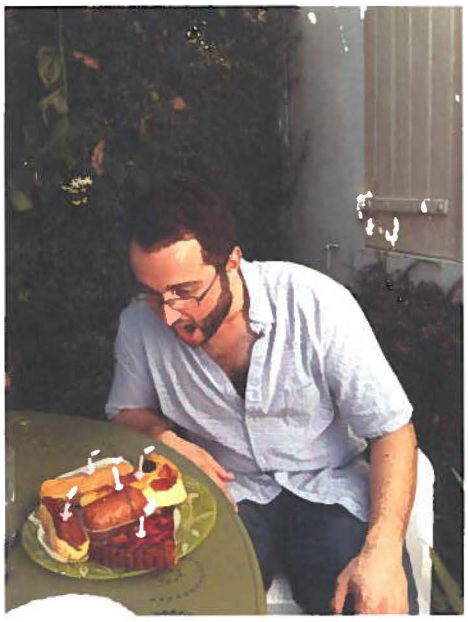
The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook:

Beloved Jewish foods from ancient times to the present



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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Rabbinic Studies

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Thesis synopsis
The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook

The motivation for the thesis comes from the author's personal interest in cuisine and cooking. He grew up in an Ashkenazic Jewish family and has personal connections with the dishes under discussion. From a young age, he started cooking, and he has traveled through many Jewish communities observing their food customs (and eating). While many cookbooks have been published on traditional Jewish foods, there are few didactic ones.

As the cookbook review will reveal, certain Orthodox institutions have recently published a number of *halachic* instructional cookbooks. None of them give a comprehensive history of the dish or an assessment of *halachic* development.

This thesis is comprised of 5 chapters plus a bibliography and appendices. The three dishes discussed in the three main chapters of this thesis: Cholent, Cheesecake, and Matzo Ball Soup are rooted in Jewish *halachic*, that is, legal tradition.

Each chapter follows the following format: introduction, textual development, culinary/cultural history and testimonials. Concluding remarks on each chapter are given in chapter 5. The testimonials are used to bridge the divide between the technical details of the recipe and personal memories. They are intended both as a way to derive anthropological data and potentially as excerpts for use in class discussion.

The interviews were collected from personal contacts of the author in various Jewish communities. An attempt has been made to draw from across the religious Movements, as well as from secular Jews. Each respondent received a set of questions on a given recipe via email or Facebook.

The three recipes are selected as they allow the discussion of three major elements of Jewish dietary Law. The selection on Cholent covers the development of Shabbat cooking restrictions. The chapter on Cheesecake discusses the separation of milk and meat. Finally the exposition on Matzo Ball Soup gives an introduction to the dietary practices of Judaism's most universally observed holiday.

After background research and collecting cookbooks, source-text review began. Drawing on the author's prior knowledge of the field, it was possible to quickly collect relevant Hebrew and Aramaic text starting with the *Tanakh* and moving through to the modern day. Several printed secondary sources and instructional guides online also provided extensive *halachic* footnotes. The most difficult material to find was the first record of Cholent, often alluded to in prior works without a citation. Consequently, the citation was only available in an obscure Hebrew text, which led to tracking down a copy of *Or Zarua* (see bibliography) and transcribing the material.

Cultural and historical materials were collected from gleaning secondary sources (see bibliography) and following footnotes, or relying on the personal experiences and prior knowledge of the author.

Testimonials were collected over a series of weeks prior to or concurrent with the composition of each chapter.

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates the history and culture surrounding three popular "Jewish" foods: Cholent, Cheesecake, and Matzo Ball Soup. It recounts the history and development of each dish and considers testimonials of how people link the dish to their religious/cultural identity. It also follows the development of Jewish Law as it pertains to the individual recipes. There are three main chapters, one for each recipe, an introduction, and conclusion.

Acknowledgements:

This thesis would not be possible without the advice of Dr. Yaffa Weisman, who oversaw its composition. It also owes a deep debt to the late Rabbi Gil Marks, for his excellent research on Jewish food. The entire faculty of the Hebrew Union College (particularly Rabbi Dr. Dvora Weisberg) also deserve a round of applause for making this work possible. The author would like to particularly thank his wife, Noemie, for her patience with the writing process. Finally, many thanks to all those who contributed testimonials, without which this thesis would have remained unrealized.

-CHAPTER 1-

INTRODUCTION

The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook: beloved Jewish foods from ancient times to the present

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Introduction

Cooking is a language through which a society unconsciously reveals its structure.

-Claude Levi-Strauss[1]

This thesis contains three central chapters covering the origins of popular Jewish foods. Jews are often viscerally connected to particular recipes and show a great deal of interest in their origin. Usually this interest is limited to a given food's history within their own family, how their grandparents made it and so on.

The three dishes discussed in the main chapters of this thesis: Cholent, Cheesecake, and Matzo Ball Soup are rooted in Jewish *halachic*, that is, legal tradition. Each one also has interesting cultural nuances. To effect an immersive learning experience, each chapter contains the scriptural and legal history of a recipe, its development over time, some cultural trivia, and the author's version of how to best make the food.

The material is in a straightforward form, with narrative explanations between primary (or secondary) sources. It is meant to be a collection of material for later use, redaction into source sheets, lectures, or hands-on learning in the kitchen itself.

The motivation for the thesis comes from the author's personal interest in cuisine and cooking. He grew up in an Ashkenazic Jewish family and has personal connections with the dishes under discussion. From a young age, he started cooking, and he has traveled through many Jewish communities observing their food customs (and eating). While many cookbooks have been published on traditional Jewish foods, there are few

[1] Strauss, Claude. *The Origin of Table Manners.* New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

didactic ones. As the cookbook review will reveal, certain Orthodox institutions have recently published a number of *halachic* instructional cookbooks. None of them give a comprehensive history of the dish or an assessment of *halachic* development.

Beyond cooking, the author also has a great interest in the development of Jewish Law as impacted by history and local custom. Each chapter contains a running history, observances and practices, and their reflection in Jewish Law. These assessments are not exhaustive, but comprehensive enough to serve as pedagogical frameworks for the implementation of the thesis as a series of adult education courses. Generally, the source material begins with the *Tanakh* and continues through the Talmud and Legal Codes through to the present day.

Therefore, each chapter follows the following format: introduction, textual development, culinary/cultural history and testimonials. Concluding remarks on each chapter are given in chapter 5. The testimonials are used to bridge the divide between the technical details of the recipe and personal memories. They are intended both as a way to derive anthropological data and potentially as excerpts for use in class discussion.

The interviews were collected from personal contacts of the author in various Jewish communities. An attempt has been made to draw from across the religious Movements, as well as from secular Jews. Each respondent received a set of questions on a given recipe via email or Facebook. The questions (quoted in their responses) cover the food itself, their memories of the food, and potential links to their

Jewish identity. In some cases, the respondents used the questions as prompts for general discussion, not following their format precisely.

Overall, the thesis was enjoyable to write. It weaves together topics of interest to the author, and hopefully any reader will be able to glean something of interest from the contents.

Research methodology:

The research for this thesis began in mid-2014 with the collection of cookbooks and secondary sources about various recipes. Originally it was to include seven recipes, but was cut to three in order to be manageable given time restraints. Chapters II, III, and IV are between twenty five and thirty pages each, thus a seven recipe thesis would have dramatically exceeded the page requirements and composition schedule.

The three recipes are selected as they allow the discussion of three major elements of Jewish dietary Law. The selection on Cholent covers the development of Shabbat cooking restrictions. The chapter on Cheesecake discusses the separation of milk and meat. Finally the exposition on Matzo Ball Soup gives an introduction to the dietary practices of Judaism's most universally observed holiday.

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Dietary Laws:

Judaism links holiday observance directly with eating. Most holidays include elaborate demands to eat or not eat particular foods. After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE), Judaism's sacrificial cult was ended for good. As personal religious observances flourished, so did personal dietary laws.

In modern Judaism, the most commonly referenced dietary laws are: Sabbath, forbidden foods, meat and milk separation, and Passover laws. These are the most widely known, although there are many more such as tithing and restrictions on wine. The forbidden foods (especially pork) are referenced in Chapter III.

The Sabbath restrictions prohibit the cooking of food (and starting of fire) on the Sabbath. From the original *Tanakh* restrictions, there are 39 parent categories of forbidden activities. Non-observant Jews are familiar with some of the practices that result from these laws such as lighting candles Friday night. Chapter II will explore the cooking restrictions of the Sabbath through a food that grew out of these very prohibitions, namely Cholent.

The second major area of dietary Law is the separation of milk and meat. These laws have their roots in ancient dietary practices and have developed greatly over time. Chapter III will discuss their development and modern implementation. The degree to which a Jew separates milk and meat is often a direct marker of religious observance, and thus identity.

Passover restrictions against eating leaven create a large shift in diet for the seven or eight days of the holiday. They also created foods that are enjoyed throughout the year such as Matzo Ball Soup. Quintessentially Jewish in character, these foods are common in the United States and are strongly linked to Judaism in the public consciousness. Chapter IV will present the development of the leaven restrictions and present the practical outcomes of those laws.

Types of Cookbooks:

Jewish cookbooks have a variety of formats, each corresponding to the rationale of the author. The most common is a general Jewish cookbook, like *The New Yorks Times Jewish Cookbook*. These books are straightforward, although they often have some testimonials included, or brief introductions to culture and recipes. American versions will most often include traditional Ashkenazi recipes and a few Sephardic ones. They are often viewed as maintaining or validating a mainstream Jewish culture.

One of the most recent innovations in Jewish cookbooks are the instructional guides. Many of these are published by Orthodox institutions and include instructions on how to observe the dietary or Sabbath laws. A cursory search of any internet book dealer will reveal myriads of these book such as: *Joy of Kosher, Passover by Design,*

Hip Kosher, and *the Modern Kosher Kitchen.* These books are often a subtle (or not so subtle) form of Orthodox outreach. They are primarily intended for *Ba'alei Teshuvah*, those who are newly Orthodox and wish to learn more about kosher cooking. Traditionally, recipes were passed within families. As we will discover later, Jews who become Orthodox later in life often bring their tastes with them. Consequently, the Orthodox world has become enamored with specialty cuisine (sushi, Thai food, etc).

Some of the instructional cookbooks offer ways to create kosher versions of non-"Jewish" dishes like Enchiladas or Pastrami-Bacon. This type of book suggests to its readers that a kosher lifestyle is compatible with broad modern tastes. Other books focus on traditional Ashkenazi or Sephardic dishes. These books evoke a romanticised religious past in order to make *Ba'alei Teshuvah* feel that they are participating in an unbroken chain of Tradition. This subtle power play by Orthodox outreach organizations propagate the falsehood that Orthodox Judaism has remained unchanged since the Revelation at Sinai. Any cursory exploration of Jewish textual and religious development will immediately dismiss this claim as invalid.

The next type of cookbook is the Synagogue, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, or Lodge[2] variety. These cookbooks were especially popular from the 1950s to the 1990s and many groups reflected their individual mission through their choice of recipes. We will see an example of mission statement through recipe choices in Chapter II with the *Leo Baeck Temple Cookbook.* These cookbooks create group solidarity and are seen as a way of preserving traditional recipes and practices through the period of post-WW II

[2] "Lodge" here includes anything from B'nai Brith to the National Council of Jewish Women to Hadassah. Any non-synagogue Jewish association publishing its own cookbook.

suburbanization. Shifts in Jewish identity towards more individualization and fluidity have led to a decline in this variety of cookbook.

What we shall term "memorial" cookbooks make up another category. These cookbooks attempt to document Jewish foods that are perceived as in danger of extinction. They present a vanished or vanishing world through food, and sometimes testimonials. The Jewish community of Stockholm published an excellent cookbook in this vein, *Judiska mat i svenskt kök*[3]. After WW II, Sweden received a large number of Jewish refugees. The refugees did not generally speak to their children about their experiences before or during the war. While cooking however, aging Jews did speak about their pre-Swedish lives. The cookbook thus, contains their recipes for distinctly non-Swedish foods, paired with stories about their previous lives. Other cookbooks of this type include the *Holocaust Survivor Cookbook*[4] and *The Sephardi Kitchen.*[5]

The Sephardi Kitchen straddles two types of cookbook. It is a memorial cookbook representing specialty regional cuisine. One anxiety present in non-Ashkenazic communities is a fear losing particular Jewish subcultures. In the United States and Israel, Ashkenazim have dominated the cultural landscape for decades. It is only recently that there is a new sensitivity to the unique contributions (and foods) of other Jewish subcultures. Sephardic food (writ large) is rising in popularity, as well as localized non-Polish/Russian Ashkenazi dishes. One finds

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[3] "Jewish food in a Swedish Kitchen." Fried, Eva, and Marina Burstein. *Judisk Mat I Svenskt Kök: Mat, Minnen & Tradition*. 2. Uppl. ed. Stockholm: Hillelförlaget, 2003

[4] Caras, Joanne. *Holocaust Survivor Cookbook: Collected from around the World.* Port St. Lucie, FL: Caras & Associates, 2007.

[5] Sternberg, Robert. *The Sephardic Kitchen: The Healthful Food and Rich Culture of the Mediterranean Jews.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

cookbooks specializing in Greek or Syriac Jewish cuisine, the Gumbos of the Cajun South, Bukharian foods, and Alsatian.

There are also books like Rabbi Gil Marks *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, which give a great deal of historical information. These books straddle the line between cookbook and food anthropology.

Review source material and prior secondary literature:

This section contains an assessment of some materials used in the construction of the central chapters.

Bar Ilan Responsa Project. Database

This database is a collection of Jewish religious and legal texts. It contains searchable copies with connecting internal hyperlinks including *Tanakh*, *Mishnah, Talmud*, legal responsa, and works of mysticism. The database is available on CD or by subscription over the internet. All primary source material in Hebrew, unless otherwise indicated, is from this database.

Klein, Isaac. *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America :, 1979.

The author was a noted professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary and this work is considered a handbook for Conservative Jewish observance. The book is arranged by topic (holidays, life cycles, etc) and includes instructions as well as legal references. It

is an excellent resource for finding citations in original legal texts such as the Shulchan Aruch or Mishneh Torah.

Kraemer, David Charles. Jewish eating and identity through the ages. [New ed. London: Routledge, 2009.

The author presents an anthropological/historical view of Jewish eating practices. He starts with the biblical period and continues through modern day arguments about kosher standards. The book conjectures that Jewish dietary practices evolved in reaction to surrounding cultures. He draws heavily on Jewish textual sources, particularly Talmud and legal codes. Kraemer is a professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Lowenstein, Steven M.. The Jewish cultural tapestry: Jewish folk traditions from Persia to Poland. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

The author is a retired professor of Jewish History from the University of Judaism and a practicing Orthodox Jew. His work is a thoughtful reflection of the current state of American-Jewish identity. The book presents historical background for many current phenomena and is helpful for understanding various Jewish subgroups. Food and eating are major components of the Jewish cultures explained in the book.

Marks, Gil. Encyclopedia of Jewish food. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010.

The author was an ordained Orthodox rabbi and outstanding food schollar. His work is a collection of ingredients, recipes, and culinary concepts arranged in encyclopaedic format. Most entries contain information about the history and significance of the food. He presents food as a blending of Jewish cultural and religious experience.

-CHAPTER 2-

CHOLENT

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Cholent is a slow cooked dish that is often made of low cost ingredients. It generally contains fatty meat, root vegetables, onions and garlic, paprika, and sometimes *kishke* (filled sausage). It sometimes includes bulgar wheat or rice. The ingredients are placed in a pot or slow cooker and simmered on a low heat for 12-18 hours.

Cholent[6] is a quintessential Ashkenazi stew, once prepared primarily for the Sabbath but now commonly eaten on Thursday and Saturday night as well. The origins of Cholent date back to medieval France, and the ingredients varied within Europe depending on availability and price. Cholent is enjoying a surge in popularity in the United States and Canada correlated to a shift towards the poles of the religious spectrum. Jews moving towards the more observant end of the spectrum often view Cholent as an identifying marker of a *Shomer Shabbat* lifestyle. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex and attached to claims of "authenticity" by Ashkenazi Orthodox outreach organizations.

Since Cholent is intimately connected to observance of Jewish Sabbath Laws, cooking and serving it can be understood as an identity statement. Within 21st century Ashkenazi Orthodoxy, cooking and eating Cholent has experienced elevation to a sublime religious activity, a cultural statement, or a reinforcer of gender roles.

In Conservative (Jewish) circles, Cholent serves as a connector to the European-Jewish ancestry that drove the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism throughout the 20th century. Although it was not widely consumed in Conservative

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[6] Sometimes spelled Chulent, Tsholent, or Tzalent, depending on transliteration from Hebrew or Yiddish.

households in the last two generations, it is experiencing renewed interest as the Movement searches to redefine itself.

Nowadays, Cholent, once exclusively a meat based dish, sometimes suffers the indignity of being made without meat at all! Vegetarian Cholent, an attempt to marry a traditional aesthetic with modern sentiment, has become quite the rage.

Reform Judaism has a troubled relationship with Cholent. Since 19th and 20th century Reform Judaism often involved breaking away from the Sabbath Laws, Cholent became persona non grata. Other Ashkenazi foods remained, primarily Friday night foods such as Matzo Ball soup and Gefilte Fish, and some Saturday lunch foods; but Cholent faded into obscurity. For example, while the Leo Baeck Temple Cookbook from as recently as 1990 lists Boeuf Bourguignon, Borsht, and Red Caviar Madrilene in the same volume, there is no mention of the slow simmering Shabbat staple.[7]

Origins and Laws of Cholent

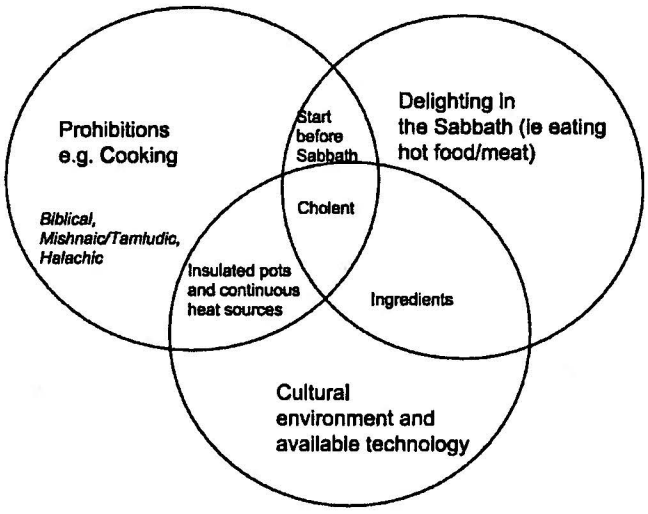
The importance of hot food:

Cholent as a hot Sabbath dish fulfills a critical role within Jewish life. Rabbinic Judaism is based not only on the contents of the Tanakh, but also on the Oral Law. From the 7th to 9th centuries, Rabbinic Judaism engaged in an important polemic against Karaite Judaism (from the Hebrew קראיה: reading/written). Karaite Judaism maintained that only the Tanakh (the Written Torah) was Divine in origin, and not the Oral Torah (as transcribed into writing the in Mishnah and Talmud).

[7] Litchmann et al. *The Original Leo Baeck Temple Cookbook.* Los Angeles, Bristol Press, 1990.

One of the important distinctions between Rabbinic and Karaite Jews is the employment of fire (and more recently electricity) on the Sabbath. Karaite Jews maintain that fire may not be used at all, while Rabbinic Jews permit the use of fire and electricity provided they are kindled before the Sabbath (or turned on by an automated timer). Thus, the common use of Sabbath candles in Rabbinic Judaism, which are kindled before the onset of the Sabbath and serve to light the house for dinner. Kindling Sabbath candles so as to use their light after sundown of the Sabbath is not only a spiritual practice, but a polemic against the reading of Tanakh (Written Law) without the supplementary Talmud (Oral Law). So too is eating hot foods, kept hot through insulation or the application on continual heat. Cholent, and hot Sabbath foods in general, reflect the dominant acceptance of Rabbinic Judaism over Karaite Judaism.

There are several overlapping restrictions and requirements that create the Jewish legal environment in which Cholent is situated. It can be pictured as a venn diagram with Cholent at the center.



Cholent has a fascinating history. Even though the name "Cholent" and the particular variety that is now part of the Ashkenazi-Jewish consciousness did not appear until the 12th century, the history of Cholent starts with verses in the Tanakh. The fortifying and aromatic dish that has caused stomachs to rumble for over 800 years has an origin story that has its roots in the foundational document of the Jewish people.

From a strict interpretation of the Tanakh verses, it appears that the result of doing any kind of productive work, or having a fire within your residence is strictly prohibited. These prohibitions cause problems when they are combined with the command to "delight" in the Sabbath, which is associated with having hot food (especially for Saturday lunch). If one cannot light a fire after sundown on Friday (or an oven), it causes difficulties with fulfilling the duty of having a hot and edifying lunch on Saturday (often followed by a nap). These are the verses in the Tanakh that form the basis for Sabbath cooking rules:

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הִוא לָכֶם מְחַלְלֶיהָ מוֹת יוּמָת כִּי כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה בָהּ מְלָאכָה וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמֶּיהָ

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים יֵעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן קֹדֶשׁ לַיקֹוָק כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת

You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is sacred to you, and anyone who violates it by doing work on it, their spirit shall be cut off from among the people. Six days you shall do work and on the seventh is a Sabbath, a sacred Sabbath to God, and anyone who does work on the Sabbath day shall certainly die.

Exodus 31:14-15

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן לַיקֹוָק כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה בוֹ מְלָאכָה יוּמָת לֹא־תְבַעֲרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכֹל מֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת

Six days you shall work, and the seventh day shall be a sacred Sabbath for you, a Sabbath to God, and anyone who does work on it shall die. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your camps on the Sabbath.

Exodus 35:2-3

These verses are the origin of one of the major disagreements between Rabbinic and Karaite Judaism, and Rabbinic Judaism emerged dominant from the struggle.

