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A Comparative Analysis of Eating Jewishly in American Progressive Jewish Movements

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Abstract

This thesis explores what it means to eat Jewishly and keep kosher in the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements. It will explore these ideas on three axes: Jewish food ethics, engagement with the divine, and sociocultural implications. It is meant to compare how each of these movements teaches eating Jewishly and keeping kosher and look at how the similarities and differences can offer points of connection and bridge building cross-denominationally. I will start by outlining my argument, followed by an explanation of how and why I chose to use guidebooks. I will then explain key terminology and parameters of my thesis. Next, I will review key sources in the development of this field of study. I will then go into my three chapters of analysis before concluding with a reflection on where the three axes show us patterns that can be extrapolated for real life use.

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Introduction

"Kashrut is among the most important institutions of the Jewish religion, and constitutes nothing less than an attempt to turn the act of eating–surely among the most banal and ordinary of life's daily tasks–into a holy opportunity to acknowledge God as the Source and Sustainer of all life."

Rabbi Paul S. Drazen, (The Observant Life, 306)

Kashrut is a microcosm of how rabbis and learned Jewish scholars understand Judaism and their prescribed practice for their denomination. Food is a necessity to exist, but furthermore, food is an experience that reflects where and who we come from. In Judaism, many people use *kashrut*, culturally Jewish foods, and Jewish food rituals to connect to the broader Jewish people. While eating Jewishly is of great importance, there are many ways Jews individually and as local communities understand how they are supposed to eat. Thus, food can become a barrier between Jewish communities.

My aim is to look at education resources for adult learners like *kashrut* guides and essays on eating Jewishly from the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements written in the late twentieth and first part of the twenty-first century and are regularly used by members of their respective movement. I will analyze how rabbis and learned Jewish scholars discuss *kashrut* and eating Jewishly within these texts through the lens of three main themes: ethics, engagement with the divine, and socio-cultural identity. Ultimately, these texts reflect broader patterns of defining and experiencing important ideas around Judaism theology and how to approach living a Jewish life in each of these different denominations. I hope that my comparative analysis of

these movement's perspectives on eating Jewishly will assist those who seek to engage in intra-Jewish cross denominational collaboration and joint programming.

Due to the time constraints of my research and my language abilities, I focus on the American context. Additionally, Orthodox Judaism represents a wide range of perspectives and contains multiple movements. Whereas, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaisms are each represented by a single movement and the movements offer similarly institutional structures that make comparing them possible. Future research may be able to expand upon my work to consider additional streams of Judaism and/or non-American contexts.

In the literature review, I will look at previous scholarship on eating Jewishly, *kashrut*, and *halakhah*. This will lay the foundation for the meta-study I will do on these topics as they are understood within a specific denomination of Judaism. I continue my review by looking at the concept of Jewish denominations and the movements that represent them. Only with an understanding of Jewish denominations and movements as discrete streams of Judaism is my comparative work made possible.

To compare the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative perspectives on *kashrut* and eating Jewishly, I will analyze two to three resources published by each of the movement's affiliated publishing bodies. I use resources that are intended for adult learners. These resources are either materials used for an introduction to Judaism or conversion course, practical guides, or guides for understanding Judaism from a specific denomination's theological approach. These sources all share the intention of providing the reader a better understanding of how to do Judaism, the why Judaism is practiced a specific way, and/or a starting place to participate in the continuous development and redevelopment of Jewish practice.

First, I will consider the way ethics appear in each resource. Then I will offer a short reflection of each movement's overall perspective on Jewish food ethics. Lastly, I will conclude with a comparative analysis between the three denomination's teachings on eating Jewishly as they relate to ethics. I will then repeat this process using the same primary sources on the theme of engaging with the divine and then on the theme of socio-cultural considerations. After comparing the movement's descriptions of eating Jewishly using each thematic lens, I will offer my closing thoughts on the similarities and differences between the denomination's understanding of eating Jewishly.

Methodology

In order to make meaningful comparisons between the denominations, I have attempted to select resources from each movement that fill similar roles for adult learners. While there is a range of individual practices and rabbinic perspectives within a single denomination, by focusing on instructive materials published by a denomination-affiliated institution, I seek to identify characteristics within the collection of sources which reasonably represent the unique Judaism of that movement. I chose to focus on teaching materials for adult learners rather than resources intended for youth education because adult learners already have a formed sense of self and guiding values for their daily life. Scholar Meredith Woocher provides the following description of adult educational settings,

> "The ultimate effect of adult Jewish learning, based on these findings, seemed to be to encourage and legitimate the values of individualism and choice by placing them within the context of Jewish tradition, thus blurring the distinctions between the two underlying value systems. Students emerged from their courses believing that learning about 'authentic' Judaism, knowing that the themes of choice and autonomy were woven throughout their lessons and, therefore, concluding that the two are one and the same."[1]

In addition to the value of focusing on adult education, I chose to use sources published by a movement's affiliated publishing body. If materials published by a movement's publishing body, written and edited by rabbis of said movement are not sufficiently authoritative, cross-denominational analysis is impossible. Therefore, while this methodology may include a margin of error in its representation of a denomination, I consider the approach worthwhile for the sake of putting the different forms of Judaism in a single discourse on Jewish eating.

To represent the Reform movement, I have selected the revised edition of *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* by Rabbi Mark Washofsky, *Honoring Tradition,*

[1] Meredith L. Woocher, "Texts in Tension: Negotiating Jewish Values in the Adult Jewish Learning Classroom," *Journal of Jewish Education* 70, no. Method and Meaning: How We Know What We Know About Jewish Education (Summer 2004): 30.

Embracing Modernity: A Reader for the Union for Reform Judaism's Introduction to Judaism Course edited by Rabbi Beth Lieberman and Rabbi Hara Person, and *Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic* edited by Rabbi Mary L. Zamore. The first two of these resources fit neatly into my framework for selecting primary sources.

I have chosen to include *Sacred Table* because the Reform movement has dramatically changed its position on *kashrut* and eating Jewishly over the years since 1979. Prior to 1979, any official Reform rabbinic document that mentioned *kashrut* did so with a negative perspective on the practice.[2] Since then, perspectives on *kashrut* within Reform Judaism have shifted and now contain diverse ways of engaging the question of how to eat Jewishly. Therefore, I have included *Sacred Table* because it is intended to assist Reform Jews develop a Jewish food practice rooted in Torah and meaningfully applies their Jewish values to daily living.[3] To turn this 519 page collection of essays into a resource within the scope of my research, I have used *Sacred Table*'s study guide which provides recommended readings for courses on different aspects of the Jewish relationship with food. Wherever I refer to *Sacred Table*, I refer only to the sections included in the study guide's *b'kiut* track intended as a general class about food and Judaism. Because *kashrut* is still only influential for a small number of Reform Jews, this overview course offers an equivalent descriptive teaching resource to a practice guide or introduction to Judaism resource.[4]

I have selected two sources to represent the Reconstructionist perspective, one practical guide, *A Guide to Jewish Practice* by Rabbi David A. Teutsch, and one descriptive introduction

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[2] Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: URJ Press, 2010), 181.
[3] Nigel Savage, preface to *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), xxi-xxiv.
[4] Eric H. Yoffie, foreword to *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), xix.

