had either financial means or erudition, thereby making carnivorism synonymous with elitism. Rav Kook taught that the eating of meat was a concession—divine permission granted begrudgingly that would expire once the Messiah arrived and human perfection was achieved; while composers of the Codes expanded the laws of kashrut to include *shechita*, a supposedly instantaneous and thus pain-limited death. Jewish immigrants of yore "idolized the calf," so to speak, understanding meat consumption of a sign of "making it" in America.

I then showed how the Agriprocessors scandal galvanized any number of disparate Jewish groups and individuals into conscientious eating along multiple paths,

including the creation of a loosely-confederated Jewish Food Movement with Hazon at the helm and various mainstream Jewish movements responding in kind. Among the most pragmatic responses, I pointed to *Magen Tzedek* and *Tav HaYosher,* which are attempting to make organizational change, and KOL Foods and other small businesses, which are producing meat that adheres both to Jewish law and ethics. In addition, Jewish meat-minimalists and religious vegetarians believe that reducing or eliminating meat from our diets is the best way to align our values with our physical desires.

Ultimately, one might argue that a continuum of eating practices inheres within the Jewish community, with those who strictly adhere to traditional notions of kashrut on one end and those who keep a strict vegan diet on the other. Such a continuum, one might add, moves from the particularistic Jewish practices of keeping kosher to the universalistic notion of ethics built into the Food Movement. But I argue that it is far more complicated than that. Conscientious eating among Jews blurs the boundaries between particularism and universalism. Religious vegetarians, for example, are engaged in understanding the spirit of particularistic systems like kashrut while rejecting the Rabbinic system of permitted and forbidden foods. These Jews are accepting Jewish law and rejecting it. They claim that it is possible to eat both within and beyond the boundaries of kashrut.

In a time of such permeable boundaries, we might ask how a Jew can express his or her particularistic Jewish way of eating within the global universe of food ethics? I advise such a Jew to consult Arthur Waskow's perspective of a "Both/And" approach to Jewish eating. Being a conscientious Jewish eater requires the kashrut of the past, the

ethical canon of the present and the environmental and health-related research of the future.

So in the end, as in the beginning of this thesis, I ask: What ought to be the relationship between this Jew and meat consumption? For myself, I do not advocate for a vegetarian diet; nor will I limit my meat-eating to Shabbat or special occasions. I will, however, take the discussion of meat seriously. I will base my decisions on my understanding of the complicated tension between Jewish law and ethics. I will not yield to my physical desire for meat. Like most teenagers, at that age, I allowed my peers to influence my decisions about food choices. And, as an adult, I continue to appreciate the ways that food allows for human connection. I understand that my diet affects my place in community, and I continue to be influenced by Jewish communal norms. As these norms change, my eating practices may change as well.

I must confess that, as during that transformative summer in Israel, I believed that, at the conclusion of researching and writing this thesis, I would be transformed into a vegetarian. And yet, I continue—albeit less frequently and in smaller quantities—to eat meat that is non-kosher by Jewish law, but organic, and local according to Jewish and universal values. I have been influenced by the myriad issues I've studied relating to being an ethical Jewish omnivore. Michael Pollan's popular admonishment, "Eat food, not too much, Mostly plants," guides me daily.[123] At the end of the day, I have committed myself anew to being a meat-minimalist, who consumes mostly plants, and plans to keep a vegetarian kitchen, according to Jewish values and universal ethics.

[123] Pollan, *xv*.

GLOSSARY

AGRIPROCESSORS- The kosher slaughterhouse and processing plant located in Postville, Iowa; raided by Federal Law Enforcement officers in May 2008 on suspicion of illegal workers.

FACTORY FARMED- Meat raised and processed (slaughtered) in large quantity, in industrialized factories and plants.

FLEISHIG- Yiddish for a meat product/ kitchenware

GRASS-FED/ GRASS-FINISHED- Animals who eat grass their entire lives/ animals who eat feed for some of their lives but eat grass for the months before slaughter. Grass-fed meat is known to be higher in quality and have a better taste.

KASHRUT- fitness, worthiness, legidimacy; "kosher-ness"

KOSHER- fit, proper, adapted. Can be used to describe the status of a food or dishes

MILCHIG- Yiddish for a milk product/ kitchenware

ORGANIC/ NATURAL- Food produced without use of traditional pesticides, animals fed organic feed, animals raised without growth hormones or antibiotics.

PAREVE- Neither meat nor milk (ie., fruits and vegetables, eggs, fish)

TRAYF- a non-kosher food/ item[124]

[124] A more extensive and explanatory glossary can be found in Safran Foer's *Eating Animals*, chapter 2.

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