In the above Tanakh verses, work is not clearly defined, nor do the verses define the permitted uses of fire. The Mishnah, a written codification of the Oral Law from the 2nd century CE, elaborates the 39 types of "work" that are described in the Tanakh as forbidden on the Sabbath.[8] The types of work are based on daily activities done around the desert Tabernacle. Among these types of work is found cooking. Additionally, as an elaboration of the above verses, not only is lighting a fire forbidden, but kindling, stoking, or transferring a fire are also forbidden.

Mishnah Shabbat 2:8 explicitly permits the placing of foods onto a continual and sustained heat source prior to the Sabbath, which clears the way for Cholent, a dish first mentioned almost 1,000 years later.

שלשה דברים צריך אדם לומר בתוך ביתו ערב שבת עם חשכה עשרתם ערבתם הדליקו את הנר ספק חשכה ספק אין חשכה אין מעשרין את הודאי ואין מטבילין את הכלים ואין מדליקין את הנרות אבל מעשרין את הדמאי ומערבין וטומנין את החמין

A man is required to question his wife about three topics on Friday prior to the Sabbath. [He asks] have you tithed, have you prepared the eruv, and have you lit the lights? If he is not sure whether darkness has fallen [and the Sabbath is just about to start], he may not tithe, or ritually wash vessels, or kindle lights, but he may tithe, set up an eruv, and arrange his provender on the heat source.

Mishnah Shabbat 2:8

The second principle that lays the groundwork for Cholent is the injunction to eat meat on the Sabbath. This principle is rooted in the command to make the Sabbath "a delight" (*oneg*). The command is found in Isaiah 58:13:

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[8] Mishnah Shabbat 7:2

אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת רַגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי וְקָרָאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֹנֶג לִקְדוֹשׁ יְקוָק מְכֻבָּד וְכִבַּדְתּוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכֶיךָ מִמְּצוֹא חֶפְצְךָ וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר

If you turn away your foot on account from Sabbath, from pursuing business on My holy day, and you call the Sabbath a delight, and a sanctified and honorable day for God, and respect it, and not going upon your [own] path nor pursuing business or speaking of [business on it]...

In this single verse, there are several concepts that will be unpacked and elaborated over the next several millennia. When Isaiah speaks of "calling the Sabbath a delight," his words are often combined with another verse in the book of Deuteronomy to make the link between joy and eating meat.

וְזָבַחְתָּ שְׁלָמִים וְאָכַלְתָּ שָּׁם וְשָׂמַחְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְקוָק אֱלֹהֶיךָ

And you shall make a peace offering and eat it there and you shall rejoice before Y-H-V-H your God.

Duet. 27:7

Moving ahead to the Talmudic period[9], eating of meat and drinking of wine on festivals were elevated to an important and required status. Unlike in the Tanakh, where meat production is primarily controlled by Priests, meat consumption happens in the home rather than the Tabernacle or Temple.

תנו רבנן: חייב אדם לשמח בניו ובני ביתו ברגל, שנאמר אושמחת בחגך, במה משמחם - ביין. רבי יהודה אומר: אנשים בראוי להם, ונשים בראוי להן. אנשים בראוי להם - ביין...תניא, רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בבשר, שנאמר וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת לפני ה' אלהיך. ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא ביין, שנאמר גויין ישמח לבב אנוש

Our Rabbis taught: a person is obligated to make his wife, sons, and daughters happy on [Sukkot], as it says in the Torah, "you shall be happy on your holiday [sukkot]." What does it mean to make them happy? Rabbi Yehudah says: for men, with what is appropriate for men, for women with what is appropriate for women, with wine...It was taught that Rabbi Yehuda son of Batyra said: at the time when the Temple stood, there was only celebrate [when it included] meat and wine, as the Torah says "your sacrifices and your peace offerings you shall eat there and you will rejoice before Y-H-V-H your

[9] From the 3rd to 6th centuries CE

God." Now the Temple no longer stands, and there is only happiness [when] wine [is consumed], as it says in Proverbs, "wine gladdens the heart of man."

Bavli: Pesachim 109a

It is important at this point to recognize that the driving force of Jewish Law revolves around the definitions of certain words. In the Tanakh, a command such as "rejoice!" requires a definition, and that definition changes over time. One part of the Talmudic endeavor is to compare different places words are used, and try to establish definitions for such commands as "rejoice!" If there is a command to "rejoice!" on Sukkot, and the word "rejoice!" appears elsewhere as well, then the definition in one case is transferable to define the appearance of the word in another case. This principle is known as a *G'zerah Shavah* (lit. equal decree), where the context and definition of a concept appearing in one verse of Tanakh may be applied to another verse.

The concept of eating meat (in this case on Sukkot) is also applied to the Sabbath, as the principle is transferable according to the equivalency that is often made between a majority of the laws for the three Festivals (Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot/Pentecost). These texts explain the requirement for meat, and the phrase "there is only joy with meat and wine" has become a proverb of its own within the Jewish community. One often finds it quoted, especially by young yeshiva students, as a justification for gluttonous meat consumption on the Sabbath and holidays.

"*Ein Simchah bli basar v'yayin*," the phrase under discussion, appears in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, a legal compendium composed in Egypt between 1170 and 1180, without its Talmudic context. Maimonides says

והאנשים אוכלין בשר ושותין יין שאין שמחה אלא בבשר ואין שמחה אלא ביין

And for men, [on holidays and by implication Shabbat] they should eat meat and drink wine, for there is no joy without meat and there is no joy without wine.

Laws of Yom Tov: 6:18

Maimonides has indicated an important shift in the understanding of meat consumption. In the original passage in the Talmud, meat consumption was linked to Temple service, and after its cessation, only wine was required for joyous occasions. Perhaps Maimonides is reflecting a shift in understanding, or perhaps his community has more access to meat. While Maimonides is writing from a Sephardic community in Egypt, slow-cooked meat stew was popular across the Jewish world at the time.

Maimonides' writing comes just around the time the word "Cholent" first appears. Cholent mentioned in an Ashkenazi work, *Or Zarua* (composed in 1260), by Isaac ben Moses of Vienna. Within Sephardic communities (and most *halachic* texts), Shabbat stew is known by its Hebrew name, חמין, and it has different ingredients from Cholent.

> *I saw in France, in the house of my teacher Rabbi Judah ben Isaac, that sometimes they take a cool [pot full of] Cholent and on the Sabbath [they take the already] prepared food and servants light a fire near the pot in order to heat it well, and there are those who remove it and put it next to the fire...* [10]

There has been a major shift in the understanding of cooking on the Sabbath, related to the advance of technology. Previously, the temperature at which food is considered cooking (and thus it is forbidden to raise food to that temperature) was defined as: יד

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[10]Or Zarua, Hilchot Erev Shabbat: 8 (fin).

ראיתי בצרפת בבית מורי ר' יהודה בר' יצחק שפעמים מקררין צלנ"ט שלהם שהיינו טמון ובשבת טרם עת האוכל מדליקין העבדים אש סמוך לקדרות כדי שיתחממו בטוב ויש שמסלקין אותם ונתנים אותם סמוך לאש ומפרשים להיתר מפני שאין לחוש לאוסרן דמסתמא חמין הן קצת קרוב ליד סולדת בו וכשמוסיפים להם חום מיותר שהרי גם בישול אין להם ואפי' יתקרריו הרבה אין לאוסרין שגם כונתן בעבורם הן ואפי' מתכוני' בעבור ישראל אין לחוש דמסתמא אין ישראל רוצה בכך שאילו יודעו שהקדירות נתקררו לגמרי לא היו מניחים לחמם אותם כלל וכשהעבדים עשים לאו כל כמיניהו לאסור לנו התבשילים בעל כרחנו ובחופות רגילים לאשות כן אבדיהם ואין איש נמנו מלאוכלן וגם ר"ת זצ"ל ושאר גדולי הדור כולם מתירינץ מיהו נכון וראוי שלא לנהוג כן משום דאוושא מילתא ואיכא זילותא דשבתא וכל מדינה דלא שכיחי בה רבנן ראוי לאסור עליהם דבר זה.

סולדת בו (that which is hot enough to make the hand recoil if touched)[11]. Defining cooking in such a way is an indication that Jewish Legal systems were relying on a premodern approximation of temperature assessment.

All the necessary components are now in play: the requirement to eat meat, the prohibition of cooking on the Sabbath, and a decentralized diaspora with local ingredients and local rabbinic authority. Out of this melange, Cholent was born.

Cholent enters the scene:

The variety of stew known as Cholent was invented in France, as a local variety of *hamin* (hot food for the Sabbath). Gil Marks suggests that *hamin* was imported to southern France around the 11th century.[12] Apparently the stew was so popular that it began to be cooked by Christians in the area as well. Even at that early stage Cholent was considered a food linked to Jewish observance. When Provencal Christians began to produce a version of Cholent, the local Bishops clamped down and forbid the practice. Despite the interdiction, Cholent retained its popularity among French Christians and is probably the ancestor of the popular regional dish, Cassoulet.

Ingredients in Cholent varied to reflect what was locally available. As Cholent spread east from France, the composition (and also the spelling of the word) changed. There is no agreement on the true meaning of the name but suggestions include: slow-hot/slow-cooked or warmth-of-the-bed (French), warm (Spanish), and even after-synagogue (a false derivation from Yiddish). Since the dish has so many local

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[11] Bavli Shabat 40b
[12] Marks P. 127

varieties and is closely linked to Sabbath observance, many Jews rigorously defend their personal recipes.

During the early stages of its development in France[13], rabbis permitted Cholent pots to be adjusted and heated during the Sabbath. As the dish spread to Germany, the *halachah* changed and the temperature could no longer be manipulated.

After the immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States, *halachah* became more scientific. Oral instruction on how to cook Cholent fell by the wayside in favor of standardized regulations. A loose concept regarding cooking such as יד סולדת בו became a discrete temperature. Moshe Feinstein, a major Orthodox legal decisor of 20th century America, made a scientific ruling regarding regarding יד סולדת בו.[14] This ruling occurred in 1959. He determined the temperature to be 110 fahrenheit. His ruling enabled an entirely new variety of specially produced Sabbath food-warming devices. It changed the process of Cholent production from one of approximation, to one of scientific and mechanical certainty.

In Jewish life of 2014 America, much ink has been spilled relating to cooking on the Sabbath, and Sabbath laws in general. With the rise of *Ba'al T'shuvah* Judaism and an increase of previously non-Sabbath-observant Jews becoming Sabbath-observant, many instructional books are needed, often in the vernacular. Rather than learning the rules of how to make Cholent from their parents, or as children in *yeshivot* or day-schools, more and more Jews are referring to instructional books or even the internet.

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[13] See footnote *Or Zarua*

[14] Igrot Moshe, Orech Chayim 4:74 "bishul" 103

Quick reference guides to the laws of cooking, directly relevant to Cholent, are available from Artscroll (Mesorah) Publications, Chabad.org, and even Cholent-specific websites such as sichosinenglish.org. While the cultural import of such a shift will be unpacked in the next section, it is worth taking a look at the strict rules espoused by such works.

One of the widely used works in this area is *Shemirath Shabbath* by Yehoshua Neuwirth. Neuwirth (1927-2013) was an ultra-Orthodox rabbi. The dissemination of his work, and similar work by Artscroll (Mesorah) Publications indicates the rise of new stringencies around Sabbath observance. The forward to the second edition proclaims the triumph of his work, "The wonderful success of the book...which has reached almost every Jewish home in all corners of the globe..."[15]

By the time of the book's first publication, the cooking implements for Cholent had changed from placing a metal plate on top of a stove (*blech*) or baking in an oven (as was the case during the Middle Ages), to the use of specially constructed Sabbath compliant vessels. Neuwirth refers both to the special plates, and to automatic electrical switches[16] that enable food to easily remain warm on the Sabbath.

Cholent and Identity:

> *People are not nonchalant about Cholent - they seem to feel passionate about it one way or another. This reaction is not only about taste, but also about mindset: Cholent is either viewed as a delicious and integral component of religious devotion and Jewish culture or as an old-fashioned remnant of a disregarded ethnic background and a time when poor nutrition was common.*[17]

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[15] Neuwirth, Yehoshu, and W. Grangewood.*Shemirath Shabbath: A Guide to the Practical Observance of the Sabbath*. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1984. P. 327
[16] Ibid. p.10
[17] Marks P. 129

It is indeed true that Cholent holds a special place within the Jewish psyche, and it is especially linked with observance. After the *haskalah*[18], Cholent truly became a culinary incarnation of *halachah.* Heinrich Heine, a German poet who straddled the worlds of Jewish observance and secular Romanticism, mocks Cholent in a parody of Schiller.[19] He writes in his poem *Princess Sabbath*, a parody of *Ode to Joy* (*An die Freude*):

> *Loved one! Smoking is forbidden, for to-day the Sabbath is,*
> *But at noon, in compensation,*
> *Thou a steaming dish shalt taste of,*
> *Which is perfectly delicious-*
> *Thou shalt eat to-day some Schalent!*
> *Schalent, beauteous spark immortal,*
> *Daughter of Elysium*
> *Thus would Schiller's song have sung it*
> *Had he ever tasted Schalent*
>
> *Schalent is the food of heaven,*
> *Which the Lord Himself taught Moses*
> *How to cook, when on that visit,*
> *To the summit of Mt Sinai.*
>
> *Where the Lord Almighty also*
> *Every good religious doctrine*
> *And the holy ten commandments*
> *Publish'd in a storm of lightning.*
>
> *Shcalent is the pure ambrosia*
> *That the food of heaven composes -*
> *Is the bread of Paradise;*
> *And compared with food so glorious...*[20]

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[18] Jewish enlightenment c. 1770s-1880s

[19] Heirich Heine was born into a Jewish family but converted to Christianity at age 28.

[20] Heine Pp. 486-487 (translated from German, see bibliography). *Dafür aber heute mittag Soll dir dampfen, zum Ersatz, Ein Gericht, das wahrhaft göttlich - Heute sollst du Schalet essen!« Schalet, schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium! Also klänge Schillers Hochlied, Hätt er Schalet je gekostet. Schalet ist*

Indeed, Cholent is linked to religious identity so strongly that making Cholent for the first time is seen as an act of becoming more observant.[21] Even passively eating Cholent, not having cooked it oneself, is seen as a religious act. For the purposes of exploring how this concept unfolds today, let us consider a few testimonies. The testimonies were collected in December of 2014, via email.

The first testimony comes from a woman in her early thirties of African-American background. She converted to Orthodox Judaism as an adult, and views Cholent as an important religious marker.

> Question: At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?
> *I had my first taste of [sic] Cholet when I was 18 years old after attending an Orthodox shul for the 1st time. The shul was called Shul By The Shore. I wonder if having that experience has kind of made having cholet like "the" Orthodox thing to eat on Shabbat in my mind. Though I know thats not true.*
>
> When and where do you eat Cholent now?
> *Now I eat Cholet at home, during lunch on shabbat. These days I mostly just eat the eggs or kiskah (parve), Other than that I don't really eat Cholet at any other time. I feel like it would be a bit out of place. Though I have had Cholet during the week at friend's home's when it has been offered to me. Its not my favorite thing to have during the week (I kind of hate the idea) but, I've eaten it to be nice.*

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die Himmelspeise, Die der liebe Herrgott selber Einst den Moses kochen lehrte Auf dem Berge Sinai, Wo der Allerhöchste gleichfalls All die guten Glaubenslehren Und die heil'gen Zehn Gebote Wetterleuchtend offenbarte. Schalet ist des wahren Gottes Koscheres Ambrosia, Wonnebrot des Paradieses, Und mit solcher Kost verglichen...

[21] "Observant" is used in order to indicate adherence to Kashrut and Sabbath laws rather than participation in a particular Movement (Conservative, Humanistic, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Reform, Renewal, etc.)

How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?

Well, eating cholet is totally a Jewish thing for me. If I hadn't converted to Judaism I don't think I would have ever tried it.I mean its a real community treat. After talking with a friend of mine I think I grew up with something similar as an African American girl with black Louisiana creole grandparents. I grew up eating and learning how to make gumbo. Which is basically the same idea (minus the seafood) given that gumbo is just a mixture of whatever was available mixed into a big pot and cooked for a long time. In Louisiana they had seafood so thats a major ingredient. In Poland they had potatoes so thats in cholet... the same idea. Humm this makes me wonder if I'll feel the need to really mix the two dishes in some way in the future.

What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?

Well I've always based my Cholet recipe off of the 1st cholet I ever had because it was amazing. I kind of made it up, I took a wild guess based around the different flavors. I think every cholet tastes the best with Kishka and ketchup (it gives the cholet a sweet flavor). Also I LOVE adding eggs to cholet, theres nothing like it. Once I added honey and that was yummy.

Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)?

I don't have any memories or stories. Though I guess I can say I got a kick out of having chocolate (they were chocolate chips) and cholet at Jewlicious festival one year at around 3 am on a Saturday. That was a first. **[Sarah B., see appendix 1]**

It is interesting to notice that Cholent was called "the" Orthodox thing to eat. In her mind, Orthodoxy and observance are synonymous. She felt that eating Cholent was participating in observant life. As Gil Marks suggests in the quote at the beginning of this section, few people are ambivalent about Cholent. The testimony continues and explains that she feels Cholent is only to be eaten on the Sabbath, despite the practice in very Orthodox circles of eating it on Thursday or Saturday nights.

Importantly, she makes the point that Cholent is similar to Gumbo, a food from her own family tradition. Presumably it is made from whatever is lying around, it is a food for the poor, not a delicacy for the rich. While this may have been true in times past, one may now find Cholent in even the richest households of Beverly Hills and Manhattan.

Ironically Cholent has seen a massive decline in its country of origin, France. France had a large observant Ashkenazi population prior to World War II. More recently, a majority of observant Jews are Sephardi. Many Ashkenazi Jews have embraced secularism, and so Cholent is a rarity. The author of this thesis, on a trip to France to visit in-laws, discovered that most of the Sephardi run butcheries had never heard of *kishke*. They did offer all of the ingredients for Dafina and Couscous, traditional Sephardic Sabbath foods.

The testimony above evidences an important principle, the adaptability of Cholent. The woman explains that she wishes to merge Cholent and Gumbo to create her own food, even though her current recipe is a copy. As the remainder of the testimonies will indicate, Cholent in the 21st century must carry a pedigree. Often

eating Cholent is the mark of interest in observant life, while cooking Cholent (and selecting a recipe) is an indicator of actively adopting a more observant lifestyle. Those who become Orthodox later in life often attempt to alter their Cholent recipe in some way in order to claim ownership over what they perceive as part of a received tradition.

Let us compare the first testimony with that of a woman of the same age who grew up in an observant family. While she is not strict in her observance, she attends an Orthodox synagogue and identifies as a mix of Ashkenazi and Sephardi.

> At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?
> *Since I could eat as a child.*
>
> When and where do you eat Cholent now?
> *Sometimes at Chabad in Shanghai or at my parents or my future grandmother in laws.*
>
> How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?
> *No. It was just a traditional food to eat (sometimes heavy on a hot day). My Mother is Sephardic and my father Ashkenazi so I grew up eating dafina as well as Cholent.*
>
> What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?
> *I love the kishke. My father always insists Cholent is not Cholent unless there is kishke (agreed).*
>
> Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)? *Once my mom fed leftover chloent to our dogs BAD IDEA. You think we can't always digest chloent.....* [Miriam G., See Appendix 1]

The second testimony shows a less sentimental view of Cholent as a food. Since the respondee grew up eating Cholent (as well as attending Orthodox synagogue) she views it more casually. Eating Cholent in this case does not constitute an active religious choice, but rather a passive religious activity. She does note that Cholent exists primarily in the Ashkenazi realm, and is a cultural activity. She eats it at Chabad, which Judaism through a particularly Ashkenazic lense.

Compared to this one, the first testimony was of a single woman and her conversion and emersion into the Orthodox world. It demonstrated how Cholent has a particular status as the marker of observant identity. It is unlike Matzo Ball Soup or Cheesecake, in that it is primarily eaten in observant spheres. Matzo Ball Soup is available at many non-kosher delis and in jars at mainstream supermarkets, whereas Cholent is (generally) home cooked.

The second looked at a blend of Ashkenazi and Sephardi influences from an early age. In her case, Cholent was primarily a cultural marker rather than a religious one.

The next testimony is from an early-career Conservative rabbi. The testimony was selected because it highlights a number of important links between Cholent and religious identity. Not only was Cholent important in his feeling included by his school-mates, but it even facilitated his marriage.

> <u>At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?</u>
> *I had no clue about Cholent until I started at the Yeshiva high school in 9th grade, and all of a sudden the guys who were more "in the know" were all talking about Cholent like it was the greatest thing ever, you eat it on shabbos, etc. etc. It was probably the middle of that year when I had*

Cholent for the first time, at Rabbi E's house for Shabbat lunch. I didn't love it - it was greasy and hard to tell what was in it and I'm a pretty picky eater, but the social pressure was really high so I made like I loved it as much as everyone else. I had it again from time to time, usually when I would spend Shabbat with one of the rabbis or other students who lived in the Orthodox neighborhood (it was not something my parents prepared), I acquired a taste for it, and when I was in college and shortly after it was definitely a staple of Shabbat meals. [Isaac R., See appendix 1]

This answer indicates that Cholent is indeed a significant symbol of observance and an identity marker. The rabbi says that in his youth, Cholent was associated primarily with Orthodoxy. In his desire to be accepted by his peers, he went so far as to fake appreciation for the stew. It played a significant role in his religious formation. This answer is similar to the response from the woman that converted. Cholent was actively taking part in an "Orthodox" activity.

When and where do you eat Cholent now?
I don't. I'm sure part of that is because our home is largely vegetarian (for ethical/ecological reasons), but largely it's because our eating has shifted more toward lighter dishes; even when we do cook meat, it's just a portion of protein in the context of a much larger meal, not the whole focus. [Isaac R., See appendix 1]

The rabbi highlights the tendency to make large, protein heavy meals within the Ashkenazi Orthodox community. Some Conservative Jews follow this procedure as well. Although American Reform Jews do not generally observe Sabbath cooking prohibitions, many of the Ashkenazi delicacies remain part of holiday meals, exempting Cholent (matzo ball soup, potato and sweet kugel, stuffed cabbage, etc.).