to the Reconstructionist approach to Judaism, *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* by Rabbi Rebecca T. Alpert and Rabbi Jacob J. Staub. I have chosen only these two sources because Reconstructionist Judaism originated with the teachings of a single rabbi, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan.[5] I suggest that the Reconstructionist movement's shorter history than the other movements and its origins from a single founding rabbi explains why there is greater uniformity in defining the denomination in comparison to Reform and Conservative Judaisms.[6] Additionally, the Reconstructionist movement represents a significantly smaller portion of American Jews than the Reform and Conservative movements.[7]

The three sources I use to represent the Conservative perspective are *The Jewish Dietary Laws* by Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner and Rabbi Seymour Siegel, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* by Rabbi Isaac Klein, and *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews* edited by Rabbi Martin S. Cohen and Rabbi Michael Katz. All three sources are practice guides which fulfill complementary roles for a person learning how to live according to Conservative *halakhah*.[8] Dresner and Siegel's guide is a concise volume which offers arguments as to why Jews should observe *kashrut* and user-friendly instructions for living according to the dietary laws. Klein provides a comprehensive code covering the full range of Jewish practice.[9] Cohen and Katz provide the newest guide of the three. In the preface, Cohen differentiates his work from Klein's by noting that Klein focused on ritual practice. Whereas, two

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[5] Rebecca T. Alpert and Jacob J. Staub, *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, Expanded and Updated (Elkins Park, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 2000), 10.
[6] I have previously referenced the historical shift in Reform Judaism in the explanation for choosing the Reform primary sources. I will do the same for Conservative Judaism below.
[7] "Jewish Americans in 2020" (Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021), Jewish Americans in 2020.
[8] See note 12 for a definition of Conservative *halakhah*.
[9] A code is a genre of rabbinic literature which provides the *halakhah* in an organized structure based on legal themes. In the preface, Klein places his work in the line of codes which extend for the earliest codes of the *Mishneh Torah*, *Tur*, and *Shulkhan Arukh*. Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979), xxiii.

thirds of *The Observant Life* are dedicated to matters of living Jewishly in the contemporary world which are subjects omitted by Klein. The additional guidance for daily life provides a Conservative voice on Jewish eating beyond ritual observance of *halakhic kashrut*. *The Observant Life* also references *The Jewish Dietary Laws* in its chapter "The Dietary Laws" as a recommendation for those learning about *kashrut* for the first time and in the introduction, Katz positions his work in relation to Klein's guide.[10] While the Conservative sources were published in 1966, 1979 , and 2012, all remain relevant. Therefore, the three sources present a Conservative voice which represents long held perspectives on Jewish eating and how some stances, such as interfaith social mixing, have changed in recent decades.

I will do a comparative cross-denominational analysis of the denominational perspectives on eating Jewishly with the aim of understanding points of connection across Jewish communities. We can think of this work done on two axes, denominations and these three facets of experience: engagement with the divine, ethics, and sociocultural. I will illustrate how each movement sees each of these facets, the overlap between each movement, and how the facets and movements interact with each other. This work builds on itself; each section of textual analysis provides scaffolding to see the next facet in relation, conversation, and contradiction with any of the previous analysis. It will become clear how certain movements choose to focus on one aspect much more than the other or how another may balance them more equally. I will reflect on how these similarities and differences across movements allow for points of cross-denominational connection and community building.

[10] Paul S. Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, ed. Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 307.

Key Terminology

Halakhah

Halakhah is the normative law of Judaism, which is built out of the foundational texts of the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, the *Yerushalmi*, and/or the *Bavli* and which has been continually developed through the present[11].

Rabbi Michael Katz offers a similar definition, specifically for Conservative Judaism. "Conservative Judaism teaches that *halakhah* is a code of Jewish living that represents the revealed will of God as codified by our rabbis and ultimately adopted and shaped by the Jewish people over the course of their four-thousand-year-long history."[12] Katz's definition identifies Conservative rabbis as the contemporary authority for determining the current authoritative canon of *halakhah* for practitioners of Conservative Judaism.

Kashrut

The Hebrew word כשרות, *kashrut*, literally means "fitness"[13]. The term is used to represent the subset of *Halakhah* containing the dietary laws[14]. These laws originate from the Torah and were then interpreted into practical laws as a part of the formation and development of *Halakhah*. I used the terms "traditional *kashrut*" and "*halakhic kashrut*" to refer to this body of dietary laws.[15] Whenever "*kashrut*" appears without an adjective, either in my writing or in a quotation, the term refers to the traditional collection of dietary laws.

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[11] Jacob Neusner, *The Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism*, vol. 6, *The Theology of Halakhah* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2001), xxxi-xxxii.
An extensive definition of halakhah can be found in The Theology of the Halakhah by Jacob Neusner.
[12] Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," xxxiii.
[13] Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud and Targumim* (New York: Judaica Press, 2004), 678.
[14] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice,* 302; Samuel H. Dresner, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time," in *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time & A Guide To Observance*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner and Seymour Siegel (Burning Bush Press, 1966), 9.
[15] A comprehensive guide for the dietary laws that make up *halakhic kashrut* can be found in *חֻקּוֹת הַחַיִּים: A Practical Guide to the Laws of Kashrut* by Rabbi Pinchas Cohen.

In addition to the traditional definition of *kashrut*, *kashrut* has been reinterpreted in some contemporary Jewish circles. Rabbi Mary Zamore, in the introduction to *Sacred Table*, suggests broadening the definition of *kashrut* to mean "Jewish sacred eating."[16] One example is Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi who introduced the term "Eco-*kashrut*." Eco-*kashrut* adds to the traditional dietary laws considerations for the ecological impact of one's food practices[17]. The question of whether to include Jewish values and ethical laws found in the *Halakhah* but not part of traditional *kashrut* in a contemporary definition is explored in chapter one, Ethics. In an effort to avoid confusing terminology, I use the terms "Jewish food practices" and "eating Jewishly" to describe all alternative practices to traditional *kashrut* that seek to provide a meaningful Jewish experience of procuring, preparing, and consuming food.

Eating Jewishly

In "What does it Mean to 'Eat Jewishly'?: Authorizing Discourse in the Jewish Food Movement in Toronto, Canada" by Aldea Mulhern she examines Shoresh through a conversation with its executive director Risa Alyson Cooper. Cooper asked four types of questions at a plenary of eating Jewishly "eating Jewishly as eating Jewish food, eating Jewishly as keeping kosher, eating Jewishly as a practice of Jewish ethics, and eating Jewishly as engagement with the divine."[18] These four questions are the basis of my three themes. I have synthesized the first two into the sociocultural aspect of Judaism. This text also provided the framework for understanding what it means to have Jewish food practices beyond keeping kosher or culturally Jewish foods

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[16] Mary Zamore, introduction to *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), xxvii.
[17] Mark Sameth, "The Broad Spectrum of Kashrut," *The Rituals & Practices of a Jewish Life: A Handbook for Personal Spiritual Renewal*, ed. Kerry M. Olitzky and Daniel Judson (Woodstock VT: Jewish Lights, 2002), 57.
[18] Aldea Mulhern, "What does it mean to 'eat Jewishly'?: Authorizing discourse in the Jewish food movement in Toronto, Canada," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* Religion & Food 26, (April): 335, https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67460.

and is a key term used throughout my analysis. Mulhern introduces the idea of 'eating Jewishly' where one can look at

> what it means to be a Jew and to eat. …'Eating Jewishly' is about conscious or mindful eating, understood and experienced as Jewish through the connection with 'Jewish' things like Jewish texts, Jewish tradition, or God, but also Jewish authors, Jewish institutions, Jewish camps and farms, and the experiences and concerns of ordinary Jews."[19]

This phrase is key to understanding the multitude of Jewish food practices explored and encouraged by authors I examine throughout this work. Many discuss food practices in Judaism outside of *kashrut* and the term eating Jewishly, which I may interchange with terms like Jewish eating or spiritual eating, all permit a more expansive understanding of Jewish food practices under a synthesized name.