American Jews of Eastern European descent often use large amounts of oil, chicken fat, and potato in cooking for holidays. For example, even with the rise of the arguably more tasty *Sufgania* in the United States, many Ashkenazi Jews prefer *Latkes* at Hanukkah. This phenomenon is probably due to the reliance on calorically dense yet cheap foods in poorer households in Eastern Europe and during the first generation of immigration to the United States.[22] Many American delicatessens (such as Cantor's, Frommers, and Kaplan's) still follow Eastern European tastes, offering *knishes* and *pastrami.*

Ironically, Orthodox Jews (and observant Jews of all stripes) are moving away from traditional Ashkenazi foods. Probably due to health concerns, increased wealth, and exposure to a spectrum of flavor, on may observe:

> *Sometimes one can see a paradoxical scene in a Jewish neighborhood supermarket before the holidays. An obviously Orthodox customer will have a cart loaded down with California kosher wine, kosher quiche mix, kosher filo dough, and kosher soy sauce, while and obviously secular customer will be buying nonkosher chicken together with thick red wine, borscht, gefilte fish, and kasha. The nonkosher consumer may was nostalgic about brisket, while the kosher consumer is excited about trying kosher sushi.*[23]

Many liberal Jews consider consuming traditional foods to be an integral part of their Jewish identity. Since *halacha* plays a reduced role in liberal settings, congregants tend to feel more attached to cultural elements of Jewish identity. Orthodox (from birth) and some Conservative American Jews view Judaism as primarily *halachic* and

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[22] *Sufganiot* (filled doughnuts) by comparison require more expensive ingredients and labor than *Latkes*. *Sufganiot* rose to popularity in Israel during the early period of the State due to their increased labor requirements. The government apparently felt *Sufganiot* provided additional employment for seasonal work prior to the winter holiday. See Marks, entry for *Sufganiot*.

[23] Lowenstein P. 238

theological, with the cultural expression being secondary. Thus, they feel less of a need to preserve culinary practices for cultural reasons.

Indeed, while Cholent is still popular in observant circles, it is often consumed as part of an active desire to move towards the more observant end of the continuum and is seen as old fashioned. It is going out of vogue as a Sabbath lunch food in observant communities in favor of new foods recently available in kosher varieties. In Los Angeles in particular, there is a concerted effort to make new genres of food kosher and Sabbath friendly. The rise of Mexikosher, Meshuga for Sushi, Bodhi Vegan Thai, Beverly Hills Thai (which serves meat), and La Gondola evidence this trend. Often the chef de cuisine is not Jewish, and some are even critically acclaimed in the greater culinary world (like the chef and creator of Mexikosher who competed on Top Chef).

Thus, Cholent may still be served in observant households, but it is often preceded by sushi and followed by pareve French desserts.

> How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?
> *It feels a little weird to say this, but despite the fact that I don't eat Cholent now (even when I am in places where it's being served), I actually think it played a key role in my Jewish development. When I was in Yeshiva high school, being an observant Conservative home was very isolating - most of the kids were either from Orthodox families (whether or not they were observant on their own) or from families that were more marginally connected to Jewish practice. But Cholent was something of an equalizer - everyone could relate, and everyone wanted to have some. And when I went to college and started cooking for myself, it was something that was easy to make (and hard to mess up), something you could customize to have your own "brand," and something that everyone would sit around and*

talk about. And even now Cholent is still a "thing" - my daughter is a self-determined vegetarian, but my 2-year-old son eats meat and when we were somewhere and Cholent was on the table, my wife and I were really excited for him to try it. [Isaac R., See appendix 1]

The rabbi is self-aware about the role of Cholent in his religious development. Notice that, similar to the first respondee, he wanted to create his own variety of Cholent. He also actively used it as a religious equalizer. This practice is known as adhering to the *Frummest Common Denominator* where Jews will increase their level of observance to the level of the most observant person in a room. This act is the religious equivalent to cooking an all vegetarian meal if one member of the dinner party is vegetarian, or abstaining from serving alcohol if one member is an alcoholic.

Moreover, the rabbi points to an interesting element of Cholent, it is generally easy to make. One often finds Cholent served by bachelor observant men. They can serve large numbers of guests with minimal preparation. Observant communities *tend* to follow a culinary division of labor along gender lines. Young observant men are often bereft of advanced cooking skills, as they are passed from mother to daughter. Cholent is a quick answer for the need to entertain large numbers of people. Occasionally, unmarried women will cook Cholent (generally for meals with a mix of genders) as a way of trying to impress observant men with their cooking skills and exhibit their desirability as a potential spouse (see below).

Ashkenazi Jews who observe the dietary laws in the United States will often place foods into two categories and ascribe them to a bipartite gender system.[24] Dairy meals are sometimes considered more feminine, while gratuitous meat consumption is considered a masculine trait.[25] Notice in the first testimony, the woman explained that when she made Cholent herself, she preferred vegetarian *kishke*[26] Observant men occasionally express their masculinity by moving to the opposite kosher polarity, by holding a *bussarfest* (meat-festival). A *bussarfest* is a Sabbath dinner or lunch where all food (including the bread) must contain meat products.[27] Cholent holds a central place in these meals, and the proportions of protein in the Cholent are increased, as are the variety of meats in the stew.[28]

For egalitarian Jews, such a gender division around food is highly problematic. Since this rabbi is part of the Conservative Movement, his interaction with Cholent overlaps somewhat with gender divisions that still exist in the Orthodox world (non-egalitarian worship is still permitted in the Conservative Movement, although rare). He settled into his role in the Conservative Movement after the conclusion the formative educational state that led up through the end of rabbinical school. As a result, he was

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[24] Despite a multi-faceted understanding of gender in the Mishnah and Talmud, Orthodoxy in the United States increasingly emphasizes two genders. This phenomenon may be in response to a perceived threat from modernity and liberal Jewish movements, which have a less bifurcated gender model.
[25] The author is drawing on his own experience in New York and Los Angeles in ultra-Orthodox, modern-Orthodox, and Conservative Jewish institutions. This paradigm also includes students at the (relatively liberal) Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, of which the respondee is an alumnus.
[26] A type of stuffed sausage usually made of beef fat and grains stuffed inside an intestine. It is also available in a vegetarian variety made of carrot. The sausage is placed on top of the hot stew to cook overnight. It is similar to the Scottish food haggis, notably that it was a food for the poor.
[27] For this case, bread dough is made with chicken fat rather than oil.
[28] The author of this paper has attended and hosted *bussarfests*. Cholent at these meals always included additional meat products, such as the addition of chicken, veal, or venison. The host will often also announce how much meat is in the cholent, e.g. "the cholent contains *two pounds* of beef." [Italics added to reflect emphasis]

able to shift to a vegetarian diet without reliance on meat as a primary expression of his masculinity.

> What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?
> *NO BEANS! When I was a Junior at Boston University, the Hillel House sponsored a Cholent iron-chef and my roommate and I took second place (which was still really exciting); afterward a bunch of people told us they didn't vote for our Cholent because it didn't have any beans, but we didn't care - WE HATE BEANS.* [Isaac R., See appendix 1]

The Cholent cook off demonstrates the place of individualized recipes as representing ownership over Jewish identity. The rabbi explains that he has his own recipe, unlike when he was a young man, and that it is a personal skill and choice as to how to make his dish.

> Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)?
> *When we were first married and living on the Upper West Side* [of Manhattan]*, we hosted a lot of Shabbat meals. Once we served Cholent as a first course for lunch, and then cleared the bowls away and brought out chicken, green beans, salad, potatoes, etc. The guests looked around in shock and told us that they had assumed the Cholent was the lunch - from then on (to this very day!), we always made sure to list the complete menu at the start of the meal so people could plan accordingly. I also remember trying to make Cholent for my wife (then girlfriend) and I in a 2-quart crock pot in my dorm room. I should have seen trouble coming when I could only fit one piece of flanken in the pot, but I went for it anyway… it did NOT turn out well :)* [Isaac R., See appendix 1]

The guests make a natural assumption that the Cholent is the main dish. Such a heavy stew would not usually be served as first course. There are many stories of Cholent being served to a partner, as the next testimony indicates. The next testimony is from a female Conservative rabbi who works as a professor. She graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary in the early 1990s. Her experience with Cholent has elements of all of the former testimonies.

These answers were offered free-form, not in response to the questions used the previous testimonies.

> *The first Cholent I ever tried to make came out crunchy. While everyone else scrounged for tuna fish and anything else edible, my then boyfriend made a valiant effort to try to eat some. I should have realized right then and there that I would end up married to him... (also - I've done much better since then - the key is a crock pot)* [Daryl M., See appendix 1]

Notice that Cholent plays a role in the foundation of an observant household. This rabbi attempted to cook Cholent as a way of affirming her observance, and sharing it with her boyfriend. Not only did he eat her Cholent and endorse her cooking, but symbolically accepted her level of observance and possibility as a domestic partner (same was true in reverse with the male rabbi in the previous testimony). As with some of the earlier testimonies, Cholent serves as a sort of practice for a family Sabbath experience. Since the dish involves so many ingredients, it is impractical to cook for a single person and tends to be made for groups.

> Continued from previous question...
> *When we lived in NYC, we used to make Cholent on a semi-regular basis, especially in winter if really bad*

weather was predicted. Now that we're in SoCal, not so much. Though I still love the way the house smells when you get up Shabbat morning...I think my first attempt at Cholent was connected to my religious journey at the time. I think this would have been my junior year if B. and I were already dating, though it might have been in the period when we were not yet going out but should have been (if there had been FB back then, boy would "it's complicated" have fit us!). I'd become more observant sometime around the end of Nativ, my freshman year, so I was still trying all this stuff out - and Cholent is what observant Jews make for Shabbat, right? So I had to try making Cholent.. [Daryl M., See appendix 1]

Where did you get your recipe?

I'm pretty sure it came from a cookbook. In fact, it might have been from the Hadassah cookbook (not sure when/where I got that though), which is still a recipe I use. [Daryl M., See appendix 1]

Even though this rabbi's family may have made Cholent generations past, the tradition had been broken. In order to acquire her own recipe, she went to a popular cookbook. Since the time when she first cooked the recipe, she has made slight alterations to make it her own.

How did making the Cholent impact your Jewish idendity?

It was definitely at a point at which B. was trying to win my favor, and even though we met Feb. of the year before, we didn't really start to get romantically involved until summer...The Cholent was made in the kitchen of my friend (and Nativ roommate) A.'s kitchen at Mathilde Schechter dormitory (I was at NYU but I spent a lot of Shabbatot on Morningside Heights). I guess the "low oven" wasn't low enough... [Daryl M., See appendix 1]

Once again, Cholent played a critical role in a romantic pairing. The rabbi viewed her boyfriend's reaction to her burnt Cholent as an indicator that he would be a good partner. He demonstrated a level of commitment and forgiveness of her culinary misstep, as well as an acceptance of her desire for an observant lifestyle. She had discovered the dish on the Nativ program curated by the Conservative Movement.

Nativ is a year long program of study at Hebrew University mixed with Ulpan. The Conservative Movement has recently added an egalitarian *yeshiva* component. Nativ is a culmination of a program of Jewish identity formation within the Conservative Movement that also includes United Synagogue Youth and Ramah summer camps. Nativ functions as a transitional point between adolescence and adulthood. It sometimes influences its participants to increase their observance levels, as was the case for the respondee.

> Did you have any childhood memories of Cholent, or is it something you came in contact with for the first time in nativ?
> *Nope. Never had it, don't think I ever heard of it as a kid. I probably did have it on Nativ, but don't have any special memories of it.* [Daryl M., See appendix 1]

Here is an explicit statement Cholent's impact on religious identity. The rabbi had *no childhood memories of Cholent* yes she was impelled to cook it as part of experimentation in increased observance.

Although this story is from the 1990's, the importance of Cholent as a religious identity marker has only expanded since then. It is particularly critical for *Ba'alei*

T'shuvah[29], who are often eager to demonstrate their enculturation into an Orthodox lifestyle. In 2007, *Mishpacha Magazine* published the following, originally in Hebrew:

> *In a ba'al teshuva yeshiva* [in Israel] *there was a student who has been learning there for the past 2 years, who came from a country with a mass* [sic] *aliya. This student has "strengthened himself" [i.e. become religious] and has been keeping all of the mitzvos. Over a recent shabbos he was a guest at the home of one of the married kollel students.*
>
> *Rabbi Avreich realized the student despised the chulent and could not even taste a little bit of it. He remembered the words of the Rishonim, that someone who does not eat hot food on shabbos [day] needs to be investigated to see whether he might be a heretic (source: the Baal HaMaor*[30]*).*
>
> *In addition, he realized that the student did not shuckle/sway when he prayed, and this too is brought down (in the Zohar) as being a custom of Jews.*
>
> *Since he realized that this student came from a neglected country {i.e. ostensibly Eastern European, but it does not specify] , he connected the dots and decided that according to halacha this student was likely not a Jew.*
> *Attempts to investigate the background of the student revealed nothing conclusive, so the avreich, at the behest of the student, approached Rav Elyashiv*[31] *with the situation and asked what to do.*
>
> *Rav Elyashiv answered that the student must go through a conversion as a stringency....*[32]

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[29] Jews who "return" to Orthodoxy. The term is problematic as it implies that Orthodoxy is the single, correct expression of Judaism and that all non-Orthodox Jews are lapsed Jews. The author of this thesis was himself a *Ba'al T'shuvah* for a period. Upon arrival at *yeshiva* in Monsey, NY, the head of the *yeshiva* announced that non-Orthodox Jews were non-Orthodox out of ignorance. That in fact, a Jew raised outside of an Orthodox household was the *halachic* equivalent of a child who had been kidnapped and raised by pirates. This principle is based on a reference in the Talmud (Shabbat 68a) that a child who is taken captive by non-Jewish pirates is not liable for violating *halacha*.

[30] The Ba'al Ha'Meor is Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, author of *Or Zarua* (cited in the first section of this chapter, who first mentioned Cholent in the 12th century).

[31] Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, April 10, 1910 – July 18, 2012. He lived in Jerusalem and was considered by many as the senior *halachic* decisor of the Ashkenazi community in Israel, where the yeshiva was based.

[32] Life in Israel: New Criteria for "Who Is a Jew": Chulent." (website, see bibliography)

In the world of *Ba'alei T'shuvah*, Cholent has reached a level of importance on par with Jewishness itself. It is considered an expression of Jewish identity to eat Cholent, almost on the level of eating Matzo on Passover (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter V). As the testimonies indicated eating Cholent is an outward marker of taking on an observant lifestyle.

Author's Cholent Recipe:

1-2 lbs	Fatty beef (brisket, flanken, koresh, or similar), diced
1-2	Onions, quartered
1-2	Potatoes or Sweet Potatoes
1 can	Diced Tomatoes
3/4 cup	Dried Beans (white, kidney, or "Cholent Mix")
1/2 cup	Dried Bulgar Wheat
1/4 cup	Vegetable Oil or *Schmaltz* (rendered animal fat)
1/4 cup	Honey
1/4 cup	Powdered Onion Soup Mix (non-dairy)
1/4 cup	Hungarian Paprika
1 tbl	Onion Powder
1 tbl	Garlic Powder
1 tbl	Flour
2 tsp	Salt
2 tsp	Pepper
1	*Kishkeh* loaf, frozen (meat or vegetarian base)

Optional Additions

1-2	Carrots, chopped
1-2	Parsnips, chopped
1/2 cup	Chick Peas, dried
Alcohol	1 can of dark beer *or* 1 cup of red wine *or* 1/4 cup whiskey

1. In a plastic bag, shake beef, flour, salt, and pepper until evenly coated.
2. Heat oil or *schmaltz* in a pan. Add onions and beef and cook until beef is browned and onions are translucent.

3. Mix all ingredients (including beef-onion mixture) except *kishkeh* loaf and eggs in a large crock-pot or sealed, oven safe pot.

4. Using a fork or knife, poke one to two dozen small holes in a sheet of tin foil and use the foil to wrap the *kishkeh* loaf. Place the *kishkeh* loaf (and eggs if used) on top of Cholent mixture in crock pot or pot.

5. Turn crockpot on low *or* place pot in oven at 220-250 fahrenheit and cook 12-20 hours (depending on taste and timing of meal).

6. Remove *kishkeh* loaf from pot, unwrap, and slice on a service dish. Remove eggs and place on service dish (if using eggs). Place Cholent into large bowl and serve. Do not return Cholent to heat.

CHEESECAKE

JASON SAMUEL ROSNER

-CHAPTER 3-

The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook: beloved Jewish foods from ancient times to the present

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Cheesecake is a sweet dessert of cream cheese custard inside of a pie crust. Most American versions use a pie crust made out of graham crackers, butter, and sugar, a sweet dough, or digestive biscuits. The custard usually involves cream cheese (or ricotta, neufchatel, and many other varieties) mixed with sugar, eggs, and sometimes flour. The original dessert has been elaborated upon with fruit toppings and fillings over time, giving rise to an entire genre of desserts.

While Cheesecake has a history going back to ancient Greece, the popular "New York" version has a particularly Jewish providence. Like Cream Cheese, the New York Cheesecake is a product of the late 19th century and spread like wildfire through the United States, eventually being exported to the rest of the world. Legend has it that the Cream Cheese based Cheesecake was invented by Arnold Reuben (also the inventor of the Reuben Sandwich) for his Manhattan deli.

Due to its association with Jewish gastronomy, Cheesecake has become the food for Shavuot *par excellance*. While many Jewish holidays have emphasized meat consumption particularly, Shavuot has a custom of eating dairy dishes such barkas, blintzes, and especially Cheesecake. The laws of Kashrut do not permit the eating of milk and meat products in the same meal, and the custom of eating dairy for Shavuot therefore excludes meat products (although this matter is debated). The reason for this practice may (like Shavuot itself) be agriculturally based. Spring was the time when

young animals were able to graze and so there was a large amount of available dairy around Shavuot time.[33]

In the last century-and-a-half, New York Cheesecake has become a major Jewish contribution to the culinary landscape of the United States. While various other forms of Cheesecake were already in existence, a custard of Cream Cheese is a Jewish original. The dish has become so popular that it even birthed a chain of restaurants, the Cheesecake Factory, made famous by its varieties of the dish.

Jewish tradition assigns many legal and mystical reasons for the consumption of dairy products on Shavuot. This chapter will explore the particular mixture of *halachic*, cultural, and historical reasons that New York Cheesecake has become a cornerstone of this Spring celebration.

Meat and Milk:

Before launching into exactly how Cheesecake (and dairy in general) came to be associated with Shavuot, it is worthwhile to discuss the origins why one would have an all dairy meal at all. Traditional Jewish dietary law does not prohibit the eating of meat; rather, it commands the eating of meat at certain occasions. The Tanakh does not explicitly ban the eating of dairy and meat together. What does appear in the Tanakh however, is the prohibition against cooking a kid (baby goat) in its mother's milk. It appears in three places.

רֵאשִׁית בִּכּוּרֵי אַדְמָתְךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית יְקֹוָק אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תְבַשֵּׁל גְּדִי בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ

The finest of the first fruits of your land you shall bring to the house of YHVH your God; you shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk.

Exodus 29:19, Exodus 34:26

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[33] Marks. P. 550

These two commandments appear in two locations in a single verse, and they follow upon the institution of the Gathering Festival (חג הקציר). The Gathering Festival is conflated with the Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot. It is possible that the juxtaposition of these ideas influenced the particular connection of dietary differences with Shavuot.

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כָּל-נְּבֵלָה לַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר-בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ תִּתְּנֶנָּה וַאֲכָלָהּ, אוֹ מָכֹר לְנָכְרִי--כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה, לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ;
לֹא-תְבַשֵּׁל גְּדִי, בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ.

You shall not eat anything that dies of its own accord[34] [ie. is not slaughtered], *however, you may give it to a stranger who is within your gates to eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to YHVH your God; you may not cook a kid in its mother's milk.*

Deuteronomy 14:21

Unlike in the previous two iterations of this law as they appear in Exodus, this citation appears in a long string of dietary laws. It is not linked to holidays. It does suggest however, that the dietary restrictions are constructed to set the Israelites apart from their neighbors, especially since one may sell unfit meat to their neighbors.

While the Tanakh prohibits eating a kid in its mother's milk, it does not prohibit eating meat and milk at the same meal. David Kraemer suggests that Jews inherited the custom from their Hellenistic conquerors. Greek culture considered eating milk and meat together to be barbaric.[35] The combination of the two substances occurs in Homer, who describes the cyclops as eating meat and drinking milk.[36] Herodotus, the

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[34] נְבֵלָה lit. *carrion/torn*. It has a broader meaning to include any animal that dies in a way other than being slaughtered by human hands. Rabbinically it will come to include categories of meat that have been incorrectly slaughtered.

[35] Kraemer. P. 52.

[38] Odyssey IX, 295-296 *But when the Cyclops had filled his huge maw by eating human flesh and thereafter drinking pure milk.* References to the Cyclops (the paradigmatic barbarian) as a pastoralist eating milk and meat appear throughout book IX.

foundational socio-anthropologist of ancient Greece, refers to some of the most barbaric and far flung tribes (the Scythians, who lived north of the Black Sea) as drinking milk as a beverage.[37]

Elitist urbanites viewed pastoralists as drinking milk, and not having such refined drinks as wine. Through contact with Hellenistic civilization, it is likely that urban, proto-Rabbinic Jews began to adopt this particular cultural bias with the fervor of the *nouveau riche*. It is clear that at least the works of Homer were known to the Rabbis of the Mishnah, since

אומרים צדוקים קובלין אנו עליכ' פרושים שאתם אומרים כתבי הקודש מטמאין את הידים וספרי הומריס אינו מטמא את הידים

The Sadducees blamed the Pharisees saying, "you say that holy books make the hands unclean, yet the books of Homer do not make the hands unclean!"