Denominations and Movements

There is a variety of terminology to describe the range of Judaisms practiced around the world. The "Jewish Americans in 2020" study conducted by the Pew Research Center used the term "denomination" when asking about a Jewish person's religious self-identification.[20] Respondents were given the options of "Orthodox," "Conservative," "Reform," or "Other" with space to fill in their own answer. I use the terms "denomination," "movement," and "denominational movement" interchangeably.

In this thesis, I compare the denominations of Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaisms because of their parallel organizational structuctures. Each denomination has a movement which contains one or more affiliated rabbinical seminaries, an organization representing rabbis who identify with the movement, and an institution representing the synagogues of the denomination. It is entirely possible for an individual, a rabbi, and a

[19] Mulhern, "What does it mean to 'eat Jewishly'?," 339 and 343.
[20] "Jewish Americans in 2020."

synagogue to practice a denomination of Judaism without formal membership in the movement. However, I treat a movement as synonymous with its denomination of Judaism throughout this research for the sake of practicality.

I have not included Orthodox Judaism because Orthodox Judaism includes a wide range of seminaries, synagogue coalitions, and publishing companies making it an amalgamation of movements not a singular movement.[21] Additionally, I have excluded Jewish Renewal because, according to ALEPH, Alliance for Renewal Judaism, states "Jewish Renewal is a transdenominational approach to revitalizing Judaism" and therefore is not analyzed as a denominational movement.[22] Neither have been included because while they may be ways to identify Jewishly the movements structures do not function in line with Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism.

[21] "Branches of Orthodoxy," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed March 7, 2025, Branches of Orthodox Judaism
[22] "What is Jewish Renewal?," ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, accessed March 7, 2025, What is Jewish Renewal?.

Literature Review

Virtues of Keeping Kosher

Elliot Ratzman examines how kashrut has been domineered by Orthodox Jewry and has limited more liberal interests in Jewish food practices, "such accommodations of Orthodox strictures often sidelines other Jews and Jewish concerns … [like] *justice and loving kindness*."[23] Ratzman specifically looks at how the neo-*mussar* movement has opened up space for more expansive understandings of *kashrut*.[24] While Ratzman explores how neo-*mussar* may be an avenue to thread the needle between what he describes as the more liberal Jewish practices, which is anything outside of Orthodoxy, and the more right leaning beliefs of Orthodoxies, he too takes an intra-Jewish communal approach to understanding how *kashrut* may be an avenue for crossing communal boundaries. While I aim to look at how the liberal movements have taught *kashrut* along the lines of ethics, engagement with the divine, and sociocultural ideologies as a means to show their unique teachings have similar aims and may offer a place for cross-denominational experiences. Ratzman also focuses on these same three dimensions as points of tension between Orthodoxies and liberal Jewish practices, however, he comes to the conclusion of a new practice as the avenue for intra-Jewish connection and one that may include Orthodox communities. Like Ratzman, I am using *kashrut* to imagine how we can build connection, rather than divide us, across Jewish communities.

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[23] Elliot Ratzman, "The Virtues of Keeping Kosher," in *Feasting and Fasting: The History and Ethics of Jewish Food*, ed. Aaron S. Gross , Jody Myers and Jordan D. Rosenblum (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 305.

[24] The traditional *mussar* [emphasis added] movement was most often framed in the language of piety – oriented towards one's duties to God by upholding *halakhah* [emphasis added]. *Neomussar* [emphasis added] is first and foremost concerned with the Other. … Living a Jewish life is essentially one dedicated to 'bearing the burden of the Other.'" Ratzman, "The Virtues of Keeping Kosher," 311.

Be Holy for I am Holy

In this article, the author, Jay Eidelman, reflects on his experience teaching a college level course on Jewish food. Eidelman offers one way, albeit a very different one, that this topic has been engaged. He explains that his course was meant for college age students and the class's population ended up being predominantly non-Jewish and had taken at least one other course in religious studies. He used the lens of shechita to teach and to write his article on Jewish food culture. Here it can be seen that Jewish food has been taught across denominational lines, but in a non-Jewish setting. His aim was to show that food was important to the field of Judaic studies, not engage different Jewish communities in conversations about eating Jewishly.[25] It is helpful to see how and in what contexts there has been a survey teaching of Jewish food culture.

Texts in Tension

While Eidelman explores Jewish food in an academic setting, Meredith Woocher in her article "Texts in Tension: Negotiating Jewish Values in the Adult Jewish Learning Classroom" explores more broadly how Jewish communal spaces can be teaching spaces. Woocher shares that "'my job … is to bring together two sets of texts—the living texts of the students and their backgrounds and experiences, and the written texts of the tradition.'"[26] This lens of two texts and the ways they can both wrestle with each other and mesh together reflects the complexities of the liberal Judaisms described by by Ratzman. In the context of modernity these values systems can come into conflict, but I am interested in looking at how Jewish food may be a space for this wrestling to be productive and additive. As will be seen, many of these authors offer creative and alternative ways to imagine what it means to eat Jewishly beyond eating kosher according to

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[25] Jay M. Eidelman, "Be Holy for I am Holy: Food, Politics and the Teaching of Judaism," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 45, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368576.
[26] Woocher, "Texts in Tension," 22.

halakhah. Woocher shares that for many students engaging in "Jewish learning had given them the confidence to look at texts, traditions, and teachings 'how they want to,' not feeling constrained by external rules or expectations."[27] Additionally she shares that for many "personal choice, not tradition, is the road to authentic experience."[28] Woocher crucially helps scaffold Mulhern's idea of eating Jewishly being taught through these texts and courses as meaningful, if not more efficacious ways to help individuals find meaningful Jewish practice.

[27] Woocher, "Texts in Tension," 28.
[28] Woocher, "Texts in Tension," 28.

Chapter 1: Jewish Food Ethics

The production and consumption of food is central to the human experience. Every day, a person must make many choices regarding food. There are values and ethics which can guide each decision. Judaism provides *kashrut*, a framework for ethical behavior, and a values system to help inform food behaviors for Jews. The ethical aspect of *kashrut* refers to the internal components of traditional *kashrut* that are identified to be morally righteous, as well as, ethical guidelines derived from Jewish and/or universal values. These ethical considerations are usually presented with a biblical origin. The ethics of Jewish eating practices are defined in relation to moral behaviors rather than how closely one's behavior adheres to the *halakhah*. Included in this category are references to correlations between positive non-social, physical utility and Jewish food practices. While the ethics and values contained in this chapter can be derived from purely Jewish origins, they are not exclusive to Judaism. At times, *kashrut* is celebrated as a historical method for the observant Jew to live to a higher ethical standard than the societal standard. All three denominations have identified where traditional *kashrut* provides insufficient ethical guidelines for the contemporary world[29]. Thus, each denomination has employed Jewish values from non-*kashrut mitzvot* to enhance the ethics of food-related behaviors of its members.

[29] In 2008 Agriprocessors, a major kosher meat producer, was exposed for unethical labor practices, mistreatment of animals, and illegal financial practices. This scandal led to discourse around the relationship between kashrut and Jewish ethical obligations within and across denominations of Judaism. For further reading on the Agriprocessors scandal and its impact on religion and ethics discourse see Aaron S. Gross, *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), specifically chapter two.

Reform Approach

Rabbi Mary Zamore, in her essay "Eating our Values" in *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity* identifies eight core tenets central to eating Jewishly. *Kashrut* is just one of the eight core tenets according to Zamore. More than half overtly fall within the category of ethics. The eight values Zamore lists are *Bal Tashchit* - Environmentalism, *B'rachot* - Blessings, *Kesher* - Connection through Food, *Oshek* - Worker's Rights, *Sh'mirat HaGuf* - Preserving Our Health, *Tzaar Baalei Chayim* - Animal Rights, and *Tzedakah* and *Tzedek* - Charity and Social Justice.[30] For each tenet, Zamore includes its biblical origin (if there is one), examples of how one might apply the value to their practice of eating Jewishly, and possible benefits one gets when they elevate their practice by incorporating the value. Zamore describes *Kashrut* as

> *Kashrut* [emphasis added] is our Jewish relationship with food. Any time we allow Jewish law and values to inform our food choices, we are keeping Jewish dietary laws… When Jewish dietary laws influence our eating habits, we affirm our Jewish identities and connect to our greater Jewish community, our sacred tradition, and God.[31]

By listing *kashrut* as one of the eight values it gives the impression that the other seven values are not inherently contained within *kashrut*. Thus, the reader of the Reform Introduction to Judaism textbook is given an ambiguous impression on whether *kashrut* is essentially a matter of ethics or ethical eating by a Jew is but one possible expression of an authentic, personal *kashrut*.

Zamore and the contributing authors of *Sacred Table* offer a richer description of traditional *kashrut* and the ongoing process of creating and recreating Reform *kashrut*.[32] The latter, ought to incorporate the ethical values which already contain Jewish authority, but were

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[30] Mary Zamore, "Eating our Values," in *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity: A Reader for the Union for Reform Judaism's Introduction to Judaism Course*, ed. Rabbi Beth Lieberman and Rabbi Hara Person (New York: CCAR Press, 2017), 220.
[31] Zamore, "Eating our Values," 220.
[32] For further reading on recreating *kashrut* in a Reform context see *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), specifically "Part 1 - Perspective: History and Trends of Jewish Dietary Practices within Reform Judaism," 1-118.

traditionally considered a different aspect of *halakhah* from the laws of *kashrut*. Whether one encounters Zamore's shorter or longer work, the conclusion is the same. Jewish values and ethical considerations are critical in the development of Jewish food-related practices; the sum of which can be the definition of a reclaimed, Reform *kashrut*.[33]

Rabbi Mark Washofsky's *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* focuses primarily on the social value of *kashrut*, but he does offer an ethical responsibility as a final reasoning why a Reform Jew may choose to observe *kashrut*. While Washofsky's primary focus is on the socio-cultural importance of *kashrut*, he does acknowledge that there is a secondary source of meaning found in ethics. Washofsky sees dietary restrictions as an opportunity to press one's ethical responsibility toward nature.[34] Zamore sees this differently because her focus goes beyond the *halakhic* definition of *kashrut* and imagines other value-based eating practices as holding equal importance to *halakhic kashrut*.[35] Washofsky and the authors in *The Sacred Table* focus more on a *halakhic*-centered idea of *kashrut* and build the values from those laws. Washofsky only addresses ethics as a minor point of consideration, while Zamore seeks to redefine *kashrut* such that ethical eating is an essential component of Reform *kashrut*. Given these two approaches, we can see that when teaching Reform Jews, ethics is an important consideration for an individuals practice of eating Jewishly, but given the multitude of Reform *kashruts*, there is no consensus wither to preserve the traditional definition of *kashrut* or reform the definition to expand it to include wider Jewish ethics. There is agreement that pursuing an ethical food practice is an authentic, but not in-of-itself complete, avenue towards eating Jewishly.

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[33] However, the role of ethics does not exclude the importance of spiritual and socio-cultural aspects of *kashrut*.
[34] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*.
[35] Zamore, *The Sacred Table*.

Conservative Approach

In Rabbi Isaac Klein's *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, a Conservative guide, in both his section on *shechita* and his section on milk and meat and mixing kosher and non-kosher foods he talks in depth about the ethics surrounding *kashrut*. It is noteworthy that Klein includes ethics since his guide is primarily focused on *halakhic* observance and the guide was published prior to the Agriprossesor scandal which elevated ethical considerations within traditional *kashrut*-observant communities.[36] Klein describes *shechita* as "The use of a special method of slaughtering has been explained as the fulfillment of the commandment of *tzaar baalei chaim*–prevention of cruelty to animals."[37] He supports his definition by citing Maimonides and Nachmanides as rabbinic authorities who arrived at the same conclusion. Even though Klein identifies an ethical basis for *kashrut*'s ritual slaughter, he impresses upon the reader that *shechita* is a prescribed ritual. Thus, only *shechita*, as it is traditionally understood, fulfills one's obligation. Other methods of slaughter may minimize animal suffering, but only *shechita* may be used in kosher meat production according to the majority opinion and is then the only way to make meat ethical.[38]

Rabbi Paul Drazen's section "The Dietary Laws" in the collection *The Observant Jewish Life* has a much smaller, but still present focus on ethics, which examines the reverence of life, Magen Tzedek, and the vegetarian ideal. Only Drazen's fourth and final reason for keeping *kosher* is about ethics. Traditional *kashrut* does not typically include many ethical values-based *mitzvot*, even though they are important in the production of food. As such, Drazen describes a gap in *kashrut* standards that had ignored the treatment of workers in food production. He argues

[36] Klein's book was published in 1979, while the agriprocessor scandal took place nearly thirty years later in May of 2008 (Gross, *The Question of the Animal and Religion*, 26-27).
[37] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 308.
[38] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 308.

that the creation of Magen Tzedek offers a strong solution. Drazen writes, "the project has helped to move the discussion of ethics in *kashrut* to the mainstream *kashrut* supervision agencies and has thus made consumers of all stripes sensitive to the meta-issues involved in *kashrut* observance."[39] While Magen Tzedek has moved the discussion of ethics in *kashrut*, Drazen defers further coverage of this topic for his colleagues to cover in chapters within the section *"Ahavat Ḥesed*, Deeds of Loving Kindness."

In the chapter, "Animals" within the section *"Ahavat Ḥesed*, Deeds of Loving Kindness," Rabbi Edward M. Friedman focuses on ethical and moral guidance around the raising of animals for slaughter and the slaughter of animals under the principle of *tzaar baalei hayyim*, animal rights.[40] In the chapter, "The Environment" in this same section, eco-theologian Rabbi Lawrence Troster offers the reader a perspective on the Conservative Movement's *halakhic* decisions on matters related to food production and consumption which were informed by the ethical *mitzvot* introduced by the previous authors.[41]

While ethics are present in both Conservative general practice guides, both maintain the traditional separation of *kashrut* and ethical commandments. Even the value of "reverence for life" is treated as secondary to the need to practice said value within the ritual practices of traditional *halakhah*. Katz added to *The Observant Life* matters of ethical behavior which had not been addressed in Klein's earlier work. Yet, as discussed earlier, the ethical behavior sections, which discuss food production and consumption are not treated as essential elements of *kashrut*; nor are they seen as significant motivations for one to observe a personal *kashrut*. Thus, eating

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[39] Paul Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," in *The Observant Life*, 307.
[40] Edward M. Friedman, "Animals," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, ed. Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 867-869.
[41] Lawrence Troster, "The Environment," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, ed. Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 875-893.