Mishnah Yada'im 4:6

Kraemer makes an interesting argument about the origin of the prohibition of mixing meat and dairy.

> *By avoiding the simultaneous consumption of meat and dairy, a Jew would be distancing herself from the very combination that, in Hellenistic prejudice, would mark her as a barbarian. The combination of these foods had a symbolic power, and by avoiding the symbolic one, would would avoid its connotations. Was a Jew a barbarian? Assuredly not. Should a Jew, like a barbarian, regularly eat meat and drink milk? Again, certainly not. Some meat on special public and ritual occasions, or cheese in its proper place? Surely. But this was a civilized Roman practice. What the milk-meat prohibition assured is that the Jew would not be able to eat like the barbarian. Instead he would eat like a cultured citizen of the Roman Empire.*[38]

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[37] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:216:4 *Their drink is milk. The sun is the only god whom they worship; they sacrifice horses to him; the reasoning is that he is the swiftest of the gods, and therefore they give him the swiftest of mortal things.*

[38] Kraemer. P. 53.

From the cultural background, the Mishnah codified three specific prohibitions regarding the mixture of meat and milk.

מתני'. המעלה את העוף עם הגבינה על השלחן אינו עובר בלא תעשה
גמ'. הא אוכלו - עובר בלא תעשה, שמע מינה: בשר עוף בחלב דאורייתא! אימא: המעלה את העוף עם הגבינה על השולחן אינו בא לידי לא תעשה
מתני'. בשר בהמה טהורה בחלב בהמה טהורה - אסור לבשל ואסור בהנאה, בשר בהמה טהורה בחלב בהמה טמאה, בשר בהמה טמאה בחלב בהמה טהורה - מותר לבשל ומותר בהנאה. ר"ע אומר: חיה ועוף אינם מן התורה, שנאמר לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו ג' פעמים, פרט לחיה ולעוף ובהמה טמאה. רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר: נאמר לא תאכלו כל נבלה, ונאמר לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו, את שאסור משום נבלה - אסור לבשל בחלב, עוף שאסור משום נבלה, יכול יהא אסור לבשל בחלב - ת"ל: בחלב אמו - יצא עוף שאין לו חלב אם

MISHNAH: One who places poultry together with cheese on the table has not transgressed a negative commandment. GEMARA: Consequently one may derive that he would only be transgressing a negative commandment if he actually at them together. Learn from this that the prohibition of eating poultry with milk is based in the Torah! Thus say rather, "if one places poultry and cheese together on the table one will certainly come to transgress a negative commandment." MISHNAH: Regarding cooking meat of a clean animal in the milk of a clean animal, it is forbidden to cook it and it is forbidden to benefit from the cooking of it. It is however, permitted to cook the flesh of an unclean animal in the milk of a clean animal or the other way around. Rabbi Akiva adds that wild animals, unclean animals, and poultry are not included in the prohibition from the Torah, since it says "you shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk." Rabbi Jose the Galilean says that since it is written you shall not eat any carrion, and you shall not cook a kid in its mothers milk, and cooking carrion in milk is forbidden, and poultry falls under the category of carrion (as it does not fall under the category of red meat) one might think poultry and milk are forbidden. Thus it comes to teach us that in fact [poultry can be cooked in milk] since poultry do not have mother's milk.

Bavli Chulin 113a

Here is a codification of the behaviors regarding the mixing of milk and meat. Although it is not in the Tanakh itself, the Rabbis here do make the prohibition dependant on a Tanakh verse. Therefore, it retroactively gains the status of a Torah prohibition. The tenuousness of the connection give rise to a joke.

Moses was receiving the Written and Oral Torahs from God on the top of Mt. Sinai.
GOD: So, don't boil a kid in its mother's milk.
MOSES: Ok, so no eating milk and meat together, gotcha.
GOD: No, thats not what I said...
MOSES: ...and also we should wait 6 hours after eating meat to drink milk...
GOD: I didn't say that! All I said was. don't boil a kid in its mother's milk.
MOSES: ...and we should have two separate sets of plates, one for meat, the other for milk...
GOD: Fine, have it your way!

Over time, the rules became more elaborate and codified. Not only did meat and milk substances require separation, but waiting times between them were mandated as well. Meat, as noted in Chapter II, maintained a special status for holidays and celebrations, and dairy meals became considered secondary in status.

The Shulchan Aruch, addressing a Sephardic audience, renders a clear verdict on waiting between eating meat and cheeses. Written in 1563, this code became dominant in the Jewish world because it was one of the first *halachic* codes widely published on printing press. The work's author, Joseph Caro, rendered his *halachic* decisions by amalgamating earlier codes. He compared the Arba Turim[39], Maimonides Mishneh Torah, and Isaac Alfasi[40] and took the majority opinion if the three differed.

Caro's work generated a firestorm of controversy, especially because of its high handed prescriptive positions. Shortly after its publication, Moses Isserles wrote a commentary called the *Mapah* (lit. tablecloth, playing of the name of Caro's work as the

[39] 14th century code by Jacob ben Asher. It reflected both German and Spanish Jewish practices, as the author had fled Germany for Spain.
[40] Also known as the "Rif," a Talmudic commentator and judge who lived in Fez between 1013 and 1103. He created a version of the Talmud with the story sections edited out, mainly for use in legal cases.

'set table'). The *Mapah* (noted as הגה in the Shulchan Aruch) offers more lenient versions of Caro's rulings based on Ashkenazi practices.

אכל בשר אפילו של חיה ועוף, לא יאכל גבינה אחריו עד שישהה שש שעות.ואפילו אם שהה כשיעור, אם יש בשר בין השינים, צריך להסירו.והלועס לתינוק, צריך להמתין.
<u>הגה:</u> ואם מצא אחר כך בשר שבין השינים, ג ומסירו, ד צריך להדיח פיו קודם שיאכל גבינה ויש אומרים דאין צריכין להמתין שש שעות, רק מיד אם סלק ובירך ברכתהמזון, מותר על ידי קנוח והדחה והמנהג הפשוט במדינות אלו, להמתין אחר אכילת הבשר שעה אחת, ואוכלין אחר כך גבינה. מיהו צריכים לברך גם כן ברכתהמזון אחר הבשר דאז הוי כסעודה אחרת, דמותר לאכול לדברי המקילין. אבל בלא ברכת המזון, לא מהני המתנת שעה. ואין חילוק אם המתין השעה קודם ברכת המזון, או אחר כך .ואם מצא בשר בין שיניו, אחר השעה, ז צריך לנקרו ולהסירו ויש אומרים דאין לברך ברכת המזון על מנת לאכול גבינה אבל אין נזהרין בזה. ויש מדקדקים להמתין ששעות אחר אכילת בשר לגבינה, ח וכן נכון לעשות.[41]

> *SHULCHAN ARUCH: One who eats meat, even if it is poultry(and not red meat) does not eat cheese afterwards for six hours, and if (after six hours) there is any meat stuck in his teeth, he must remove it, and even youths and babies need to wait (between).*
> *RAMA: And if he founds meat afterwards between his teeth, he needs to rinse his mouth out before he eats cheese. There are those who say that it is not necessary to wait six hours, but only to bless the post-meal benediction and immediately afterwards (can eat the other thing). And the simple custom/normal custom in our lands is only to wait one hour after eating meat and then after to eat cheese, and so it is another meal and thus permitted to eat dairy but we need to say the birkat hamazon and not wait all these hours and it doesn't matter if the benediction after the meal is said before or after the hour waiting period. If one found meat between their teeth, after an hour, it is required to clean it out and rinse. There are those who say you don't need to say birkat hamazon before (switching back to) cheese. However, there are pious ones/stringent ones who are extremely exacting who wait six hours after eating meat to (eat) cheese, and thus it is correct to do it in this manner.*

[41] Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 89:1

While Caro demands a six hour waiting period, Isserles counters that some people wait only one hour, or sometimes not at all. He is responding to the real situation of Jews in Europe, not simply redacting earlier codes.

Now that we have seen the necessity of separating milk and meat, it is important to introduce another concept, the link between Shavuot and the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Shavuot, also known as the Feast of Weeks in English and Pentecost in Greek, was originally a harvest holiday. At that time, as was alluded to in the Exodus verses cited earlier. Over time, each of the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) took on additional meanings.

Of the three originally harvest related holidays, Shavuot became synonymous with the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai by God to the people Israel. The agricultural elements have not died away however, including decorating the interior of the synagogue with greenery. The proliferation of dairy at the time of the holiday remained as well, in the form of emphasis on dairy foods. However, since dairy and meat could no longer be mixed together by the time of the Mishnah, the meal for the eve of Shavuot became traditionally a dairy meal only.

According to traditional interpretations, the Israelites received some of the Laws before they arrived at Sinai, in their march through the wilderness.[42]

והתניא: עשר מצות נצטוו ישראל במרה, שבע שקיבלו עליהן בני נח, והוסיפו עליהן: דינין, ושבת, וכיבוד אב ואם

It has been taught that the Children of Israel were given 10 mitzvot at Marah, seven of these had already been taught to the children of Noah (ie. the Noahide Laws), to which

[42] Exodus 15:23, camping at the waters of Marah, the 5th stop after leaving Egypt.

were added the Laws of Sabbath, honoring [your] mother and father, and also court laws.[43]

The bulk of the laws however, are given in Exodus chapter 19. Now let us examine one of the most frequently cited reasons for eating dairy dishes on Shavuot, since traditionally meat would be eaten to celebrate a major holiday in the Jewish tradition.

Among the various instructions, according to the Rabbinic tradition, were the laws for correct slaughter of meat. Additionally, the Israelites now had to wait between the eating of milk and meat, since the Rabbinic presumption is that they understood not cooking a kid in its mother's milk as separation of all milk and meat. Finally, they would need to clean their pots and rekasher them for use with correctly slaughtered meat. The problem is that the Rabbis date the giving of the Torah to a Sabbath. Thus, the Israelites would be unable to prepare clean pots and prepare meat.

מאכלי חלב - עיין מ"א ואני שמעתי עוד בשם גדול אחד שאמר טעם נכון לזה כי בעת שעמדו על הר סיני וקבלו התורה [כי בעשרת הדברות נתגלה להם עי"ז כל חלקי התורהכמו שכתב רב סעדיה גאון שבעשרת הדברות כלולה כל התורה] וירדו מן ההר לביתם לא מצאו מה לאכול תיכף כ"א מאכלי חלב כי לבשר צריך הכנה רבה לשחוט בסכין בדוק כאש רצוה ה' ולנקר חוטי החלב והדם ולהדיח ולמלוח ולבשל בכלים חדשים כי הכלים שהיו להם מקודם שבישלו בהם באותו מעל"ע נאסרו להם ע"כ בחרו להם לפי שעה מאכלי חלב ואנועושין זכר לזה:[44]

Dairy foods - this is an idea that I heard from another great personage, that it is talking about the taste in particular. Since when the people stood and Mt. Sinai and received the Torah (for the 10 commandments were revealed together with all the laws and their explanations, or so writes Sa'adia Ga'on, and with the 10 commandments, the entire Torah as well...). So when Moses came down the mountain to the people they couldn't find anything to eat, except dairy foods, since extensive preparation was needed for the slaughter of meat such as checking the knives (for sharpness) and they had to remove the milk (from the udders of cows) and the blood and soak and salt the meat, and they

[43] Bavli Sanhedrin 56b
[44] Mishnah Berurah 494:12

had to boil the new utensils since they had, they had used for cooking (non-kosher meat) and thus the utensils were forbidden for use. Therefore at that time they decided to eat dairy foods, and people do this (on Shavuot) to remember the occasion.

In this case, the codes read backwards the *halachic* requirements on meat to the very moment of the revelation at Sinai. Other reasons for the practice include references to Israel as the "land of milk and honey,"[45] and "honey and milk are under your tongue."[46] Among the various substances to which the Torah is likened in the tradition include: water, fire, milk, and honey. Some communities have a custom of eating honey on Shavuot as well as milk, or make dishes that include both ingredients.

Another explanation links the eating of dairy foods to a remembrance of the two special loaves of bread offered for Shavuot (in the Temple). The Rama explains,

ונוהגין בכל מקום לאכול מאכלי חלב ביום ראשון של שבועות; ונ"ל הטעם שהוא כמו השני תבשילין שלוקחים בליל פסח, זכר לפסח וזכר לחגיגה, כן אוכלים מאכל חלב ואח"כ מאכל בשר וצריכין להביא עמהם ב' לחם על השלחן שהוא במקום המזבח, ויש בזה זכרון לב' הלחם שהיו מקריבין ביום הבכורים.
It is customary everywhere to eat dairy foods on the first day of Shavuot. I understand the reason is that they are like the two cooked foods we take (and pick up from the seder plate) on Passover, one (the shankbone) in memory of the Passover sacrifice and the other (the egg) in memory of the festival sacrifice. Thus we eat dairy foods and afterwards we eat meat foods. Thus we need to bring with the meat foods to the table, we have to bring a second loaf of bread to the table (since the first loaf might have absorbed milk), and the table symbolizes the altar in the Temple. This practice is in memory of the two loaves of bread that were brought (to the altar) on Shavuot.[47]

The Rama's answer is highly contrived, but again plays with *halachic* concepts in order to explain the custom of eating dairy on Shavuot. Since there is no wait time after

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[45] Exodus 3:8
[46] Song of Songs 4:11
[47] Shulchan Aruch, Orech Hayim 494:2, Rama

eating dairy before eating meat[48] but there is a large wait time after meat for dairy, the meal must preceed in this order. Unfortunately for the Rama and his elaborate legal acrobatics, many Jews only eat a dairy meal on the first night, not bothering with meat at all. Indeed, the rise of vegetarianism and ethical eating practices have meant that some Jews no longer eat meat on any holidays. Shavuot for vegans however, often includes vegan Cheesecake.

Ironically, the prominence of eating meat in the Orthodox community (see previous chapter) has meant that more Jews are opting to have a meat meal for the evening of Shavuot. In this case, they sometimes purchase a pareve (tofu) Cheesecake as a dessert, in memory of a real Cheesecake.

The Festival of Cheesecake:

New York Cheesecake, like many of New York's Jews, is a European import with a new world twist. It is closely related to the German *kaesekuchen* but with a flamboyant American twist. The dessert had already been making the rounds in Ashkenazi circles dating back to about 1,000 CE[49], around the time that Cholent entered the scene as well. The dish even has its own Yiddish proverb, *Gomolkes ken men nit makhn fun shney*, meaning "you can't make Cheesecake from snow." It is roughly the equivalent of "you can't get blood from a stone."

Why it became the paragon of Shavuot foods is a matter of some debate; however, it has a storied history within American gastronomy. It has a particular

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[48] Hard cheeses require waiting, soft cheese and milk products only require the rinsing out of the mouth. Some *chassidic* Jews have instituted a waiting period after diary of half an hour, but the practice is not widespread.

[49] Marks. Pg. 111

association with Judaism as it play out in popular culture. Since it has "cheese" right in the name, it is a natural move for Shavuot.

Now lets look at some testimonials regarding the links between Cheesecake and Jewish dietary laws. The first response is from a gentleman who grew up in the Conservative Movement and is now very active in the Reform Movement.

> Do you have a special memory of Cheesecake or what does Cheesecake make you think about?
> *My special memory is my ex-mother-in-law used to make a special cheese cake for passover. It was always better than sponge cake and better than the package mixes that were available in the markets. Cheesecake also makes me think about New York delis which are famous for cheese cake, especially Junior's in Brooklyn.* [Henry M., See appendix II]

Interestingly, he associates Cheesecake with Passover. It is true that the filling is easy to make without the use of flour, and a crust could be made of matzo or potato flour. He does touch directly on the association of Cheesecake with New York, and has a particular deli in mind that he feels makes the best Cheesecake. Linking Cheesecake with a particular deli is an old and well known practice. The supposed creator of New York style Cheesecake, Arnold Reuben and his eponymous restaurant has vied for best Cheesecake for many years against competing delis. Other notables include Lindy's (later known as Mindy's). According to lore, Mindy's owner Leo Lindemann hired Reuben's chef and stole his recipe. Mindy's was immortalized in the musical *Guys and Dolls*, in which the main character Sky Masterson debates the merits of Mindy's Cheesecake. The debate over who has the greatest Cheesecake continues in within New York, and also between cities. Philadelphia and Chicago have their own variety.

When do you like eating Cheesecake?
Breakfast, lunch, dinner or late night - whenever the mood strikes (and it's available!).

Do you feel Cheesecake has a special place within a religious context? Why or why not?
If you keep Kosher (even if you don't) Cheesecake has always been a traditional dairy dessert after a dairy meal. If you don't keep kosher, Cheesecake is also a great dessert. My favorite is Cheesecake with sour cherry topping and a chocolate cracker crust.

Here he is reflecting one of the great innovations of Lindy's/Mindy's, the introduction of a fruit topping for the cake. Cheesecake has been greatly embellished, and has its own thematic restaurant, the Cheesecake Factory which offers upwards of 20 varieties at one time. Now it is available with every kind of fruit topping, Atkins friendly with no crust, Godiva chocolate, pumpkin, and cookie dough. The relatively pure and smooth flavor of the cream cheese adds a level of silkiness that makes the dessert nearly irresistible.

Do you observe any dietary rules (kosher, vegetarian, ecokosher, gluten free, lactose free, halal, etc)? Why do you think it is important (or not important) to adhere to dietary rules?
No. And I don't feel it is important to adhere to dietary rules other than those that are important to a healthy lifestyle (everything in moderation).

If you observe dietary rules, when and how did you start doing so (or if you stopped, why did you stop)?
My mother, aunt and grandmother all kept Kosher when I was a child so I observed the dietary laws at home but as a family the dietary laws were not observed outside the home (except my grandparents did by only eating vegetarian or

fish in restaurants. In Denver in the 50's and 60's there weren't Kosher restaurants). [Henry M., See appendix II]

The answer regarding observance of the dietary laws outside the home is very important in American Judaism. Due to the acceptance of religious observance in the public sphere, and a restaurant culture, American Jews will often have kosher homes and eat "hot dairy" or fish at "out." This compromise allows for full participation in public life. Even though the Conservative Movement (of which this gentleman was a part as a youth) does not officially endorse eating fish at non-kosher restaurants, it is common practice to do so.

How has your observance of dietary rules changed over time?
As you get older you realize that you really should eat what you like (in moderation) and try to avoid foods you know aren't conducive to good health (diet sodas, too much animal fat, too many carbohydrates - a sensible, and preferably a Mediterranean, diet).

This answer demonstrates some of the break away from dietary laws in religious life. Although the Reform Movement originally did away with the *kashrut* laws, recent generations of Reform rabbis have revived them to some degree as part of a religious or mindful eating practice. There is some implication in this answer that dietary laws force one to eat foods that they do not enjoy, or restrict them from pleasures that should be available to everyone.

If they have changed, how does this change reflect a change in your understanding of ethics or religion?
I've never considered observance of dietary rules to be related to religion even though kashrut is mentioned in the

Bible, but I think ethical treatment of food animals is important for moral reasons. [Henry M., See appendix II]

Morality in this case is divorced from scrupulous observance of *halachic* dietary restrictions. As an adult, this gentleman has become very active in the Reform Movement, where morality is not equated with scrupulous *halachic* observance. Morality is drawn from principles that blend concepts from the Tanakh (especially the Prophets) and post-Enlightenment philosophy. As a result, ethical treatment of animals and dietary rules are separated from a religious mandate.

The Talmud does legislate on the treatment of animals and forbids צער בעלי חיים, undue suffering of living creatures. The prohibition is based on a read of Exodus 23:5, which commands passersby to unburden animals struggling under their load. The Talmud, in Bavli Baba Metzia 32b, explains that even animals for slaughter may not be treated badly or made to undergo undue suffering.

Ironically, kosher meat in the United States became primarily a matter related to the moment of slaughter onwards and not the treatment of the animal at all. Shackling and hoisting, a slaughtering practice deemed cruel by the US Government, was banned in all areas *except* kosher slaughter. It persisted for decades until in 2000, Conservative Rabbis Elliot Dorff and Joel Roth wrote a responsum condemning the practice. After it became generally known, the practice declined.

The second testimonial is from a prominent Reform Rabbi. She is well acquainted with Conservative and Orthodox praxis.

Do you have a special memory of cheesecake or what does cheesecake make you think about?

I learned to make cheesecake from my mother. I've always thought of the recipe I use as her recipe, and now when I make it I think of her. She taught me that it isn't possible to cook without getting your hands into the food, and I remember this when I handle the dough for the crust, which is very buttery and messy. [Judith K., See appendix II]

Like many instances of Jewish food, cooking it is often strongly linked to memory. It is often the moment when parents can pass on customs or morals to their children. In this case, the rabbi learned that getting one's hands messy is a critical component in the cooking process, but this part of a broader concept. It is a life lesson on the importance about breaking the rules of cleanliness in order to create something delicious, "you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs." The lesson about getting one's hands dirty extends out to the rest of life as well.

When do you most like eating cheesecake?

Shavuot. I love cheesecake and make it religiously for Shavuot. [Judith K., See appendix II]

Here is the direct link. The rabbi has made a small pun on the implication of "religiously."

Do you feel Cheesecake has a special place within a religious context? Why or why not?

I associate cheesecake very strongly with Shavuot - although I could make it any time, in fact I only make it once a year, for Shavuot.

Do you observe any dietary rules (kosher, vegetarian, ecokosher, gluten free, lactose free, halal, etc)? Why do you think it is important (or not important) to adhere to dietary rules?

I observe kashrut. It is part of the structure of my daily life and has been since I was seventeen. I think it is very

> important to have rituals in one's life that are part of daily life. [Judith K., See appendix II]

This particular rabbi is associated with the Reform Movement, and has explained the dietary laws in terms of a personal practice rather than a theological imperative. It is possible that the rabbi believes they are a theological imperative, although it is unlikely from the phrasing.

> If you observe dietary rules, when and how did you start doing so (or if you stopped, why did you stop)?
>
> I started when I was seventeen, first at camp and then at college. It was part of the process of becoming more observant. [Judith K., See appendix II]

As in the previous chapter, dietary laws are linked with an increase in observance. The rabbi attended a university that had multiple Jewish expressions.

> How has your observance of dietary rules changed over time?
>
> It really hasn't. I eat dairy food at restaurants without a hekhsher, which was also the practice of my husband's family (he grew up keeping kosher). I would say that our kashrut practice has stayed essentially the same since our marriage 29 years ago. When we lived in the South and had trouble getting certain products certified Kosher for Passover, we loosened up a little on that (i.e. we bought non-hekhshered cheese for Pesach, which we ordinarily wouldn't have done on Pesach), but here we haven't had that issue. [Judith K., See appendix II]

Interestingly, the rabbi explains that she follows the custom of her husband's family. This particular rabbi became more observant as an adult, but it is worthwhile to note the family differences here. When two Jews of different family backgrounds (e.g. Ashkenazic and Sephardic) marry, they must decide how to negotiate their dietary

practices. As we saw with the Rama's point on waiting times between meat and milk, there are regional discrepancies on these topics. Often, one partner will recalibrate entirely to the other's dietary practices. This issue is particularly relevant during Passover, regarding the eating of *kitniyot*. Negotiating different dietary customs or levels of observance can be challenging.

> If they have changed, how does this change reflect a change in your understanding of ethics or religion? Although some of my practice has changed over time (I now only observe one day of Yom Tov, we began using electric lights on Shabbat, and we now drive for Shabbat-related events on Shabbat), my kashrut hasn't changed. I've never felt any need to change, nor has my understanding of kashrut changed. [Judith K., See appendix II]

This answer is extremely important regarding shifts in religious observance. The rabbi has maintained personal ritual observances, while changing on communal issues. It is often the case that Jews will change certain areas of their observance while leaving others exactly in tact. One might think that all the areas of observance operate in unison, although each operates quite independently.

The next testimonial is from a gentleman who is active in a large Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles. His response does not follow the format of the previous two, but includes a great deal of information.

> I love cheesecake, but fortunately don't like mediocre cheesecake. My late mother's cheesecake, [my wife] Rachel's or Canter's Hungarian cheesecake – all excellent. Cheesecake factory – not worth eating. New York cheesecake – all air and calories. [Max B., See appendix II]

He mentions several types of Cheesecake all in succession, but as he is passionate about food, he explains his favorites. One might expect a fealty to New York Cheesecake, as it is the most popular variety, but he makes several identity statements: loyalty to his wife, affiliation with a landmark Los Angeles deli, and a dismissal of the Cheesecake Factory. Dismissal of New York Cheesecake may be related to a friendly rivalry between the New York and Los Angeles Jewish communities. New York has a distinctive culture and, to quote Woody Allen, believes "the true New Yorker secretly believes that people living anywhere else have to be, in some sense, kidding."[50]

The Los Angeles Jewish community, while very large, sometimes sees New York as the center of Jewish life in the United States. This assumption causes mild resentment of New York and Jews of Los Angeles are quick to point out the superior selection of kosher food available, climate, and Israeli population. This gives rise to a joke, "where has the sea to the west, mountains to the north, a mediterranean climate, and a huge number of Jews who speak Hebrew as a first language? Tel Aviv, no Los Angeles!"

The gentleman also prefers a traditional deli, Cantors, to Cheesecake Factory. Cheesecake Factory has large portions and is a chain restaurant started in Beverly Hills. It has successfully exported the model throughout the country. The gentleman rejects the smoothed-over culturally flat Cheesecake that the restaurant offers.

> We always have cheesecake at Shavuos, seldom at other times, though we had some good Italian lemony ricotta cheesecake at Xmas-time. [Max B., See appendix II]

[50] Manhattan, 1979 (see bibliography)

Notice the use of a Yiddish spelling of Shavuot. This gentleman retains the Ashkenazi pronunciation, and is a fan of the culture that goes along with it. Although the Conservative Movement officially began to phase out Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew, many of their members retained it. Although among the older generations this phenomenon was simply resistance to change, for the gentleman it is an active choice as a point of loyalty to his family lineage. His son, soon to be ordained as a rabbi in the Conservative Movement, also privately retains Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew.

> Rachel always makes cheesecake at Shavuos and it's good. I once made a cheese torte for a contest at the Shul from Althea Silverman's book, The Jewish Home Beautiful, which was a wedding gift to my mother in 1948. It was excellent; came in 2nd in the Men's division. (It called for a spring form pan; I bought one for 50 cents. Rachel had been baking for years without using a springform pan and was astonished that I simply went and got one. I was astonished that she was astonished.)
>
> As for me I associate blintzes with Shavuos. When you have two on a plate, they can look kind of like two tablets. And I guess also lokshen kugel. But I never really celebrated Shavuos until I was in college or since, except maybe to go on the 2nd morning to say Yizcor if it was not on a school day when I was in high school. Cheesecake we often had at Hanukah; they would ask my mother to bring it to the big extended family Hanukah party. But she made it at other times too. [Max B., See appendix II]

There are several dishes here that have traditional roots for Shavuot. The practices of placing two blintzes on a plate to mirror the tablets is reminiscent of the Rama's point about two breads to mirror the sacrifices. Shavuot is one of the lesser observed holidays among American Jews, as it lacks much of the liturgical pomp of the High

Holidays and mimetic devices of Passover. He does mention attending Yizkor (the memorial service held on the second day, originating in the middle ages). Cheesecake is not limited to Shavuot only, but is also served throughout the year. It is also worth noting the Yiddish name for dairy noodle kugel, *lokshon*.

> We keep a kosher home. We set it up when we first moved in together, partly because we had many friends for whom it would be important, partly because we wanted to try it out, and a little because when my grandmother comes back, I thought she'd need a place to eat. It certainly wouldn't be with any of my other relatives. **[Max B., See appendix II]**

Here are several jokes about dietary practices that explain a great deal about their place in Jewish consciousness. Although it seems odd that one would calibrate their kitchen so their friends could come over, it is not unheard of among Conservative Jews in particular. They also (as with some of the Cholent testimonials) used their dietary practices as a marker of beginning a family together. "When my grandmother comes back" is likely a joke about the resurrection of the dead. He is making a point that he is keeping up a family tradition that no one else is his family has done. In some way, he suggests that this honors the memory of his observant grandmother.

> As a child, our house was not kosher, though my mother bought meat from the kosher butcher, especially veal and liver. (Eventually she relaxed about that and bought only liver and veal there.) But my parents never served fleishigs [meat] and milchigs [dairy] together, saying, "It just doesn't go." Once, when I was served a glass of milk at a fish meal, I asked why we were having milk at supper, which we generally didn't do. They explained that it was

> fish, so it was okay. I didn't get it at all at that time. [Max B., See appendix II]

After the migration of Jews from Europe to the United States, access to a wider variety of markets (and culture generally) meant that some of the observance patterns changed. If one lived in a small village where the default behavior was to buy all meat from a kosher butcher, it was easy to do so. Once Jews moved to the United States, the chain of transmission was stressed and certain behavior patterns were retained while others faded away. Although the conceptual points were long on him, he did understand that certain foods went together and others not.

> When we moved in together, we did not stop eating non-kosher out. We had both grown up eating [non-kosher] out, and we didn't want to refuse to eat in our parents' homes or with them. (Rachel had already had family tsuris [trouble] when she stopped eating mammal.) And we wanted never to have to say to our children that they couldn't eat by them. [Max B., See appendix II]

Constructing a religious identity through diet is a recurring theme for newly married couples. As with Cholent, and the previous testimonial this gentleman had to negotiate multiple worlds. He wanted to express his religious identity in his home, but doing so might have cut him off from his family. He and his wife decided to compromise, although doing so is *halachically* inconsistent. It is a common practice, since refusing to eat at his parents house would transgress the commandment to "honor your mother and your father." While a *ba'al t'shuvah* might take the opportunity to use dietary laws as a way to break away from their family, refusing to eat in their parents house, this gentleman chose to keep his relationship with his parents in tact. Since the rise of the

ba'al t'shuvah culture, many families have been strained by differences in observance between generations.

It is the opinion of the author that in decades past, the forces hemming in the Jewish community were stronger in the United States. A break with one's parents and community of origin to pursue a radically different iteration of religious lifestyle was unacceptable. Starting in the late 1960's, Orthodoxy began to engage heavily in outreach. It is now more frequent to see Jews becoming Orthodox in college and severing ties with their parents.[51] The gentleman however, saw an increase in observance as a way to honor the older generations of his family *without severing ties* to the proximate generation.

> Our children each decided they wanted to keep kosher all the time when they were about 7. We made a deal, that they would continue to be willing to eat vegetarian out. So on vacation or otherwise, we simply had to accommodate that. Neither ever went back to treyf [non-kosher]. Somewhere along the line, I think long before that, I became a pork-avoider.. During Pesach, I'm very strict, not eating out at all and buying kosher cheese at home, etc. During the 10 days (RH-to-YK.) I also buy kosher cheese for home use. It's just an extra stringency, and support for the industry. If I thought God paid any attention to us, I'd probably do more. **[Max B., See appendix II]**

[51] The narrative presented by outreach professionals is often that one's secular or liberal Jewish parents are an aberration from the correct transmission of Judaism. According to their narrative, the entire community was Orthodox until it was fractured by the Jewish Enlightenment and Immigration to America. Thus, one is not choosing to become religious for the first time, one simply *returns* to the religion of one's ancestors (*ba'al t'shuvah* may be translated: one who has returned).

Once again the gentleman's sense of humor comes through. He never suggests that dietary laws are a theological imperative, and in the end he mocks the idea. His adherence to them is primarily behavioral, community and family based.

Author's Cheesecake Recipe:
2 packages (8 oz) Cream Cheese
2 eggs
3/4 cup sugar
2 tsp vanilla extract
2 tsp grated lemon peel

Topping:
1 cup sour cream
2 tbs brown sugar
2 tbs vanilla extract

Crust:
1 1/2 cups graham cracker
3 tbs sugar
1/3 cup melted butter

CRUST

1. Place graham crackers into a ziplock bag and crush.
2. Add remaining crust ingredients and mix well
3. Pour into 9" pie pan, smooth, and bake 10 minutes at 350 degrees

FILLING

1. In a large bowl beat cream cheese lightly
2. Mix in eggs, sugar, vanilla extract, and lemon peel
3. Spread evenly inside cooled pie crust
4. Bake 25 minutes or until firm
5. Cool in refrigerator for at least 4 hours
6. Spread topping and add fruit if desired, and serve

-CHAPTER 4-

MATZO BALL SOUP

The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook: beloved Jewish foods from ancient times to the present

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Rabbinic Studies

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Date: 2015

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Introduction:

Matzo Ball Soup is a recipe that calls for dumplings made of Matzo meal (crushed Matzo), egg, and shortening floating in a chicken (and sometimes beef or vegetarian) broth. Unlike Cholent, Matzo Ball Soup is eaten across the Jewish religious spectrum. Unlike Cheesecake, Matzo Ball Soup is considered a quintessentially Jewish food.

Like most Jewish foods, there is great disagreement over when it should be served and how it should be made. Matzo Balls can be made large or small, hard or soft, and the recipe for the broth may be simple or greatly complex. Most broths call for chicken (traditionalists will use feet or necks), onion, carrot, and celery. There is great debate over the inclusion of noodles.

Matzo, unleavened bread, is a food for Passover, and while Matzo Ball Soup is now eaten throughout the year, its original purpose was as a Passover delicacy. It is vastly more popular in Ashkenazi spheres than Sephardi, Mizrachi, or Ethiopian Jewish subcultures. Nonetheless, in the Ashkenazi dominated American Jewish Community, Matzo Ball Soup is seen as a Jewish staple and cultural marker. The food is often the source of puns and many delicatessens compete for the best (or simply the largest) Matzo Ball. Once a year, at Christmas, Jewish communities throughout the United States hold the Matzo Ball, a charity event for young professionals.

The origins of the soup is rooted in Jewish Law, and evidence of chicken soup as a comfort food and remedy stretch back to the time of the Mishnah.

Matzo:

Before arriving to the soup, it is first necessary to establish how Matzo came to be in the first place. It is not originally a flat cracker or meal as we now know it. It comes from basic prohibitions about not eating leaven on Passover.

וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ וּמַצּוֹת עַל־מְרֹרִים יֹאכְלֻהוּ׃

And you shall eat the meat at night, roasted on a fire, and with Matzo and marror you shall eat it.

-Exodus 12:8

This is the first mention of Matzo related to Passover in the Torah. It is connected to how one should consume the lamb roasted for Passover. The implication is that one should create a sensory experience in order to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. The text does not explain exactly how Matzo must be baked. Earlier in the Torah, Lot bakes Matzo for his angelic guests:

וַיִּפְצַר־בָּם מְאֹד וַיָּסֻרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמַצּוֹת אָפָה וַיֹּאכֵלוּ

And he urged them strongly, and they entered into his house and he made them a feast and baked Matzot and they ate.

-Genesis 19:3

Traditionally, commentators on the Torah ask why Lot was offering Matzo to his guests. Rashi[52] suggests that the angels arrived at Lot's house on Passover. According to the Talmud[53], Lot would have been aware that the date of the angels

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[52] Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, who lived in France and Germany from 1040 – 1105. He is known for amalgamating earlier exegesis from the Talmud and Midrash and arranging it by Torah verse. He also wrote a decisive commentary on the Talmud in a mixture of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Old French. Consequently, Rashi is cited not only by Talmud scholars, but also by scholars of Old French as a source of vocabulary.

[53] Bavli Megillah 17a: Jacob studied at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, the sons of Noah. Accordingly, all the early patriarchs studied there and all the mitzvot of the Torah were generally known. In this way, the Talmud can claim continuity of observance dating back to Abraham. It solves the problem of how Jews could hold their ancestors in such high esteem if the patriarchs did not follow Torah Law, as it had not been revealed. Christianity has an analogous problem, if only the death of Jesus can gain one admission to Heaven, no one

arriving corresponded to the future date of Passover, which he would have celebrated preemptively.

It is more likely that Matzo was simply an early form of flat bread. The entire Passover ritual is meant to evoke pastoralist themes. The sacrificial lamb (not a large herd animal like a cow) is roasted simply over fire and eaten with herbs. The Passover Seder meal is not fancy, and is purposefully constructed to remind the participants of a nomadic lifestyle. Matzo as it is mentioned in Genesis and Exodus is probably just the simplest form of bread, like a pita or tortilla in modern times. Lot served the angels Matzo because it was quick to make, the angels were unexpected guests and he had no time to make leavened bread.

Exodus goes on to elaborate on the nature of Matzo, namely that it is free of leavening agents.

בָּרִאשֹׁן בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בָּעֶרֶב תֹּאכְלוּ מַצֹּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעָשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בָּעָרֶב
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׂאֹר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבָתֵּיכֶם כִּי כָּל־אֹכֵל מַחְמֶצֶת וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּגֵּר וּבְאֶזְרַח
הָאָרֶץ
כָּל־מַחְמֶצֶת לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מַצּוֹת

From the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month [Nisan] until the twenty-first day you will eat Matzo. Seven day there will be no leaven in your house, and anyone who eats it shall be cut off from their kin, whether they are a sojourner or born in the land of Israel. You shall not eat any leaven in any of your camps, only Matzo.

Exodus 12:18-20

Since most scholarship dates the Deuteronomic author later than J, E, and P,[54] the Matzo described in Exodus is likely an earlier understanding of the bread than the

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born prior to Jesus could gain salvation through grace. Thus, Abraham, Moses, David, etc, would be discredited, and so Christianity also created an *ex post facto* solution.

[54] The four authors of the Documentary Hypothesis of biblical authorship. First proposed by Julius Wellhausen in 1876.

mention in Deuteronomy (below). The text in Deuteronomy links Matzo with "affliction," although that explanation is not present in the Exodus text.

לֹא־תֹאכַל עָלָיו חָמֵץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עָלָיו מַצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֹנִי כִּי בְחִפָּזוֹן יָצָאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ

You shall not eat any leaven for seven days, you shall eat only Matzo, the bread of affliction, in memory of your going out from Egypt in haste, and you shall remember it as long as you live.

Deuteronomy 16:3

This verse is particularly important in support of the idea that Matzo was a ubiquitous, simple bread. The word עֹנִי is most often translated as "affliction" but the root may also mean "poverty." If Matzo is the bread of the poor, then perhaps it is meant to conjure up images of poor wandering shepherds. Certainly it is an image that is coherent with the Passover narrative, the Israelites fleeing as poor desert nomads from their bondage. Matzo however, has lost its ubiquity and taken on a symbolic nature. Even by the time of Rashi is would seem irregular to serve Matzo as a regular staple of a diet, for one would only serve it only on Passover.

Over time the rules for making Matzo solidified. By the time of the Talmud there were rules as to exactly how it could be made and what grains could be used. As with Cholent, advances in technology and time measuring techniques meant the rules for Matzo making became more complex and precise. Matzo could be as thick as one *tefach* (hand-breadth), the thickness of the breads presented in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is difficult to imagine the cracker style Matzo of today that would be three to six inches thick.

Originally, Matzo was a thin and flexible bread, not like the cracker style bread that is popular in American Jewish circles. The Hillel Sandwich during the Passover Seder is evidence of the original flexibility of the bread, as the instructions are to wrap other food items in Matzo as with a tortilla or pita. With modern Ashkenazi brittle Matzo, it is impossible to do so, and one ends up with Matzo dust.

Making Matzo:

Matzo is made from grain that must be kept dry from the moment it is harvested. The grain must be picked on a sunny day with low humidity. Once it is ground into flour, it is mixed with water (the only other permissible ingredient) and baked. The entire process from the moment the water touches the Matzo to the end of cooking may take no longer than 18 minutes.

Matzo may not have any large bubbles or pockets in it, any bubble or pocket larger than an olive (*kziet*) in size causes the Matzo to invalid and thus discarded. In order to prevent pockets from forming in the Matzo, it helps to pierce the dough with holes, thus the tiny holes in most Matzo wafers.[55]

Matzo with ingredients beyond flour and water is known as *Matzo ashira* (rich Matzo). If made correctly, it is technically free of leaven but is not permissible for use as Matzo on Passover itself (as one of the testimonials will explain). *Matzo ashira* is technically not *lechem oni* (poor person's bread), which is the only permissible form of Matzo for the seder and is made of the most basic ingredients. Even were *Matzo ashira*

[55] Marks. Pp. 293

dough to sit longer than 18 minutes, it would not leaven according to Jewish law. Matzo must have the capacity to leaven in order to be legally valid.

מי פירות בלא מים אין מחמיצין כלל. ומותר לאכול בפסח מצה שנלושה במי פירות אפילו שהתה כל היום, אבל אין יוצא בה ידי חובתו מפני שהיא מצה עשירה וקרא כתיב לחם עוני

One who makes Matzo with fruit juice rather than wine, that Matzo cannot be considered to leaven at all. One is permitted to eat it on passover if even if the [flour] is kneaded all day long with juice. However, one cannot fulfill their obligation to eat Matzo with it, as it is "rich" Matzo, and [the Matzo required for Passover] is "poor man's bread." [56]

Until the late middle ages, Matzo was made in the home and primarily by women rather than men. As restrictions on the amount of water tightened, the dough became harder to knead. Mixing of Matzo dough thus required more forearm power and was, like so many Jewish functions, removed from the home and industrialized. As Jews moved into larger cities in Europe in the 1700s, Matzo began to be produced commercially. Matzo bakeries provided seasonal labor to poor members of the community leading up to Passover.[57]

The industrial revolution brought on yet another change, a shift from hand Matzo assembly lines to machine made Matzo. The first machine made Matzo was produced in Alsace in 1838, and quickly spread throughout the world. The first Matzo made by machine in Jerusalem dates as early as 1863.

In 1886, one Rabbi Abramson of Salant arrived in the United States with a black market passport. The passport was listed in the name of Dov Manischewitz. He started

[56] Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim: 462: 1

[57] Marks. Pp 394. Incidentally, *sufganiyot* (filled doughnuts) have a similar history. They became a Hanukkah staple in Israel after the government encouraged their production as a way of creating temporary work prior to the winter holiday.

his eponymous company in Cincinnati, OH, and eventually came to expand from Matzo to many kosher products.

The Matzo Dumpling:

Matzo dumplings (Yiddish *Kneidel*) probably appeared during the late middle ages. Prior to the introduction of the potato from the New World, Jewish families suffered from a severely limited diet during Passover. Poorer families could not afford a great deal of meat and some ingenious person realized they could make a version of dumplings using ground Matzo, eggs, and animal fat. Prior to the introduction of Matzo meal (machine ground Matzo first introduced by the Manischewitz company in the 19th century), the balls were made of crushed Matzo wafers. It was with the introduction of Matzo meal that the balls began to achieve a fluffy character and spread from a Passover only food to a year around delicacy. Making fluffy Matzo Balls requires finely ground Matzo, which is difficult to create by hand.

The first official publication of Matzo Balls appears in *The Jewish Manual* in London, 1846.[58] It makes its debut in an American cookbook in 1873 (*Jewish Cookery*, published in Philadelphia).

By the 1930's, Matzo Ball Soup had broken the bounds of Passover completely and was available as a daily food. Like Cholent, Matzo Ball Soup has served as an inspiration for songs and poetry. The earliest popular song on the subject was written by Slim Gaillard, an African American jazz musician, in around 1945.

Oh well, ah, Matzo Balls, gefilte fish,
bestest fish I ever ever had
Matzo Balls and gefilte fish,

[58] Ibid. Pp. 319.

makes you order up an extra dish
Matzo Balls and gefilte fish
really very very very fine
now you put a little horseradish on it and it knocks you right out...[59]

Matzo Ball Soup's status as a comfort food (as Gaillard implies) has made it a staple for cold days, or days when one has a cold, for Sabbath fare, and the rest of the week. Many American cities have comparative ratings of which delis make the best Matzo Ball Soup, and in Los Angeles, one may order Matzo Ball Soup for home delivery. As it has become synonymous with Jewish cuisine, it is also linked to Jewish identity.