Jewishly as a Conservative Jew entails *halakhic* kashrut observance and adherence to Jewish food ethics. One who follows the complete Conservative practice guides would be tasked with living out the same Jewish food ethics as those instructed by the other liberal denominations.

Reconstructionist Approach

As mentioned in the literature review, Kaplan's concept of Judaism as a civilization influences the ways in which Reconstructionism understands the relationships between Jewish food ethics and *kashrut*. Rabbi David Teutsch, in *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Everyday Living*, identifies the important meaning Reconstructionist Jews find through their ethics-infused *kashrut* practices. In the introduction to his guide, Teutsch identifies five principles which his guide rests upon. The fourth principle is reinterpretation and renewal. He uses *kashrut* as an example of this principle in practice and defines *kashrut* as, "an ethical guide designed to sanctify the act of eating."[42] This definition presents a concept where ethics-informed relationships with food, within a Jewish context, is *kashrut*. Therefore, it is logical that this Reconstructionist guide structures its chapter on *kashrut* by first identifying its biblical origins then exploring the values which will inform the reader's value-based decision making process. Teutsch includes the values that focus on minimizing or avoiding pain to animals (*tza'ar ba'aley ḥayim*), concern for the environment (*haganat hateva*), avoiding waste (*bal tash'ḥit*), the treatment of workers (though without a hebrew/biblical equivalent), and fairness (*tzedek*).[43] Each value is accompanied by at least one example of how individuals have applied it to their personal food practice or *kashrut*. Teutsch presents two important aspects of Reconstructionist thought on the connection between *kashrut* and ethics. First, *kashrut* is a practice of living one's ethics in addition to the traditional

[42] David Teutsch, *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, vol.1, *Everyday Living (Philadelphia: RRC Press, 2011),* XXI.
[43] Teutsch, *Everyday Living*, 524-527.

kashrut aspects of spirituality and sociocultural influences. Second, the ethics that influence one's personal *kashrut* can come from Jewish, as well as, non-Jewish origins.[44]

Comparative Analysis

When defining the ethical aspects of *kashrut*, one must determine which ethical *mitzvot* to include in the definition and which ethical *mitzvot*, while impacting how one may eat Jewishly, are not inherent to *kashrut* specifically. The Conservative Movement's sources unanimously maintain the traditional *halakhic* boundaries of *kashrut*. Magen Tzedek is referenced by every publication I analyzed in this chapter as an example of Jewish food ethics elevating eating Jewishly beyond the ethical aspect of traditional *kashrut*. On the organization's website it describes its purpose as

> The Magen Tzedek Commission has developed a food certification program that combines the rabbinic tradition of Torah with Jewish values of social justice, assuring consumers and retailers that kosher food products have been produced in keeping with exemplary Jewish ethics in the area of labor concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, consumer issues and corporate integrity.[45]

Magen Tzedek only certifies food products which already have a *kosher* hechsher. Within the Conservative Movement there is a major effort to maintain a traditional definition of which *mitzvot* are included within the dietary laws of *kashrut*.

Both the Reconstructionist and Reform movements acknowledge the traditional definition of *kashrut*. The Reconstructionist movement prioritizes this point more than the Reform movement as exemplified by the detailed tutorial for traditional *kashrut* observance in *A Guide to Jewish Practice*. The Reform general practice resources describe traditional *kashrut* only in brief overviews. Both movements differ from Conservative by encouraging one to

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[44] Non-Jewish food practices can be incorporated into Judaism and thus become authentically Jewish according to Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*.
[45] "The Magen Tzedek Standard," Magen Tzedek, accessed February 16, 2025, Magen Tzedek.

reform/reconstruct the definition of *kashrut* to include the ethical *mitzvot* related to food habits which were traditionally excluded. Both movements thus make it possible for food products with a *hechsher* to be deemed not *kosher* on ethical grounds.[46] Whereas, Magen Tzedek does not review the *kosher* status of the products it certifies. Thus, the products Magen Tzedek does not give its ethical certification to are *kosher*, but transgressive of the ethical values it obligates from its products.

Ultimately, all three movements encourage varying degrees of autonomy of its members resulting in a range of individual observances of the ethical aspects of Jewish food habits. All three movements identify the same ethical values using almost the exact same Jewish sources.[47] As seen in this chapter, there is little correlation between movement and the practical implementation of these values, other than the popularity of vegetarianism in Reconstructionist Judaism.[48] I understand the variation in emphasizing the ethical values related to Jewish food habits, whether it is the food one purchases or how they may eat Jewishly, and how to implement these values as a result of the personal preferences of the author.

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[46] A Reform example of redefining a kosher food as *t'reifah*, unfit, comes from Temple Emanu-El, Livingston, New Jersey, led by Rabbi Peter E. Kasdan. In 1973, the temple's board of trustees passed a resolution ruling head lettuce as *t'reifah* in support of the organizing efforts to improve working conditions of lettuce workers.
Peter E. Kasdan, "A Look Back at the Reform Movement's Response to the United Farm Workers Grape Boycott," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 301.
A Reconstructionist example comes from Aliza Green, who believes that Reconstructionist Jewish eating for those who eat meat must go beyond traditional *kashrut* to include considerations for the animal's well being prior to slaughter.
Aliza Green, James Greene, and Micah Becker-Klein, "An Approach to Food, Kashrut and Justice Through a Reconstructionist Lens," filmed October 5th, 2021, Reconstructing Judaism, 14:20. An Approach to Food, Kashrut and Justice Through a Reconstructionist Lens.

[47] For example, the value of *tzaar baalei chayim*, animal rights is introduced with the biblical source Deuteronomy 14:21.
Teutsch, *Everyday Living*, 524-525; Zamore, "Eating our Values," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 223; Dresner, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time," 70.

[48] I hypothesize that this is a result of social influences within Reconstructionist communities more than a result of specific Reconstructionist ideology.

Chapter 2: Engagement with the Divine

Introduction

Engagement with the divine relates to spiritual experiences, sacredness, and that which transcends the physical. Within Jewish eating and *kashrut*, I include in this category practices, experiences, and benefits which go beyond physical relationships with food. For example, the blessings said before and after a meal, non-logic based reasons for why an animal is *kosher* or *treyf*, and any active experiencing of the Divine. Regardless of Jewish movement at times, and depending on one's theology, a component of *kashrut* and Jewish food practices may be spiritual and also a matter of ethics or social and cultural significance. For clarity, I have tried to focus this section only on matters which are predominantly focused on one's relationship with God or spiritual experiences. Cases which cover multiple topics are explored in the other chapters. Thus, this chapter explores the ways each movement understands *kashrut* and eating Jewishly as part of the Jewish experience of straddling the mundane and the sacred throughout daily life.

Reform Approach

In *Jewish Living*, Washofsky opens his review of *kashrut* in Reform Judaism with the instruction that "each Jewish family should study *kashrut* and consider whether it may enhance the sanctity of their home."[49] He defends traditional dietary practices as valid expressions of Reform Judaism. However, Washofsky does not mention spirituality in his examples of possible motivation for a Reform Jew to observe traditional elements of *kashrut*. Washofsky does not argue on behalf of a spiritually-meaningful food practice. Rather, he rejects the classical Reform

[49] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 180.

view which denied the possibility that a Reform Jew could find spiritual benefits from *kashrut*, specifically how *kashrut* may bring the sacred into the home. One would need prior experience with *kashrut* to understand how it could be a meaningful pathway for engaging with the divine.

Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity addresses eating Jewishly within the section "Creating a Jewish Home and Life." There is one essay before the food-related essays by Wasserman and Zamore. The first essay is "The Jewish Home: From the Physical to the Spiritual" by Rabbi Joui M. Hessel. Thus, the discussion on food is placed within a larger framework where Jewish practices transform the mundane into the sacred. Even though Zamore uses more of her essay to describe ethical aspects, her writing on the spiritual aspects of Jewish food practices affirm spirituality as equally important to the ethical considerations.[50] Zamore identifies the blessings over food as a primary mode for turning eating into a spiritual practice of eating Jewishly. However, with regards to *kashrut*, she does not mention spirituality. Zamore's primary focus in "Eating Our Values" is on ethics, one of her key values is focused on blessings connecting to this concept that eating and *kashrut* reflect a sense of spirituality.[51]

Just as Zamore offers a concise, yet meaningful representation of spirituality within food-related practices in *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity,* she takes the same approach with *Sacred Table*. The penultimate lesson from the study guide's overview course is on spirituality. Only one of the ten lesson themes covers spirituality as the primary lens to study one's relationship with food.[52] Rabbi Ruth Abusch-Magder explores spirituality in her chapter, "Food Preparation as a Holy Act: *Hafrashat Challah*." She goes beyond the spirituality of blessing meals and *kashrut* to explore the ritual of *hafrashat challah*, the separating of challah. Abusch-Magder describes the opportunity one has in this ritual as "while *challah* bread has the

[50] Zamore, "Eating our Values," *Sacred Table*, 218.
[51] Zamore, "Eating our Values," *Sacred Table*, 219.
[52] "Sacred Table Study Guide" (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 2-3.

potential to feed the body, the ritual of *hafrashat challah* has the potential to feed our souls."[53] While this ritual is not suggested to be part of a Reform *kashrut*, it is an example of a ritual which is primarily about engaging with the divine and even one that reduces the amount of edible food for the meal for the sake of transforming the food's metaphysical status. The concept of heightening one's engagement with the divine by eating Jewishly is made more frequently within the Reconstructionist and Conservative resources than in the Reform ones. Thus, Abusch-Magder's exploration of *hafrashat challah* may be more relatable to her Reform readers than considering this concept within traditional *kashrut*. Perhaps, one may be inspired to seek the experience of engaging with the divine found when preparing challah in other contexts of eating Jewishly.

The Reform practice guides and introduction to Judaism resources encourage developing a sacred relationship with food. The spirituality of *kashrut* is diluted in exchange for a broader range of methods for personal spiritual experiences regarding food. Zamore and Abusch-Magder offer paths for creating a "sacred table" which emphasize blessings, rituals, and the formation of dietary practices which spur one into awareness of their covenantal relationship with God. Washofsky acknowledges that traditional *kashrut* observance can achieve this spiritual awareness, however, he considers socio-cultural and ethical reasons for *kashrut* observance. The Reform sources I have reviewed do not discuss the *halakhic* categories of kosher and *treyf* from the lens of spirituality. I posit that this is due to the general Reform approach to *halakhah* and there is little to be said on the matter since the spiritual significance of *kashrut* is best experienced rather than taught in a book or classroom.

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[53] Ruth Abusch-Magder, "Food Preparation as a Holy Act: *Hafrashat Challah*," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 410.

Conservative Approach

In *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time & A Guide To Observance*, Rabbi Samuel Dresner identifies spirituality and holiness as the primary reason for observing *kashrut*. Dresner wrote his essay, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time" because he believed that if Jews better understood the "why" of *kashrut*, then they would be more willing to observe it. In the second half of the essay, Dresner explores the socio-cultural reasons why Jews do not observe traditional *kashrut* and his solutions to those challenges. I will explore the second section in the chapter on socio-cultural aspects of *kashrut*. Dresner describes a Jewish understanding of the nature of the world as "Judaism says nature is neither holy nor unholy, but is waiting to be made holy and thereby sublimates the natural desires of man through a system of *mitzvot*, to the service of God."[54] Thus, sacredness is at the heart of *kashrut*. Through the eating of certain foods, following the prescribed methods for preparing food, and the rest of the dietary laws, one actualizes the holy potential of nature. Simultaneously, the Jew also hallows oneself through this process. Dresner connects this to the commandment of becoming a holy people.[55]

Judaism is a continuous cycle of imbuing the mundane with holiness and becoming aware of the holiness one encounters in life. Dresner describes *kashrut* within this framework. Within his Conservative context, it is logical that Dresner emphasizes the importance of abiding by the *halakhah*. Through *mitzvot*, as traditionally defined, the Jewish people have the methods of actualizing holiness. How might Dresner answer questions such as "can one say a blessing over a cheeseburger" or "if technological progress creates a method of slaughter more humane than *shechitah*, would one still be obligated to slaughter according to traditional Jewish

[54] Dresner, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time," 14.
[55] Dresner, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time," 18-19.

methods?"[56] Dresner would likely say no because observing *mitzvot* is both about acting according to the values of a *mitzvah* and achieving holiness through the divinely prescribed means.

In Klein's *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* he explains to the Conservative learner that *kashrut* is a practice in spirituality. Klein elevates spirituality as the primary rationale for *kashrut*. He introduces *kashrut* as "the Torah regards the dietary laws as a discipline in holiness, a spiritual discipline imposed on a biological activity."[57] The spirituality of *kashrut* comes from the discipline required to observe the many restrictive dietary laws. As a practice, one rises above their biological urges and fulfills a *mitzvah* through the act of eating, especially eating Jewishly. This may come from the everyday *kashrut* or the extra restrictions on food and food-related actions during Shabbat or Passover.

Klein adds a secondary aspect of spirituality by citing the suggested purpose of the dietary laws given by Dresner in *Jewish Dietary Laws*. As previously mentioned, Dresner understands the dietary laws as having the purpose of teaching Jews to revere life. While reverence for life is an ethical value, Klein views it as an aspiration to transcend biological satisfaction which is a sacred pursuit.[58]

In Drazen's chapter on dietary law from *The Observant Life*, he focuses on spirituality as the most important aspect of *kashrut*. Drazen outlines several potential benefits gained from observing *kashrut*. He lists them starting with what he believes is the essential impact, the infusing of spirituality into one of the most primal of daily actions. *Kashrut* is the means for achieving this infusion.[59] Drazen describes this process as,

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[56] Dresner, "The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time," 14.
[57] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 303.
[58] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 303-304.
[59] Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," 305-306.

> "Keeping kosher forces us to stop and think about what we eat, when we eat, even about the plates on which we eat and the pots and pans in which we cook. In turn, this effort to ensure that we are following the rules appropriately forces us to focus on God's structure for living and eating and, in so doing, to allow a spark of holiness to illuminate our everyday lives."[60]

Drazen emphasizes God's structure for living and eating as the way to access holiness. Within this Conservative source, "God's structure" is an allusion to *halakhah*.