Gebrochts:

According to most authorities, Matzo may be ground into flour and then cooked in a soup. This follows the general principle of *ein bishul acher bishul* (there is not cooking after cooking). In the case of Matzo, once the cooking process is completed, it cannot be cooked a second time and retains its status as non-leavened (even if it puffs up in soup). Maimonides and the Shulchan Aruch permit the eating of Matzo that has been crushed and mixed with water.

The Chassidim however, took a more stringent approach to these matters. Shneur Zalman of Liadi[60], the founder of the Lubavitch (Chabad) dynasty, wrote a new version of the Shulchan Aruch, the Shulchan Aruch Ha'Rav. In it he mandated various additional stringencies and customs for Chassidim, including a ban on eating *gebrochts*, Matzo that has been crushed (and mixed with liquid).[61] The concern was that after the

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[59] Slim Gaillard Quartet. *Matzo Ball Soup* Hollywood: Melodisc Records of Hollywood, 1945
[60] 1745-1812. He also authored the Tan'ya and is thus known as the Ba'al Ha'Tanya and also the Alter Rebbe.
[61] Shulchan Aruch Ha'Rav, Shae'lot and Tshu'vot: 6

implementation of machine-made Matzo, Matzo was baked in far fewer than the 18 minute limit. In theory, according to Shneur Zalman's calculations, Matzo might have the capacity to leaven, even though it is technically cooked. It is possible, according to his logic, that some of the flour was not adequately mixed during the time of preparation, and is susceptible to leavening should it come in contact with water.

As a result, Chabad-Lubavitch (those who follow the rulings of Shneur Zalman) do not eat Matzo that has come into contact with water. They will sometimes keep Matzo in plastic bags during meals, lest moisture alight on it accidentally. Oddly however, on the 8th day of Passover many Lubavitcher Jews will eat *gebrokts*. According to their reasoning, the 8th day is an entirely Rabbinic institution.[62] Thus, many Lubavitch Jews, and some non-Lubavitch Chassidim will specially eat a meal of Matzo Balls on the 8th day of Passover when the stringencies of Torah prohibitions only partially apply.

Meanwhile, the difficulty of abstaining from Matzo Balls is great. Many Lubavitch Jews will eat Matzo Balls made of potato flour, labeled non-*gebrochts* in stores. Potato flour and potato starch are both heavily used during Passover to create legally permissible dishes. The substance has a rather dubious history, and is mentioned as an unhealthy filler in the famous novel *The Jungle* about the origin of the industrial food industry.

> *They had always been accustomed to eat a great deal of smoked sausage, and how could they know that what they bought in America was not the same--that its*

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[62] Two day long *yom tov* outside of the land of Israel was instituted by Rabbinic authority. Since the New Moon (and thus correct day of the month for celebrating) was declared in Jerusalem, runners had to go out to Jews in diaspora. Cf. Bavli Rosh Hashanah 22b. Thus, the 8th day of Passover in the diaspora is not clearly bound under the Torah laws of Matzo according to Lubovitch considerations.

color was made by chemicals, and its smoky flavor by more chemicals, and that it was full of "potato flour" besides? Potato flour is the waste of potato after the starch and alcohol have been extracted; it has no more food value than so much wood, and as its use as a food adulterant is a penal offense in Europe, thousands of tons of it are shipped to America every year.[63]

Testimonials:

The first testimonial comes from the African-American woman who generously supplied information on Cholent in Chapter II. Her experiences as she converted to Judaism and took on an Orthodox practice suggest that Matzo Ball Soup is an expression of observance rather than a cultural marker.

> What is your earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup?
> I'm not sure when I first learned about Matzo Ball Soup. I can only remember the 1st time I tried it, which was at my first seder. I was vegetarian at the time and my host had know idea. I didn't know the soup had a chicken base.. and it was so yummy I don't think I cared. For some reason I think matza balls and matza ball soup has simply become apart of the normative lexicon of anyone living in the LA area or any place with a massive amount of Jews. **[Sarah B., see appendix III]**

As with the Gaillard song, she says Matzo Ball Soup has entered the normative lexicon for non-Jews living in Jewishly dense areas. Gaillard had written his song after living in Detroit and New York City.

> How do you feel when you eat Matzo Ball Soup? Does it conjure up particular feelings?
> I am not sure how to describe how eating Matzo Ball Soup makes me feel. It makes me feel umm very Jewy which doesn't say much. I think Matzo Ball Soup is the best thing to have when one is sick and it doesn't even have to be chicken

[63] Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Cambridge, Mass.: R. Bentley, 1971. Ch. 11

soup (known for healing sickness), even pareve Matzo Ball Soup makes me feel like I am going to be a hundred times better on a sick day. I am sure it psychical. [Sarah B., see appendix III]

The respondee says that Matzo Balls can be divorced from their chicken soup, and the carbohydrates, eggs, and shortening in the balls still have a medicinal effect. Her point about chicken soup as a salve is quite ancient, and is referenced as early as the Mishnah and is also in the medical writings of Maimonides.[64] Chicken soup has been the inspiration for many written works, including the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and in Jewish circles it has become nearly synonymous with Matzo Balls. Although meat filled dumplings are available, most delis offer Matzo Balls as their default filler for chicken soup.

Do you have dietary restrictions on Passover, if so, what?
Umm if you are referring to only eating things that are "kosher L'peasch", yes. I only eat things that are considered kosher for Passover according to Orthodox tradition. For me this includes beans, rice, and corn. amongst other things that many American Jews are surprised to learn are in fact kosher and okay to use during Passover. [Sarah B., see appendix III]

Rice, beans, and corn are considered *"kitniyot,"* regionally prohibited foods for Passover. Like *gebrochts*, *kitniyot* are a eaten by Sephardi Jews and some Ashkenazi Jews. Despite various attempts to explain that rationale by appropriating a barely connected Talmudic passage, it is most likely that the foods were banned because of the custom of transporting them in sacks also used for grain. Since this practice was

[64] Rosner, Fred. *Encyclopedia of Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud.* Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2000. Pp. 75

common in Europe, local authorities banned the eating of *kitniyot* lest they contain some trace of leaven.

More recently, Israeli legal decisions such as David Golinken have suggested that observant Ashkenazi Jews living in Israel should eat *kitniyot*. Despite the understanding that the foods are no longer transported in grain sacks, the legal concept of *minhag avoteinu b'yadeinu* (the customs of our forefathers are upon us as well) prohibits many Jews from eating beans and rice on Passover. Converts (such as our respondent) and Ashkenazi Jews who marry Sephardim or move to Israel often change their practice to include eating *kitniyot*.

Incidentally, the Maxwell House Haggadah is linked to this particular debate. In the 1930s, the Maxwell House Coffee Company wished to reclassify coffee as a berry rather than a legume/*kitniyot* (thus making it acceptable for Passover). They hired a rabbi to announce in Yiddish that coffee would be acceptable for Passover and in an effort to further promote their coffee, printed a Haggadah. The Maxwell House Haggadah, a mainstay of the American Jewish seder, was born out of a marketing trick.[65]

> If you do, why do you practice Passover the way you do? When and how did you learn to do so?
> I think I celebrate Passover according to the Orthodox tradition and practice because it really speaks to make passion and commit to tradition. Not just as a Jew but, in general. I think I'm very tradition[al] or to use modern language "conservative". Of course I learned the details about orthodox Passover practices during my conversion

[65] Cohen, Anne. "101 Years of the Maxwell House Haggadah." The Jewish Daily Forward. March 23, 2013. Accessed February 15, 2015. http://blogs.forward.com/the-arty-semite/173621/-years-of-the-maxwell-house-haggadah/.

process in addition to learning in "yeshiva"… I also spent a lot of time reading, and questioning what I learned as I grew older and as different issues arose. [Sarah B., see appendix III]

Passover is the most exacting period of the year regarding dietary laws. The respondent infers that the higher level of dedication to diet is equivalent of a show of religious dedication. The "yeshiva," to which she refers, almost certainly gave her the most exacting possible stringencies regarding Passover dietary restrictions. Matzo Balls may have been permitted, unless the yeshiva was Chassidic. The purpose of introductory classes for adults in yeshiva settings is to create the highest level of stringency, with leniencies granted on a case-by-case basis on the authority of the rabbis.

Who makes the best Matzo Ball Soup? What is so special about it (size of the Matzo Balls, broth, etc)?
I'm not sure if I had the aliment BEST Matzo Ball Soup yet, so I guess I'll just say I make the best Matzo Ball Soup. One day I would like to add cilantro to the balls. I think by doing so the soup might taste similarly to a Mexican chicken "meat ball" soup I loved growing up in LA with a dad who would bring home a lot of cool dishes home from downtown LA. Sadly I haven't had a chance to add the cilantro to Matzo Ball Soup yet. Most of the time people are just interested in the classic Matzo Ball Soup straight from the shetel. [Sarah B., see appendix III]

As was the case with Cholent in chapter II, the respondee would like to customize the Matzo Ball Soup to include regional flavors. It is an attempt to mix her childhood non-Jewish culture with her Jewish observance. She reflects a desire by many Jews, particularly those who have become Orthodox as adults, to romanticise

Eastern European Jewish life. Although she has no requirement to do so, she defers to the classic Eastern European flavor profile, which is considered more appropriate for holiday meals.

As Steven Lowenstein pointed out in Chapter II[66], many "frum from birth" Jews are eschewing traditional menus in favor of more cosmopolitan and multicultural ones. Jews who have become more observant over time tend to construct their identity around an idealized Eastern European religious milieux.

Now let us examine a second testimonial, also from a woman who converted to Judaism as an adult. In this case, the woman comes from a primarily Sephardi environment.

> What is your earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup? Do you have any stories about Matzo Ball Soup?
> The first time I had Matzo Ball Soup I thought someone was playing a prank on me. I was still in the process of conversion at the time and the few Pessah experiences I had had, had been with a family of sephardic friends who are known for their delicious recipes : roasted lamb in apricots and honey, msuki (a tunisian dish) with fava beans and lamb, roasted pepper salad, spicy moroccan carrots, etc. [Sofia N., see appendix III]

In this case, the respondent is used to an entirely different flavor profile than Eastern European Ashkenazi. Although France has a robust Ashkenazi tradition, Ashkenazi religious observance and traditional cooking declined somewhat after the Second World War. Following the decolonization of North Africa, France was flooded with Sephardi Jews, whose cooking was heavily drawn from North African cuisine.

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[66] Lowenstein P. 238

Roasted lamb on Passover is a place of disagreement between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. Ashkenazi Jews will not eat it out of deference to the cessation of the Passover sacrifice, whereas Sephardi Jews will eat it for exactly that reason.

Sephardic Passover dishes (and cuisine in general) tends towards foods heavier in spices and honey. Their food also involves olive oil in place of butter or animal fat, due to the higher availability of olive oil in North Africa. For the respondent, Eastern European Jewish food seemed bland by comparison.

> That year, I had spent the first night of Pesach with them and the second night I had decided to give my local Conservative synagogue a try, as they were hosting a traditional communal meal lead by my rabbi. The dinner was about 60 euros (about 70 dollars) and for that price I was expecting an incredible and unforgettable feast: instead, the meal started with two greasy balls of wet mashed "bread" floating in a clear broth. My first thought when the bowl was put on the table in front of me was: "Is this a joke ?". I remember staring at it in disbelief trying to figure out what exactly was floating at the surface. I also remember looking around me to see if other people were as flabbergasted as I was. But everyone seemed to find this perfectly normal and were all happily enjoying their pesadich treat. Later, I got to understand that Matzo Ball Soup was actually an important part of Ashkenazi cooking and even that Ashkenazi cooking was actually a real thing. It may sound naive and obvious, but in France most Jewish dishes are sephardic, since 80% of the community comes from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In certain communities in France, you could spend your entire life there and never taste Matzo Ball Soup. [Sofia N., see appendix III]

This experience is indicative of the intersection of French and Eastern Ashkenazic cuisine. Although France did have indigenous Ashkenazi Jews, they had a

wider variety of ingredients to draw upon due to higher levels of affluence than their Eastern counterparts. Liberal American Jews are often comforted by the broad flavors of Polish and Russian Jewish foods heavy in grease, salt, sugar, and eggs. Once again, these flavors were less expensive and salted meat lasts longer than fresh meat, keeping through the winter. The very sweet wines favored by Eastern European Jews (as high sugar content meant longer shelf life) are still popular, produced by brands such as Manischewitz, Kedem, and Mogen Dovid.

The climate of North Africa meant that fresh ingredients were more readily available, thus decreasing the reliance on salt and fat as preservatives. French food is generally lower in salt and sugar than Sephardic food, which is in turn lower in salt and sugar than Eastern Ashkenazi food.

> How do you feel when you eat Matzo Ball Soup? Does it conjure up particular feelings?
> After my first experience with Matzo Ball Soup, I have come to understand it better and even to like it.
> When I eat it, I feel warm and a little greasy, but satisfied and comforted (although I have recently become a pescatarian, so without chicken, Matzo Ball Soup is a lot less greasy). I would never order Matzo Ball Soup at a deli or elsewhere. Ironically, even after my first tragic discovery of Matzo Ball Soup, I now associate it with a festive dish you only serve on a holiday ! Matzo Ball Soup means chag to me (Shabbat, Pesach and maybe Rosh Hashana). I would also never serve it in a non Jewish context, on a weekday for example. It's almost part of a ceremonial and if I served it to non-Jewish friends, in a shabbat setting let's say, I would feel the need to warn them in advance and to explain the cultural background behind it. I feel it's almost for "initiés", although it's a very simple and not very refined dish. **[Sofia N., see appendix III]**

The sanctified quality of Matzo Ball Soup, its association with Jewish ritual and holidays, may result from the link between cuisine and observance. For secular Jews, Matzo Ball Soup may be an indulgence on a weekday, whereas for more religious Jews it is linked to the calendar cycle.

Some years ago, the author of this thesis heard the following story regarding Matzo Ball Soup. The story was recounted by a rabbi at *Yeshivat Ohr Somayach* in Monsey, NY.

> *My grandfather, Z"l* [may his memory be blessed] *recounted this story to me. He had come over from Poland and he was working in a garment factory. Every day he would see his friend Yussie in the lunch room eating chicken soup with a kneidle* [Matzo Ball] *floating in it. Yussie was from the same sthetl as my grandfather. One day, my grandfather said to Yussie, "Yussie, why do you eat chicken soup every day?" Yussie replied "in the old country, we were poor and we only had chicken soup for Shabbes, but here in New York we are rich and we can have chicken soup even on a regular Tuesday!*

The story demonstrates the shift from holiday food to daily food. Delicatessen (deli) originally indicated a shop that sold specialty or high quality foods. Smoked, cured, or salted meat was less common for poorer Jews in Eastern Europe (many of whom immigrated). Over time, increasing affluence meant that foods originally rare became more available and the delicatessen shifted from a shop for specialties to a diner.

The fear of running short of food is psychologically ingrained into many Ashkenazi Jews whose ancestors arrived in America between 1870 and 1950. As a result, one comes across overcompensation in the form of gigantic sandwiches piled

high with corned beef or pastrami. Delis and kosher restaurants are known for serving much larger portions than their non-Jewish counterparts.

> Do you have dietary restrictions on Passover, if so, what?
> Yes, I keep kosher for Passover, to a stricter level than I do the rest of the year (no eating out in restaurants or only limited to family in rare cases). I also eat Kitniot. [Sofia N., see appendix III]

Coming from a Sephardic environment, *kitniyot* are acceptable. The higher level of dietary stricture for Passover is quite normal among Jews, even those who do not keep kosher the rest of the year. Jews who do not keep any other dietary laws will avoid bread for Passover. Take for example this recent excerpt from the New York Times:

> *As Ms. Spiegelman and her future* [Catholic] *wife search for a new Jewish congregation, they are discovering their own, eccentric fusion of Christianity and Judaism. For example, they both take Communion at Dignity/Boston — but they also both keep kosher for Passover. Last year, Easter fell during Passover, as it often does, which presented a problem.*
>
> *"I mentioned something about not being able to take Communion because it is leavened, and they consecrated Matzo for us," Ms. Spiegelman said. "They had two little pieces in the pillbox so it didn't touch any of the wheat, any of the leaven."*[67]

> If you do, why do you practice Passover the way you do? When and how did you learn to do so?
> I learned it little by little through my conversion in France, and when living in Israel.
> Passover is a central holiday in Jewish tradition and I like the idea of a general clean-up as a way to renew oneself. [Sofia N., see appendix III]

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[67] Oppenheimer, Mark. "Same-Sex Interfaith Couples Face Roadblock to Marriage in Judaism." The New York Times. January 30, 2015. Accessed February 16, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/31/us/same-sex-interfaith-couples-face-a-roadblock-to-marriage-in-judaism.html?_r=1.

Who makes the best Matzo Ball Soup? What is so special about it (size of the Matzo Balls, broth, etc)?
My husband. It's special because it's made with love and it's also him who got me to like it more and made it more familiar to me. I like it when the flavour is intense, the broth is not too clear, and with lots of vegetables. I don't like when Matzo Balls are too puffy, too greasy and too big. [Sofia N., see appendix III]

The respondent's answers are consistent with her earlier assessment of Matzo Balls as greasy. Her attachment to her husband's soup is also an expression of cuisine as a family religious devotion within Judaism. Recipes are passed from parent to child, and arguments ensue for about the suitability of particular dishes for Passover. Converts to Judaism will sometimes desire to appropriate their partner's culinary customs and family traditions, as is the case here.

Looking at another testimonial, this time from a woman who grew up in a Sephardi family, we can notice similar trends.

So to answer all the questions... my earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup was at Art's Deli in the Valley. I don't have a ton of stories about Matzo Ball Soup growing up, because my family's Sephardi, but I did help my ex's family make Matzo Balls. For me, I can't think of better winter comfort food than Matzo Ball Soup. [Deborah E., see appendix III]

Since she is from a Sephardi family, she came to Matzo Ball Soup later in life, although she does not have the dislike of the soup shared by many French Sephardic Jews. Like the previous respondent, she also adopted Matzo Ball Soup from her husband's family.

> However, I will tell you that I like my Matzo Balls the size of a softball... it's the best part.
> As for Passover... I do try my best to keep Passover, except in recent years I have eaten kitniyot (which is rice, beans and corn). It's just so hard to do without those things. Passover was much harder when I was married because we kept a kosher house and had to do a full clean, including kashering dishes, which was a nightmare. [Deborah E., see appendix III]

Like most respondents, she has a preference for Matzo Ball size and likely texture as well. Since she comes from a Sephardic family, she never gave up eating *kitniyot* to conform to her husband's Ashkenazic practice. The link between Matzo, Matzo Ball Soup, and Passover is eroded, since she first came across it not at seder, but at a deli.

Now we revisit a respondent from Chapter II once again. The gentleman who spoke about having two blintzes on a plate in remembrance of the two tablets of the Law. His testimonial does not follow the formatted questions.

> We always had kneydl soup at one of the two seders. Until I was 14, both seders were always at my grandmother's apartment (she kept kosher); the entire extended family attended. One night kneidlach, the other night my Aunt Ruth's latke soup. Same chicken soup, but with her egg latkes in the soup. Everybody loved it. Our family liked the kneydlach to be light; they usually were. [Max B., see appendix III]

One of the areas of debate about Matzo Balls is their density. While most people favor fluffy Matzo Balls, they are difficult to make. The inclusion of soda water will often

make the balls fluffier, or the correct ratio of egg yolk to white. As with his previous testimonial, he employs Yiddish terminology.

> We have friends who serve kneydl soup every Friday night. We may have them 1-2 times a year not on Pesach. I get them out seldom, but occasionally, especially if I'm feeling under the weather. Once, just a few years ago, I spent several weeks trying Matzoh ball soup at different delis. Victor's (where I've only eaten twice, was best. [Max B., see appendix III]

Competition for the best Matzo Balls among delis (and individuals) is an important component of Ashkenazi heritage. There are some people who will purposely abstain from eating any Matzo for one month before Passover, this is in order to create an "appetite" for Matzo. The respondent also mentions that he feels Matzo Ball Soup serves as a medicine, which is a common theme.

> My mother never made them. For a few years when I was in high school, we made them from a mix (Streit's; we don't buy Manischewitz products). Later, I followed recipes and have made them using several different recipes over the years. At our seders, often someone else brings the kneydlach, and even the soup. Since then, we make only from scratch. [Max B., see appendix III]

The respondent is expressing a preference for home-made foods over packaged foods. He also dislikes Manischewitz due to his perception of the company as committing ethical violations.

> On Pesach our house is strictly kosher; we even buy only certified cheeses. (But not milk or sour cream, ordinary purchase before Kol Chamira is fine.) And we do not eat in uncertified restaurants. We eat no Matzoh products for a full month before Pesach (so as to be hungry FOR MatzoH). A couple times I bought a non-gebrochts kneidl mix to use

> after the house was kashered but before Pesach begins. They were surprisingly good. We do eat gebrochts on Pesach, but not before it. I always buy a box egg Matzohs to eat after Pesach but before we switch over to chametz; the switch is always on a Sunday as we don't have the time until then.[Max B., see appendix III]

His concern regarding cheeses has to do with the possibility of a tiny amount of leaven in the cheese. Whereas during the rest of the year, less than 1:60 ratio of a forbidden food or food mixture is rendered too small to be of significance, on Passover leaven is forbidden *kol sh'hu*, even at the microscopic level.

Liquid dairy products may be purchased before Passover without a special Passover certification according to a legal loophole. Normally a product would need to be produced completely free of leaven (and not made on equipment shared with leaven) to be acceptable for Passover. Upon purchase of a product, the 1:60 nullification takes place according to Jewish law and the product is 100% legally free of any unwanted leaven (even though it is still physically present). As long as this procedure is done before the recitation of the formula for nullification of leaven, the liquids are legitimate for Passover consumption.[68]

Strict legal observance of Passover creates a number of difficult situations. For example, once the kitchen is ready for Passover, no leaven may enter it lest it need to be cleaned again. As a result, many people will avoid bringing any food into the

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[68] כל חמירא וחמיעא דאיכא ברשותי, דחזיתיה ודלא חזיתיה, דבערתיה ודלא בערתיה, לבטיל ולהוי הפקר כעפרא דארעא

The *Kol Chamira* formula, recited prior to Passover: All leaven in my possession that I have seen and that I have not seen, that I have destroyed and that I have not destroyed, shall be nullified and become ownerless, like the dust of the Earth.

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kitchen, or bringing only kosher for Passover food into the kitchen. Since the respondent does not want to eat Matzo before the holiday, but does need to keep his kitchen free of leaven, he purchased non-*gebrochts* Matzo Ball mix. As discussed earlier, non-*gebrochts* foods are made of potato flour in imitation of Matzo flour. The same difficulty applies at the end of Passover, where he uses egg Matzo.

> Generally we make one seder and go out for the other -- we made two the first year of our marriage, never again. We didn't make a seder at home in the first year after each of our children's births. We usually have company once or twice later in the week. A couple times I've attempted to duplicate my late aunt's latkes for the soup. When I served it to my father, his eyes lit up and he enthusiastically ate, but it is clear that they weren't quite the same.
> I know some people don't eat fish on Pesach; we do. I know some people don't eat mushrooms on Pesach; we do. **[Max B., see appendix III]**

His concern about fish is related to the Eastern European practice of fishing with bread crumbs. Some rabbis felt that fish could retain the breadcrumbs in their stomach and would be killed before it was digested. Thus, the entire fish would have leaven status and could not be eaten.

> R. and I both grew up in non-kosher homes. We set up a kosher home when we moved in together. All new stuff! The things we got as wedding gifts (several months later) are almost all Pesachdik.
>
> At that time nobody had ever suggested that when the dead are resurrected they won't eat. I figured that when my grandmother comes back, she'd need to stay with someone;

and she certainly wasn't going to eat by any of my cousins! But the real reason we went kosher was that many of our friends kept kosher, and we wanted them to be able to eat by us. We did it as we moved in together, figuring that it would be easy to switch out if we decided to do so, but hard to switch to kosher. **[Max B., see appendix III]**

This idea was also expressed in his testimonial on Cholent. He retains the use of *by* to mean "at the home of." *By* derives from the Yiddish/German *bei.*

Our first home had a modest-size kitchen with limited counter space. Having separate fleishig [meat] and milchig [dairy] counters was driving us nuts. First time our friend Tovah H., a rabbi's daughter, came over, she asked if we were among those nudnizks who had separate counters for milchigs and fleishigs. "Say what?"

"We never did that when I was growing up." We abandoned that aspect in that very minute! But on Pesach we covered the counters for decades each year, but now we have granite counter tops, so we merely pour boiling water all over. **[Max B., see appendix III]**

Covering the countertops comes from the concern that small amounts of leaven might be caught between tiles. Certain materials, such as granite, are considered to be solid enough that no leaven can hide within them.

We learned what to do in school and from family members and friends and from various printed guides. For example, my grandmother uses to tie the knobs of chametz cabinets with pretty yarn. We do the same, but generally use attractive ribbon. We do not put masking tape all the way along the edges, as I have seen some people do.

Our friend Sharon M., using her grandmother's recipe (adapted?) makes the best kneidlach. She calls them stuffed kneidlach. The Matzoh balls have two different

> consistencies, one on the inside and one on the outside. They are baked before being put into the soup. I never understood why she liked them so much until one year she did not have time to make them a day or two in advance; they were made only hours before the seder. What a difference! [Max B., see appendix III]

Although Matzo Balls are fairly simple in this basic form, the exact recipe varies. In this case, a complex double-layered Matzo Ball was this woman's personal specialty. The ability to create such dishes is considered an asset, and makes one's house desirable for holiday invitations. "Have you been to X's house? Did you know she makes the best Matzo Balls, you just have to try them!" The personal recipes in Judaism extend beyond the normal pride of a well cooked meal in non-Jewish culture. Recipes are sometimes guarded family secrets, and the quality of holiday food in a family continues to be a point of consideration in arranged Jewish dating.

> She also makes an excellent Tsimmis with kneydlach in it that she served at the seder. I sometimes put a Matzoh ball in cholent (but not on Pesach), when it is called a goniff [thief] (because it steals flavor). [Max B., see appendix III]

Dumplings have been common in Cholent for centuries, although using Matzo Balls in particular is likely a post industrial invention. Matzo flour is far more absorbent (and soft) than crushed Matzo, making more desirable balls for Cholent.

It is worth looking at a few testimonials from Jews who have a minimal religious practice but a strong cultural affiliation.

> My memories of Matzoh balls were years ago when I was first married. I made mine from scratch. They came out hard so

from then on I use the box mix. When I use the box mix my Matzoh balls come out fluffy every time.
Most of the time I've had Matzoh ball soup for Passover either at my house, my mother-in-laws, or at my grandfather's. These were good times with family.
The Matzoh balls are the same but the soup and what else is in the soup is different at different places. I cook my chicken in water and add chicken bouillon to make the soup and add carrots and shredded cooked chicken and sometimes add lokshon noodles. Others may add cooked celery.
Matzoh ball soup is also comforting when I have a cold.
[Faye S, see appendix III]

In this case, the respondent does connect Matzo Ball Soup with Passover directly. As with all the previous respondents (although despite often making the dish), she has a clear recipe and preference for how the soup should be made. She also associates it with medicinal properties. The prompt questions gave rise to this short testimonial rather than a structured one. It is worthwhile to note that many of the respondents, across all the chapters, chose to write free-form rather than answer point-by-point.

It is possible that foods connected so strongly to memory may encourage respondents to answer in a stream-of-consciousness format, which is expressive of the high level of emotional attachment to the food.

The next and final response is from a man who is strongly culturally Jewish, although does not affiliate religiously. Like many secular Jews in the United States, he is the product of an Ashkenazic family who became less religious over successive generations since immigration.

Matzo Ball Soup memories….. where to begin. Actually, I must admit I do not remember any particular bowl of Matzo

> Ball Soup, or the Matzo Balls contained within. I am after all, 62 years of age as I write this, and barring the occasional Matzo Ball which may have escaped its bowl, rolled across the table and onto the floor (or worse, into a dog's mouth), one bowl or ball does not stand out from another. What I do remember, are the wonderful times our entire family was together for Passover. My parents, brother, aunts, uncles and cousins; all assembled at the home of my Grandparents. My Grandfather in particular, was (much to the annoyance of my Grandmother), the source of much craziness. How many times the bridge popped out of his mouth and onto the table are too numerous to count. How (and why) he hid the Matzo where he did is still a mystery to modern science. How did he finish his food so quickly? His plate always seemed to empty itself magically. And why did their dog always seem to have a happy expression and enormous belly? **[Evan G., See appendix III]**

This testimonial is particular in that it links Matzo Ball Soup directly to positive memories from childhood. The sense of humor attached to the family proceedings is also a common trait among Jewish storytelling. The exasperated, arm waving family gathered around the holiday table is a trope that appears perennially in media.[69] The amount of passion involved in discussion around the table is important as a memetic device.

> In spite of repeated utterances of annoyance and exasperation on the part of my Grandmother each year (they were married 60+ years), the hilarity never ceased until he passed away. As his Grandson (and student of the comedic arts), I have always felt it my duty to pass his Passover "traditions" on to my children. **[Evan G., See appendix III]**

[69] Examples include *Annie Hall, Meet the Faukers, Seinfeld, etc.*

The respondent, although unconventionally, has highlighted the purpose of the seder and the Passover ritual. The entire Haggadah is based around the verse,

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְקֹוָק לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם

And you shall recount it to your children on that day saying I do this [Passover sacrifice] because of what God did for me in taking me out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:8

Author's Matzo Ball Soup Recipe:

1 cup Matzo meal
4 eggs
3 tablespoons vegetable oil or melted chicken fat
1/4 cup chicken stock
1 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
1 tablespoon dry or fresh dill and/or :parsely (optional)
1/4 tsp cumin (optional)

1. Mix together all ingredients
2. Refrigerate for 20 minutes to 1 hour
3. Bring a large pot of water to boil
4. Wet hands with cold water and roll dough into balls of desired size (re wet hands as necessary)
5. Cook for 30 minutes
6. Remove from pot with slotted spoon

Chicken Soup:

Large pot of water
2 lbs chicken bones or 6 chicken necks
3-4 chicken thighs
2 brown onions
6 carrots, peeled
4 stalks celery, peeled
1 bunch fresh dill
1 bunch fresh parsley
3 sage leaves (optional)

1 parsnip (optional)
1 whole tomato (optional)
2 sliced zucchini (optional)
Salt
Pepper
Egg shells

1. Place all ingredients in pot except herbs and egg shells and bring to a boil
2. Reduce flame to simmer, add herbs, and cook 4-6 hours
3. Place in refrigerator until cool or overnight
4. Use the egg shells to skim the fat and congealed waste off the top
5. Remove any un chopped vegetables (carrots, parsnip, etc), chop, and return to soup
6. Slowly reheat, *do not boil*
7. Add Matzo Balls and serve

-CHAPTER 5-

Conclusions

THE LAWS OF CHEESECAKE: A CULTURAL AND HALACHIC COOKBOOK

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Rabbinic Studies

Los Angeles, California

Date: 2015

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This section contains concluding remarks on the three previous chapters. They are collected here for ease of comparison and synthesis. The reader will find comments on Cholent, Cheesecake, and Matzo Ball Soup in order. There is also a short section on using this material for curricula.

Cholent:

Cholent has a long history and has entered into the cultural and religious consciousness of Jews. While it was primarily and Ashkenazi food for centuries, with a Sephardic equivalent, migration and shifts in the religious landscape have made it nearly synonymous with Sabbath observance. Since Cholent was never widely marketed, as has been the case for Matzo Ball soup or Braided Challah[70], it remained a dish primarily for observant Jews in the United States.

Many Jews have begun eating and cooking Cholent as a way of expressing greater religious observance; however, for Jews who were raised in observant settings, Cholent does not have this great allure. On the contrary, cooking it is seen as either a cultural expression or a statement on gender. As Lowenstein expresses in his book, Cholent is considered rather old fashioned, and new foods like sushi are favored. Health concerns and increased affluence among "Frum from birth"[71] Orthodox Jews makes them desire the very foods *Ba'alei T'shuvah* are eschewing. A Jew struggling for acceptance the observant world may cling to Cholent while abandoning Thai food.

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[70] Braided Challah is available at many delis and supermarkets. Challah is a term for bread that is tithed by burning a small portion of the dough and reciting a blessing. This procedure is done in commemoration of the Temple tithes outlined in the Tanakh, which are now defunct. Braided sweetened bread is common for Sabbath and Holiday observance among Ashkenazi Jews in imitation of non-Jewish holiday breads in Eastern Europe. In the United States, Challah has become synonymous with sweet, braided bread, while its original meaning is often lost.

[71] Often abbreviated FFB

Meanwhile,FFBs are flocking to restaurants that offer Pad Thai and kosher lamb-"bacon," chicken-and-waffles or mock shrimp while the Cholent pot collects dust in the closet. Cholent is still served at synagogue lunches but less at special occasions. When caesar salad and steak are available, why eat stew?

Cheesecake:

Eating dairy foods for Shavuot, and Cheesecake in particular, is an expression of a long evolution of dietary laws. The laws are linked strongly to Jewish identity, in opposition to or embracing of the surrounding culture. In their early iterations, Jewish dietary laws were seen as a way of enforcing community cohesion, and they still do.

The dietary laws are comprised of many different strands, and the separation of meat and milk has a different history from the avoidance of pork. Here is a suggestion of a continuum of dietary observance, based on the testimonies above and the observations of the author:

1. Avoidance of pork and pork products
2. Avoidance of shellfish and other animals deemed wholly non-kosher
3. Avoidance of mixing non-kosher meat and cheese
4. Eating some kosher meat in the home and non-kosher at restaurants
5. Avoiding mixing meat and dairy
6. Eating only kosher meat in the home and no meat at restaurants

a. Will eat hot dairy foods in all restaurants

b. Will eat only cold dairy foods in all restaurants

7. Eating only kosher (supervised) food in all instances

8. Drinking only kosher wine, vinegar, and juices, eating only "glatt" meat[72]

9. Consuming only *chalav yisrael* dairy products[73]

10. Consuming only *bishul yisrael* tuna fish[74] *or* two sets of glassware[75]

All decisions related to dietary observance are personal identity choices. Deciding to keep a level of *kashrut* implies that one is willing to give up the freedom to participate fully in non-Jewish culture. The farther one moves towards 10, the more restricted one's participation in mainstream American culture. Whether it is related to a

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[72] According to Jewish law, wine and wine derivatives must be made under Jewish supervision and not handled by non-Jews unless flash-boiled. The concern is that non-Jews may dedicate the wine to foreign deities. Jewish law maintains that once the wine is boiled, is cannot be dedicated to a deity and is thus suitable for drinking even if handled by a non-Jew. "Glatt" (Yiddish for "smooth") indicates meat of extremely meticulous kosher quality. After the slaughter of a cow, its lungs are checked for lesions (Heb. *treifot*, from which comes the word *treif*, indicating unsuitable for consumption due to a lesion). A certain quantity of lesions are acceptable as long as they may be removed and the lungs are still airtight, only a perfect lung is known as "smooth." Glatt animals are extremely rare, and the stringency is related to political elements of the kosher food industry.

[73] Diary products that are milked and created under supervision. The Orthodox Union suggests that according to ruling made by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (see previous chapter for dates), all dairy products produced in the United States are deemed kosher. The ruling is based on the suggestion that the Federal Department of Agriculture ensures that only cow milk goes into milk produces. This type of milk (and milk products) is labeled OUD (Orthodox Union Diary).

[74] Canned tuna fish needs relatively little kosher oversight. Almost all commercially produced canned tuna fish in the United States is considered acceptable for consumption by the Orthodox Union. A small minority of Jews have begun to require a higher level of Jewish oversight, possibly as an attempt to manipulate the kosher certification market, the tuna is known as *bishul yisrael* (ie. the tuna is cooked prior to canning with Jewish oversight).

[75] Glassware is considered unable to absorb *ta'am* (taste) and thus is suitable for use with either meat or dairy. Certain ulta-Orthodox circles have begun using separate sets of glassware. This practice is based on a ruling by the Rama, who suggests that glassware is like earthenware and cannot be used for meat and dairy. Glassware, particularly drinking glasses that are not used for hot liquids, could be used with either meat or dairy meals.

theological belief of Jewish cultural affiliation, many people will move along the continuum in both directions during their lifetime.

Matzo Ball Soup:

All of the dietary restrictions of Passover and the rituals associated with the seder exist to remind Jews of the Exodus. As the dietary practices evolved over time, Matzo moved from a simple, rustic bread to a food of primarily religious significance. Passover is the most celebrated Jewish holiday in the United States, and Matzo Ball Soup has taken on a religious significance all of its own far beyond the boundaries of the Passover seder.

The development of Matzo over time, first from a normative food and then to a dumpling, reflect the changing nature of Jewish observance and culture. More than Cholent or Cheesecake, Matzo Ball Soup is associated with Jews in mainstream American culture.

Use of this material in curricula:

In addition to gathering material for further research and publication, this thesis is also intended as the framework for adult education curricula. The background research can be used to create an immersive Jewish experience where the participants learn through cooking and eating.

Although a full curriculum will not appear in this chapter, it is quite possible to create one around the following format. Participants will have the first part of their class in the kitchen where they inspect the ingredients of Matzo Ball soup. While looking at the Matzo, crushing it (or using meal) and making the balls, the instructor talks about

the history and laws of Matzo making. The physical act of making the balls associates the material with a positive experience.

As the foods are cooking, participants learns bits of trivia from chapter III, or review songs about Matzo Balls. Then, over a meal of the very food that they cooked, the participants will look at the testimonials and be asked to share their own associations with the food.

Finally, the dinner will end with a mini-lecture summing up the various points of law and history, trivia, and synthesizing the testimonials and participants memories. The format of this class has been proposed to several congregations and met with enthusiasm, although it has not yet been implemented.

Final Remarks:

Over the course of the central chapters, we have seen the development of Jewish Law and culture. Starting with verses in the *Tanakh* and their milieu, it is possible to trace the way societal changes were reflected in Jewish texts. At the outset, the Israelite community was responding to the surrounding cultures. It looked to demarcate itself as different from its neighbors by instituting dietary restrictions and creating elaborate rituals.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the failed revolt of 132-136 CE, Judaism became a more mobile culture than ever before. During the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, the dietary laws that had been percolating for centuries became codified in painstaking detail. Separate eating practices had been in place at least since the writing of Daniel.

What we have noted is the development of the dietary laws in concurrence with changing cultural trends. In the case of Sabbath laws, Cholent was a result of a localized version of *chamin*. As it spread from France to German lands, increased stringencies of local rabbinic authorities meant changes for cooking the dish itself.

The laws for the Sabbath, as they evolved, became exacting over the issue of cooking. With the advent of electricity and the ability to control cooking more precisely, *halachah* needed to catch up. This phenomenon has been the case across the *halachic* fields, new technology and liberated societies mean new challenges for the legal framework of Judaism.

Feinstein, Klein, and Washofsky are a few examples of rabbis trying to synthesize Judaism and modernity. We saw this not only with cooking Cholent, but also with Matzo production. Industrialization meant that Matzo could be produced in larger quantities and ground into meal, which in turn led to the increased popularity of the Matzo Ball. Finer Matzo Meal leads to fluffier and more desirable Matzo Balls.

With the rise of Orthodox outreach and *Ba'al Teshuvah* Judaism, legal observance has become an identity marker. What one will eat or decline to eat becomes a statement of Jewish fidelity. Younger Jews are constructing their own identities piecemeal from different Jewish sources such as *halachic* guides or different rabbi's advice. Increased mobility for work or family means that many Jews will drift from community to community. The old system of replicating one's parents practices is falling by the wayside in favor of a less consistent identity.

Movement along the *halachic* continuum was highly evident in the testimonials. Almost every one of the testimonials evidenced some change in Jewish practice (although faith and theology were hardly mentioned).

WIthin Christian circles, one may state their Christian identity through either faith or works. Public declarations of faith are common and are seen as motivators for right action. In Jewish circles however, God and faith are hardly mentioned. The only testimonial to address it, that of Max B., suggested that he felt God specifically *did not care* about scrupulous legal observance. If we may draw conjectures from the evidence, being a "good Jew" is not related particularly to faith in God, but rather to participating in Jewish cultural or legal practices.

One point of particular note is that Judaism appears to be a culture of the table. Eating practices are a significant marker of identity, such that by learning how Jews choose to eat one may reasonably predict their other religious and cultural practices.

-Bibliography and Appendices-

The Second Temple Sisterhood Cookbook: beloved Jewish foods from ancient times to the present

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APPENDIX I: Cholent Testimonials

This section contains the full testimonials used in this thesis. They are listed here along with the method of data collection and a pseudonym and age range for each respondent.

Testimonial A: Sarah B., early 30s
Orthodox, Ba'alat Tshuvah
Via email

Question: At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?
I had my first taste of [sic] Cholet when I was 18 years old after attending an Orthodox shul for the 1st time. The shul was called Shul By The Shore. I wonder if having that experience has kind of made having cholet like "the" Orthodox thing to eat on Shabbat in my mind. Though I know thats not true.

When and where do you eat Cholent now?
Now I eat Cholet at home, during lunch on shabbat. These days I mostly just eat the eggs or kiskah (parve), Other than that I don't really eat Cholet at any other time. I feel like it would be a bit out of place. Though I have had Cholet during the week at friend's home's when it has been offered to me. Its not my favorite thing to have during the week (I kind of hate the idea) but, I've eaten it to be nice.

How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?
Well, eating cholet is totally a Jewish thing for me. If I hadn't converted to Judaism I don't think I would have ever tried it.I mean its a real community treat. After talking with a friend of mine I think I grew up with something similar as an African American girl with black Louisiana creole grandparents. I grew up eating and learning how to make gumbo. Which is basically the same idea (minus the seafood) given that gumbo is just a mixture of whatever was

available mixed into a big pot and cooked for a long time. In Louisiana they had seafood so thats a major ingredient. In Poland they had potatoes so thats in cholet... the same idea. Humm this makes me wonder if I'll feel the need to really mix the two dishes in some way in the future.

What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?
Well I've always based my Cholet recipe off of the 1st cholet I ever had because it was amazing. I kind of made it up, I took a wild guess based around the different flavors. I think every cholet tastes the best with Kishka and ketchup (it gives the cholet a sweet flavor). Also I LOVE adding eggs to cholet, theres nothing like it. Once I added honey and that was yummy.

Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)?
I don't have any memories or stories. Though I guess I can say I got a kick out of having chocolate (they were chocolate chips) and cholet at Jewlicious festival one year at around 3 am on a Saturday. That was a first.I

Testimonial B: Miriam G., early 30s
Sephardic/Modern Orthodox
Via Facebook Private Message

At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?
Since I could eat as a child.

When and where do you eat Cholent now?
Sometimes at Chabad in Shanghai or at my parents or my future grandmother in laws.

How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?

No. It was just a traditional food to eat (sometimes heavy on a hot day). My Mother is Sephardic and my father Ashkenazi so I grew up eating dafina as well as Cholent.

What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?
I love the kishke. My father always insists Cholent is not Cholent unless there is kishke (agreed).

Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)? Once my mom fed leftover chloent to our dogs BAD IDEA. You think we can't always digest chloent.....

Testimonial C: Isaac R., late 30s
Conservative Rabbi
Via Facebook Private Message

At what age did you start eating Cholent and where?
I had no clue about Cholent until I started at the Yeshiva high school in 9th grade, and all of a sudden the guys who were more "in the know" were all talking about Cholent like it was the greatest thing ever, you eat it on shabbos, etc. etc. It was probably the middle of that year when I had Cholent for the first time, at Rabbi E's house for Shabbat lunch. I didn't love it - it was greasy and hard to tell what was in it and I'm a pretty picky eater, but the social pressure was really high so I made like I loved it as much as everyone else. I had it again from time to time, usually when I would spend Shabbat with one of the rabbis or other students who lived in the Orthodox neighborhood (it was not something my parents prepared), I acquired a taste for it, and when I was in college and shortly after it was definitely a staple of Shabbat meals.