All three Conservative resources share the perspective that through adherence to *halakhic kashrut* one accesses holiness in their food practice. Furthermore, *halakhic kashrut* is the only path for a Jew to access the holy potential in their food-related behaviors. Each Conservative rabbi identifies different spiritual purposes or benefits from observing *kashrut*. Dresner emphasises *kashrut* as a transformative process of turning the mundane into sacred. Similarly, Klein focuses on the discipline *kashrut* requires as a practice of spiritual discipline which enables a person to transcend their primal self. Drazen adds that the structure of *kashrut* is part of the greater structure of *halakhah* which is how one accesses the holiness of life. The Conservative approach to the spirituality of *kashrut* is that this is the inherited system by which Jews can realize the sacredness of the natural world and the way to heighten one's own spirituality beyond their most basic needs towards divine service.

Reconstructionist Approach

Alpert and Staub place spirituality at the heart of Reconstructionist *kashrut* in *Exploring Judaism, a Reconstructionist Approach*. They offer a descriptive definition of *kashrut* as it is practiced across the spectrum of Reconstructionist practices. Alpert and Staub state that "for Reconstructionists, keeping kosher is not about *obeying* a divine commandment, but is rather a

[60] Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," 306.

means of sanctifying their lives—a value that must be balanced with other values."[61] While I discuss Jewish values primarily within the chapter on ethics, Alpert and Staub's definition of *kashrut* articulates a theology in which the application of Jewish values, beyond just those of spirituality, is in of itself a path to spiritual experiences. A meal is sanctified through a combination of reciting blessings, intentional choices of what is eaten (whether guided by traditional *kashrut* or a Jewish value-based reconstructed *kashrut*), and with whom one eats. Alpert and Staub present the ongoing process within Reconstructionist communities where traditional *kashrut* is valued as a communal spiritual practice, even while individuals may choose a personal *kashrut* that deviates from tradition in favor of applying Jewish, ethical values. All Reconstructionist approaches seek to achieve a meaningful application of values which leads to a sanctified and spiritual experience of eating.

In *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, Teutsch depicts similar spiritual aspects of *kashrut* as Alpert and Staub. Like Alpert and Staub, Teutsch identifies *kashrut* as a spiritual practice because it is the method by which a Jew sanctifies the act of eating. It also can reflect one's intentionality regarding their food habits as an ethical and spiritual experience. He states, "the Torah is explicit, the goal is not sanitation, but sanctification. Observing *kashrut* [emphasis added] brings holiness and humanity to an act that we have in common with all animals."[62] By presenting eco-*kashrut*, traditional *kashrut*, and vegetarianism/veganism as a method of *kashrut* observance, Teutsch teaches that the spiritual significance of Jewish food practices can be accessed with a range of practices in Reconstructionist Judaism. Traditional *kashrut* is not the only path for sacred eating and to eat Jewishly ought to incorporate engaging with the divine.

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[61] Alpert and Staub, *Exploring Judaism, a Reconstructionist Approach*, 100.
[62] Teutsch, *Everyday Living*, 522.

Reconstructionist approaches toward *kashrut* aim to achieve sacred living through applied Jewish values and to have spiritually significant encounters in one's food relationships. Both Alpert and Staub and Teutsch provide multiple pathways Reconstructionist Jews take to achieve these goals because Reconstructionist Judaism holds space for traditional and non-traditional interpretations of *kashrut*. This is because both sources rely on definitions using the term "meaningful." An experience or system of Jewish eating can only be evaluated as "meaningful" on an individual level and thus there are many ways to observe a spiritually fulfilling *kashrut* in Reconstructionist Judaism. This does not mean that anything goes. *Halakhic kashrut* and traditional interpretations have a long history of being spiritually meaningful and thus provide a proven practice for many. Non-traditional approaches are still guided by established Jewish values. Blessings are invited as means to engage the spiritual component of eating.

Comparative Analysis

Kashrut and Jewish eating is a spiritually significant practice. Resources published by all three movements identify spirituality when one engages in their method for sanctifying their act of eating, they also sanctify themself. Additionally, they become actively aware of the holiness found within the natural world and possibly their relationship with God. The major difference between the movements is the role of *halakhah* and therefore whether traditional *kashrut* is the exclusive way Jews can access spiritually rich food habits. Conservative Judaism requires adherence to their *halakhah* while being open to additional personal practices that can be done alongside *halakhic kashrut* for sacred eating. Whereas, Reconstructionist and Reform Judaisms accept creative interpretations of *kashrut* to achieve the same experiences. Reform resources mention spiritual aspects of *kashrut* less frequently than the other movements' materials. I do not

believe that this suggests Reform considers spirituality to be a less significant component of *kashrut* and Jewish food practices. Rather, the emphasis on individual experience to determine a worthwhile spiritual food practice makes it difficult to describe or prescribe how one gleans spiritual benefit from their version of *kashrut* or Jewish eating. Reconstructionist Judaism's resources describe the spirituality of Jewish eating similarly to Reform Judaism's resources, however, they go into greater detail and place significant weight on spirituality as a core purpose of *kashrut*.

Chapter 3: Sociocultural Implications

Introduction

Whether it is Abraham welcoming guests into his tent or which table a child sits at in a school cafeteria, how and with whom one eats have a defining influence on social relationships. Eating according to *halakhic kashrut* standards has been a key way to develop an internal Jewish community, foster intra-Jewish relationships, and protect the Jewish community from the broader world. Each movement has found ways to adhere to, adapt to, or justify the standards in the modern age. A primary focus for sociocultural rationale across Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist is the idea of protecting Jewish community from the outside community, whether historically, or in the present. Interestingly, *kashrut* takes on a sort of anthropomorphic characteristic as a protector of the Jewish people from harm. By eating Jewishly, Jews preserve their collective identity. In Reform and Reconstructionist contexts the authors acknowledge that this complete separation is not feasible, not desirable, and can even be harmful to living in an integrated society.

Reform Approach

Tina Wasserman's essay "The People of the Food" in *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity* focuses on how Jewish food creates social boundaries between Jews and non-Jews and affects Jewish migration patterns. Wasserman introduces the Reform reader to Jewish food and dietary practices by starting with the historical role food plays in creating social boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. She identifies this separation as a necessary survival tactic and the obligations of *kashrut* motivated traveling Jews to settle in places with existing Jewish

populations. The demands of *kashrut* and eating with fellow Jews fostered a sense of community which preserved the Jewish people throughout history. "This sense of community has sustained us throughout time and our dispersion. It has allowed us to sometimes thrive but always survive in the face of insurmountable odds."[63] Wasserman argues that two things primarily make food Jewish the laws of *kashrut* and the laws of Shabbat.[64] She concludes with a message to the reader that traditional recipes, which are *kosher*, can connect them to the Jewish history of survival and perseverance.[65] For Wasserman, food taking on these ritualistic laws is a key way for food to allow Jewish people to connect more deeply with their Judaism. Wasserman brings up an interesting point that *kashrut* and its laws around separation have aided in the survival of the Jewish people, but what she fails to acknowledge is that it has also prevented Jewish people from eating with those outside their community, which may be equally important to Jewish survival.