When and where do you eat Cholent now?

I don't. I'm sure part of that is because our home is largely vegetarian (for ethical/ecological reasons), but largely it's because our eating has shifted more toward lighter dishes; even when we do cook meat, it's just a portion of protein in the context of a much larger meal, not the whole focus.

How is eating Cholent linked to your Jewish (religious/cultural) development?

It feels a little weird to say this, but despite the fact that I don't eat Cholent now (even when I am in places where it's being served), I actually think it played a key role in my Jewish development. When I was in Yeshiva high school, being an observant Conservative home was very isolating - most of the kids were either from Orthodox families (whether or not they were observant on their own) or from families that were more marginally connected to Jewish practice. But Cholent was something of an equalizer - everyone could relate, and everyone wanted to have some. And when I went to college and started cooking for myself, it was something that was easy to make (and hard to mess up), something you could customize to have your own "brand," and something that everyone would sit around and talk about. And even now Cholent is still a "thing" - my daughter is a self-determined vegetarian, but my 2-year-old son eats meat and when we were somewhere and Cholent was on the table, my wife and I were really excited for him to try it.

What special ingredients do you like in Cholent (eggs, kishke, types of beans, extra paprika, etc)? Are these ingredients linked to your community, family, or background?

NO BEANS! When I was a Junior at Boston University, the Hillel House sponsored a Cholent iron-chef and my roommate and I took second place (which was still really exciting); afterward a bunch of people told us they didn't vote for our Cholent because it didn't have any beans, but we didn't care - WE HATE BEANS.

Do you have a favorite story or memory about Cholent (personal, family, traditional)?

When we were first married and living on the Upper West Side [of Manhattan], we hosted a lot of Shabbat meals. Once we served Cholent as a first course for lunch, and then cleared the bowls away and brought out chicken, green beans, salad, potatoes, etc. The guests looked around in shock and told us that they had assumed the Cholent was the lunch - from then on (to this very day!), we always made sure to list the complete menu at the start of the meal so people could plan accordingly. I also remember trying to make Cholent for my wife (then girlfriend) and I in a 2-quart crock pot in my dorm room. I should have seen trouble coming when I could only fit one piece of flanken in the pot, but I went for it anyway… it did NOT turn out well :)

Testimonial D: Daryl M., Mid-50s
Conservative Rabbi
Via Facebook Wall Message

The first Cholent I ever tried to make came out crunchy. While everyone else scrounged for tuna fish and anything else edible, my then boyfriend made a valiant effort to try to eat some. I should have realized right then and there that I would end up married to him... (also - I've done much better since then - the key is a crock pot)

When we lived in NYC, we used to make Cholent on a semi-regular basis, especially in winter if really bad weather was predicted. Now that we're in SoCal, not so much. Though I still love the way the house smells when you get up Shabbat morning...I think my first attempt at Cholent was connected to my religious journey at the time. I think this would have been my junior year if B. and I were already dating, though it might have been in the period when we were not yet going out but should have been (if there had been FB back then, boy would "it's

complicated" have fit us!). I'd become more observant sometime around the end of Nativ, my freshman year, so I was still trying all this stuff out - and Cholent is what observant Jews make for Shabbat, right? So I had to try making Cholent..

I'm pretty sure it came from a cookbook. In fact, it might have been from the Hadassah cookbook (not sure when/where I got that though), which is still a recipe I use.

It was definitely at a point at which B. was trying to win my favor, and even though we met Feb. of the year before, we didn't really start to get romantically involved until summer...The Cholent was made in the kitchen of my friend (and Nativ roommate) A.'s kitchen at Mathilde Schechter dormitory (I was at NYU but I spent a lot of Shabbatot on Morningside Heights). I guess the "low oven" wasn't low enough...

Did you have any childhood memories of Cholent, or is it something you came in contact with for the first time in nativ?

Nope. Never had it, don't think I ever heard of it as a kid. I probably did have it on Nativ, but don't have any special memories of it.

APPENDIX II: Cheesecake Testimonials

Testimonial E: Henry M., mid- 50s
Reform
Via Email

When do you like eating Cheesecake?
Breakfast, lunch, dinner or late night - whenever the mood strikes (and it's available!).

Do you feel Cheesecake has a special place within a religious context? Why or why not?
If you keep Kosher (even if you don't) Cheesecake has always been a traditional dairy dessert after a dairy meal. If you don't keep kosher, Cheesecake is also a great dessert. My favorite is Cheesecake with sour cherry topping and a chocolate cracker crust.

Do you observe any dietary rules (kosher, vegetarian, ecokosher, gluten free, lactose free, halal, etc)? Why do you think it is important (or not important) to adhere to dietary rules?
No. And I don't feel it is important to adhere to dietary rules other than those that are important to a healthy lifestyle (everything in moderation).

If you observe dietary rules, when and how did you start doing so (or if you stopped, why did you stop)?
My mother, aunt and grandmother all kept Kosher when I was a child so I observed the dietary laws at home but as a family the dietary laws were not observed outside the home (except my grandparents did by only eating vegetarian or fish in restaurants. In Denver in the 50's and 60's there weren't Kosher restaurants).

How has your observance of dietary rules changed over time?
As you get older you realize that you really should eat what you like (in moderation) and try to avoid foods you know aren't conducive to good health (diet sodas, too much

animal fat, too many carbohydrates - a sensible, and preferably a Mediterranean, diet).

If they have changed, how does this change reflect a change in your understanding of ethics or religion?
I've never considered observance of dietary rules to be related to religion even though kashrut is mentioned in the Bible, but I think ethical treatment of food animals is important for moral reasons.

Testimonial F: Judith K., mid-50s

Reform Rabbi

Via Emial

Do you have a special memory of cheesecake or what does cheesecake make you think about?

I learned to make cheesecake from my mother. I've always thought of the recipe I use as her recipe, and now when I make it I think of her. She taught me that it isn't possible to cook without getting your hands into the food, and I remember this when I handle the dough for the crust, which is very buttery and messy.

When do you most like eating cheesecake?

Shavuot. I love cheesecake and make it religiously for Shavuot.

Do you feel Cheesecake has a special place within a religious context? Why or why not?

I associate cheesecake very strongly with Shavuot - although I could make it any time, in fact I only make it once a year, for Shavuot.

Do you observe any dietary rules (kosher, vegetarian, ecokosher, gluten free, lactose free, halal, etc)? Why do you think it is important (or not important) to adhere to dietary rules?

I observe kashrut. It is part of the structure of my daily life and has been since I was seventeen. I think it is very important to have rituals in one's life that are part of daily life.

If you observe dietary rules, when and how did you start doing so (or if you stopped, why did you stop)?

I started when I was seventeen, first at camp and then at college. It was part of the process of becoming more observant.

How has your observance of dietary rules changed over time?

It really hasn't. I eat dairy food at restaurants without a hekhsher, which was also the practice of my husband's family (he grew up keeping kosher). I would say that our kashrut practice has stayed essentially the same since our marriage 29 years ago. When we lived in the South and had trouble getting certain products certified Kosher for Passover, we loosened up a little on that (i.e. we bought non-hekhshered cheese for Pesach, which we ordinarily wouldn't have done on Pesach), but here we haven't had that issue.

If they have changed, how does this change reflect a change in your understanding of ethics or religion? Although some of my practice has changed over time (I now only observe one day of Yom Tov, we began using electric lights on Shabbat, and we now drive for Shabbat-related events on Shabbat), my kashrut hasn't changed. I've never felt any need to change, nor has my understanding of kashrut changed.

Testimonial G: Max B., early 60s

Conservative

Via email

I love cheesecake, but fortunately don't like mediocre cheesecake. My late mother's cheesecake, [my wife] Rachel's or Canter's Hungarian cheesecake – all excellent.

Cheesecake factory – not worth eating. New York cheesecake – all air and calories.

We always have cheesecake at Shavuos, seldom at other times, though we had some good Italian lemony ricotta cheesecake at Xmas-time.

Rachel always makes cheesecake at Shavuos and it's good. I once made a cheese torte for a contest at the Shul from Althea Silverman's book, The Jewish Home Beautiful, which was a wedding gift to my mother in 1948. It was excellent; came in 2nd in the Men's division. (It called for a spring form pan; I bought one for 50 cents. Rachel had been baking for years without using a springform pan and was astonished that I simply went and got one. I was astonished that she was astonished.)

As for me I associate blintzes with Shavuos. When you have two on a plate, they can look kind of like two tablets. And I guess also lokshen kugel. But I never really celebrated Shavuos until I was in college or since, except maybe to go on the 2nd morning to say Yizcor if it was not on a school day when I was in high school. Cheesecake we often had at Hanukah; they would ask my mother to bring it to the big extended family Hanukah party. But she made it at other times too.

We keep a kosher home. We set it up when we first moved in together, partly because we had many friends for whom it would be important, partly because we wanted to try it out, and a little because when my grandmother comes back, I thought she'd need a place to eat. It certainly wouldn't be with any of my other relatives.

As a child, our house was not kosher, though my mother bought meat from the kosher butcher, especially veal and liver. (Eventually she relaxed about that and bought only liver and veal there.) But my parents never served fleishigs [meat] and milchigs [dairy] together, saying, "It just doesn't go." Once, when I was served a glass of milk at a fish meal, I asked why we were having milk at supper,

which we generally didn't do. They explained that it was fish, so it was okay. I didn't get it at all at that time.

When we moved in together, we did not stop eating non-kosher out. We had both grown up eating [non-kosher] out, and we didn't want to refuse to eat in our parents' homes or with them. (Rachel had already had family tsuris [trouble] when she stopped eating mammal.) And we wanted never to have to say to our children that they couldn't eat by them.

Our children each decided they wanted to keep kosher all the time when they were about 7. We made a deal, that they would continue to be willing to eat vegetarian out. So on vacation or otherwise, we simply had to accommodate that. Neither ever went back to treyf [non-kosher]. Somewhere along the line, I think long before that, I became a pork-avoider.. During Pesach, I'm very strict, not eating out at all and buying kosher cheese at home, etc. During the 10 days (RH-to-YK.) I also buy kosher cheese for home use. It's just an extra stringency, and support for the industry. If I thought God paid any attention to us, I'd probably do more.

APPENDIX III: Matzo Ball Soup Testimonials

Testimonial H: Sarah B., early 30s (also in Appendix I)
Orthodox
Via Facebook Private Message

What is your earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup?
I'm not sure when I first learned about Matzo Ball Soup. I can only remember the 1st time I tried it, which was at my first seder. I was vegetarian at the time and my host had know idea. I didn't know the soup had a chicken base.. and it was so yummy I don't think I cared. For some reason I think matza balls and matza ball soup has simply become apart of the normative lexicon of anyone living in the LA area or any place with a massive amount of Jews.
How do you feel when you eat Matzo Ball Soup? Does it conjure up particular feelings?
I am not sure how to describe how eating Matzo Ball Soup makes me feel. It makes me feel umm very Jewy which doesn't say much. I think Matzo Ball Soup is the best thing to have when one is sick and it doesn't even have to be chicken soup (known for healing sickness), even pareve Matzo Ball Soup makes me feel like I am going to be a hundred times better on a sick day. I am sure it psychical.
Do you have dietary restrictions on Passover, if so, what?
Umm if you are referring to only eating things that are "kosher L'peasch", yes. I only eat things that are considered kosher for Passover according to Orthodox tradition. For me this includes beans, rice, and corn amongst other things that many American Jews are surprised to learn are in fact kosher and okay to use during Passover.

If you do, why do you practice Passover the way you do?

When and how did you learn to do so?

I think I celebrate Passover according to the Orthodox tradition and practice because it really speaks to make

passion and commit to tradition. Not just as a Jew but, in general. I think I'm very tradition[al] or to use modern language "conservative". Of course I learned the details about orthodox Passover practices during my conversion process in addition to learning in "yeshiva"… I also spent a lot of time reading, and questioning what I learned as I grew older and as different issues arose.

Who makes the best Matzo Ball Soup? What is so special about it (size of the Matzo Balls, broth, etc)?
I'm not sure if I had the aliment BEST Matzo Ball Soup yet, so I guess I'll just say I make the best Matzo Ball Soup. One day I would like to add cilantro to the balls. I think by doing so the soup might taste similarly to a Mexican chicken "meat ball" soup I loved growing up in LA with a dad who would bring home a lot of cool dishes home from downtown LA. Sadly I haven't had a chance to add the cilantro to Matzo Ball Soup yet. Most of the time people are just interested in the classic Matzo Ball Soup straight from the shetel.

Testimonial I: Sofia N., early 30s
Conservative
Via email

What is your earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup? Do you have any stories about Matzo Ball Soup?

The first time I had Matzo Ball Soup I thought someone was playing a prank on me. I was still in the process of conversion at the time and the few Pessah experiences I had had, had been with a family of sephardic friends who are known for their delicious recipes : roasted lamb in apricots and honey, msuki (a tunisian dish) with fava beans and lamb, roasted pepper salad, spicy moroccan carrots, etc.

That year, I had spent the first night of Pesach with them and the second night I had decided to give my local Conservative synagogue a try, as they were hosting a traditional communal meal lead by my rabbi. The dinner was about 60 euros (about 70 dollars) and for that price I was expecting an incredible and unforgettable feast: instead, the meal started with two greasy balls of wet mashed "bread" floating in a clear broth. My first thought when the bowl was put on the table in front of me was: "Is this a joke ?". I remember staring at it in disbelief trying to figure out what exactly was floating at the surface. I also remember looking around me to see if other people were as flabbergasted as I was. But everyone seemed to find this perfectly normal and were all happily enjoying their pesadich treat. Later, I got to understand that Matzo Ball Soup was actually an important part of Ashkenazi cooking and even that Ashkenazi cooking was actually a real thing. It may sound naive and obvious, but in France most Jewish dishes are sephardic, since 80% of the community comes from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In certain communities in France, you could spend your entire life there and never taste Matzo Ball Soup.

<u>How do you feel when you eat Matzo Ball Soup? Does it conjure up particular feelings?</u>

After my first experience with Matzo Ball Soup, I have come to understand it better and even to like it.
When I eat it, I feel warm and a little greasy, but satisfied and comforted (although I have recently become a pescatarian, so without chicken, Matzo Ball Soup is a lot less greasy). I would never order Matzo Ball Soup at a deli or elsewhere. Ironically, even after my first tragic discovery of Matzo Ball Soup, I now associate it with a festive dish you only serve on a holiday ! Matzo Ball Soup means chag to me (Shabbat, Pesach and maybe Rosh Hashana). I would also never serve it in a non Jewish context, on a weekday for example. It's almost part of a ceremonial and if I served it to non-Jewish friends, in a shabbat setting let's say, I would feel the need to warn them in advance

and to explain the cultural background behind it. I feel it's almost for "initiés", although it's a very simple and not very refined dish.

Do you have dietary restrictions on Passover, if so, what?

Yes, I keep kosher for Passover, to a stricter level than I do the rest of the year (no eating out in restaurants or only limited to family in rare cases). I also eat Kitniot.

If you do, why do you practice Passover the way you do? When and how did you learn to do so?
I learned it little by little through my conversion in France, and when living in Israel.
Passover is a central holiday in Jewish tradition and I like the idea of a general clean-up as a way to renew oneself.

Who makes the best Matzo Ball Soup? What is so special about it (size of the Matzo Balls, broth, etc)?
My husband. It's special because it's made with love and it's also him who got me to like it more and made it more familiar to me. I like it when the flavour is intense, the broth is not too clear, and with lots of vegetables. I don't like when Matzo Balls are too puffy, too greasy and too big.

Testimonial J: Deborah E., early 40s
Sephardic
Via Facebook Private Message

So to answer all the questions... my earliest memory of Matzo Ball Soup was at Art's Deli in the Valley. I don't have a ton of stories about Matzo Ball Soup growing up, because my family's Sephardi, but I did help my ex's family make Matzo Balls. For me, I can't think of better winter comfort food than Matzo Ball Soup.

However, I will tell you that I like my Matzo Balls the size of a softball... it's the best part.

As for Passover... I do try my best to keep Passover, except in recent years I have eaten kitniyot (which is rice, beans and corn). It's just so hard to do without those things. Passover was much harder when I was married because we kept a kosher house and had to do a full clean, including kashering dishes, which was a nightmare.

Testimonial K: Max B., early 60s (see also Appendix I)
Conservative
Via email

We always had kneydl soup at one of the two seders. Until I was 14, both seders were always at my grandmother's apartment (she kept kosher); the entire extended family attended. One night kneidlach, the other night my Aunt Ruth's latke soup. Same chicken soup, but with her egg latkes in the soup. Everybody loved it. Our family liked the kneydlach to be light; they usually were.
We have friends who serve kneydl soup every Friday night. We may have them 1-2 times a year not on Pesach. I get them out seldom, but occasionally, especially if I'm feeling under the weather. Once, just a few years ago, I spent several weeks trying Matzoh ball soup at different delis. Victor's (where I've only eaten twice, was best. My mother never made them. For a few years when I was in high school, we made them from a mix (Streit's; we don't buy Manischewitz products). Later, I followed recipes and have made them using several different recipes over the years. At our seders, often someone else brings the kneydlach, and even the soup. Since then, we make only from scratch.
On Pesach our house is strictly kosher; we even buy only certified cheeses. (But not milk or sour cream, ordinary purchase before Kol Chamira is fine.) And we do not eat in uncertified restaurants. We eat no Matzoh products for a

full month before Pesach (so as to be hungry FOR MatzoH). A couple times I bought a non-gebrochts kneidl mix to use after the house was kashered but before Pesach begins. They were surprisingly good. We do eat gebrochts on Pesach, but not before it. I always buy a box egg Matzohs to eat after Pesach but before we switch over to chametz; the switch is always on a Sunday as we don't have the time until then.

Generally we make one seder and go out for the other -- we made two the first year of our marriage, never again. We didn't make a seder at home in the first year after each of our children's births. We usually have company once or twice later in the week. A couple times I've attempted to duplicate my late aunt's latkes for the soup. When I served it to my father, his eyes lit up and he enthusiastically ate, but it is clear that they weren't quite the same.

I know some people don't eat fish on Pesach; we do. I know some people don't eat mushrooms on Pesach; we do.

R. and I both grew up in non-kosher homes. We set up a kosher home when we moved in together. All new stuff! The things we got as wedding gifts (several months later) are almost all Pesachdik.

At that time nobody had ever suggested that when the dead are resurrected they won't eat. I figured that when my grandmother comes back, she'd need to stay with someone; and she certainly wasn't going to eat by any of my cousins! But the real reason we went kosher was that many of our friends kept kosher, and we wanted them to be able to eat by us. We did it as we moved in together, figuring that it would be easy to switch out if we decided to do so, but hard to switch to kosher.

Our first home had a modest-size kitchen with limited counter space. Having separate fleishig [meat] and milchig [dairy] counters was driving us nuts. First time our friend Tovah H., a rabbi's daughter, came over, she asked if we were among those nudnizks who had separate counters for milchigs and fleishigs. "Say what?"

"We never did that when I was growing up." We abandoned that aspect in that very minute! But on Pesach we covered the counters for decades each year, but now we have granite counter tops, so we merely pour boiling water all over.

We learned what to do in school and from family members and friends and from various printed guides. For example, my grandmother uses to tie the knobs of chametz cabinets with pretty yarn. We do the same, but generally use attractive ribbon. We do not put masking tape all the way along the edges, as I have seen some people do.

Our friend Sharon M., using her grandmother's recipe (adapted?) makes the best kneidlach. She calls them stuffed kneidlach. The Matzoh balls have two different consistencies, one on the inside and one on the outside. They are baked before being put into the soup. I never understood why she liked them so much until one year she did not have time to make them a day or two in advance; they were made only hours before the seder. What a difference!
She also makes an excellent Tsimmis with kneydlach in it that she served at the seder. I sometimes put a Matzoh ball in cholent (but not on Pesach), when it is called a goniff [thief] (because it steals flavor).

Testimonial L: Faye S., early 60s
Formerly Conservative, Secular
Via email

My memories of Matzoh balls were years ago when I was first married. I made mine from scratch. They came out hard so from then on I use the box mix. When I use the box mix my Matzoh balls come out fluffy every time.
Most of the time I've had Matzoh ball soup for Passover either at my house, my mother-in-laws, or at my grandfather's. These were good times with family.

The Matzoh balls are the same but the soup and what else is in the soup is different at different places. I cook my chicken in water and add chicken bouillon to make the soup and add carrots and shredded cooked chicken and sometimes add lokshon noodles. Others may add cooked celery. Matzoh ball soup is also comforting when I have a cold.

Testimonial M: Evan G, early 60s
Secular
Via email

Matzo Ball Soup memories….. where to begin. Actually, I must admit I do not remember any particular bowl of Matzo Ball Soup, or the Matzo Balls contained within. I am after all, 62 years of age as I write this, and barring the occasional Matzo Ball which may have escaped its bowl, rolled across the table and onto the floor (or worse, into a dog's mouth), one bowl or ball does not stand out from another. What I do remember, are the wonderful times our entire family was together for Passover. My parents, brother, aunts, uncles and cousins; all assembled at the home of my Grandparents. My Grandfather in particular, was (much to the annoyance of my Grandmother), the source of much craziness. How many times the bridge popped out of his mouth and onto the table are too numerous to count. How (and why) he hid the Matzo where he did is still a mystery to modern science. How did he finish his food so quickly? His plate always seemed to empty itself magically. And why did their dog always seem to have a happy expression and enormous belly?

In spite of repeated utterances of annoyance and exasperation on the part of my Grandmother each year (they were married 60+ years), the hilarity never ceased until he passed away. As his Grandson (and student of the comedic arts), I have always felt it my duty to pass his Passover "traditions" on to my children.

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