Rabbi Mary Zamore writes in "Creating a Jewish Home" to the same audience as Wasserman: a Reform Jew who is unlikely to keep kosher and therefore, unlikely to be familiar with the laws of *kashrut*. Her focus is on how "Keeping some or all of the laws of *kashrut* [emphasis added] will distinguish your holiday table from the other daily and festive meals you serve throughout the year, it will connect your home to Jews throughout the world, and it will model living Judaism for your family."[66] Much like Wasserman, Zamore, focuses on positives of keeping some level of *kashrut* observance to connect the Jewish people, but like Wasserman she ignores the reality that *kashrut* created and maintains a social boundary between Jews and non-Jews. As much as *kashrut* creates internal connection it also creates isolation from the

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[63] Tina Wasserman, "The People of the Food," in *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity: A Reader for the Union for Reform Judaism's Introduction to Judaism Course*, ed. Rabbi Beth Lieberman and Rabbi Hara Person (New York: CCAR Press, 2017), 214.
[64] Wasserman, "The People of the Food," 214.
[65] Wasserman, "The People of the Food," 217.
[66] Mary Zamore "Creating a Jewish Home," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 220.

external communities. There is merit seen from other Reform writers of the importance of this social mixing with non-Jews that is not addressed, when focusing on the merits of eating Jewishly.

In Washofsky's chapter "The Life Cycle" *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* he examines four reasons that show how *kashrut* may be adapted in a Reform setting; the first three reasons are socio-cultural. Those three reasons are

> "(1) identification with the contemporary and historical Jewish religious experience; (2) the authority of the religious tradition itself, both biblical and Rabbinic; [and] (3) a desire to have a home in which any Jew might feel free to eat;"

The fourth reason focuses on ethics and was previously addressed.[67] While Washofsky does not intend for his list to be exhaustive, the examples he lists elevate socio-cultural reasons above spiritual and ethical reasons. Washofsky acknowledges that there are many ways Reform Jews understand and implement *kashrut* into their lives. Two of the three reasons Washofskys argues for is a connection with a larger Jewish peoplehood, both past and present. The other reason is a respect of the Jewish tradition. Washofsky emphasizes that a strength of *kashrut* is as a means to connect and develop Jewish relationships and community across denominational boundaries and Jewish time.

Rabbi Carole Balin in her essay "Making every Forkful Count: Reform Jews, *Kashrut*, and Mindful Eating, 1840-2010," offers a nuanced understanding of Reform Judaism's relationship to *kashrut* and a helpful response to Wasserman and Zamore's lack of attention to the boundaries created by eating Jewishly. "Reform Jews have rejected, adapted, resuscitated, embraced, and even invented Jewish dietary law."[68] Balin astutely argues that in the American

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[67] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 180-182.
[68] Carole Balin, "Making every Forkful Count: Reform Jews, *Kashrut*, and Mindful Eating, 1840-2010," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 6.

context especially, a rejection of *kashrut* permitted Jewish people to climb the class ladder because those social boundaries no longer existed. This is possible because Reform Judaism is borne out of a mindset of elasticity and that traditions meld with the circumstances around them. She continues by arguing that as equality and equal rights were widening, Reform Judaism felt it could put back up boundaries and no longer prove themselves to the culture they had assimilated into.[69] This brings us into the present expression of *kashrut* in Reform Judaism which says if some or all *kashrut* practices are a meaningful way to express one's own Judaism, link them to other Jews and Jewish history more broadly, and encourages ethical discipline. Bellin reflects the historical reality of Reform Jewish practice and how it has adapted in the present day.

Wasserman, Zamore, Washofsky, and Balin each see Reform *kashrut* as centrally located in a socio-cultural context. They each use a historical lens to justify where they have situated their Reform theology on *kashrut* as there is much more space for individual interpretation within the Reform movement. Everyone except Balin discusses how important *kashrut* can be in developing Jewish community and individual Jewish identity, which reflects a newer Reform opinion and is surprising in the historical context of the Reform movement, which they all failed to address. Balin offers a historical lens of how the Reform movement came to be out of an aspiration towards assimilation while maintaining a Jewish identity. Balin offers the helpful context that by ridding one's Jewish practice of *kashrut* it permitted social mixing that allowed Jewish people to climb the class ladder that has opened up the opportunities for practices described by the former three authors.

[69] Balin, "Making Every Forkful Count," 6-9.

Conservative Approach

In his section "The Dietary Laws" within *The Observant Life*, Rabbi Paul S. Drazen argues that the focus of Conservative *kashrut* is on spirituality, but sees it as an important way to develop socio-cultural Jewish identity. The social impact of *kashrut* observance is an outcome rather than an essential purpose of *kashrut*. The social outcome is a positive one as Drazen writes,

> Keeping kosher also facilitates and strengthens Jewish identification. Faithfully observing the laws of *kashrut* helps maintain the connection between our own generation and past generations of Jews. Taking care with our eating also creates a link among Jews today by establishing an overarching bond with them that transcends the details of ethnic cuisine or dining customs.[70]

By keeping kosher, a Jew consistently strengthens their Jewish identity and fosters a sense of connection with all Jews (that also observe *halakhic kashrut*). Furthermore, Drazen describes a majority opinion among Conservative rabbis, which do not favor extra-*halakhic* rules which exist only to restrict social interactions with non-Jews. This pragmatic approach not to construct extra-*halakhic* social barriers by many Conservative rabbis is discussed within the discussion on the *kashrut* for food prepared by non-Jews. These rules are an example of a stringency that would render otherwise *kosher* food unfit for the sake of minimizing social interactions between Jews and non-Jews.[71] Drazen represents the Conservative movement's efforts to navigate the tensions between *halakhah*, the value of intra-Jewish socializing, and the value or post-modern realities of interfaith social mixing.

In *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner exclusively focuses on the spirituality of *kashrut* in part one of his essay, "The Problem of Understanding." He only adds

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[70] Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," 306-307.
[71] Drazen, "The Dietary Laws," 323.

the social implications of *halakhic kashrut* observance within part two, "The Problem of Doing." He expands upon his understanding of *kashrut* as a means by which Jews become a holy people[72] by citing the Hebrew word for holiness, *k'dushah*, as also meaning to set apart.[73] Thus, Dresner takes the position that the ways that *kashrut* observance limits a Jew's ability to eat with their non-Jewish neighbors is both intentional and a positive result. The limitation on social mixing is, according to Dresner, a defense against assimilation which has maintained the Jewish people's continued existence throughout history[74]. Dresner concludes his praise of particularism with the words of the prayer *Aleinu*. In this prayer there is praise for the particularism of Israel as God's chosen people followed with the universal vision of a better future where all serve under God's rule.

In *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, Rabbi Isaac Klein sparsely touches upon the social implications of observing *kashrut*. This is consistent with Klein's purpose of creating a guide for personal observance of Conservative Judaism.[75] Thus, Klein does not participate in discourse over the social challenges and benefits of *kashrut* observance. This discourse is both beyond the scope of this practical guide and presumably one who uses this guide would share Klein's understanding that *kashrut* observance is an obligation and not a choice. Therefore, Klein touches upon social aspects of *kashrut* briefly in his explanation of kosher wine and the separation of milk and meat.

Klein mentions that a secondary reason for the rules for kosher wine were to limit social mixing with non-Jews. He does not offer a judgment on the value of interfaith social mixing in this section. He does address this subject in chapters on marriage. Klein's strongest statement on

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[72] Leviticus 11:44-45 and Deuteronomy 14:21.
[73] Dresner, "The Problem of Doing" in *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning For Our Time & A Guide To Observance*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner and Seymour Siegel (Burning Bush Press, 1966),44.
[74] Dresner, "The Problem of Doing," 46-47.
[75] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, xxiii.

kashrut as a social experience is "the separation of milk and meat is the most prominent distinguishing mark of the Jewish home."[76] In this one statement, Klein elevates *kashrut* to the most significant way a Jew can be identified as Jewish within their home. Conversely, without *kashrut* observance, a Jewish home lacks a significant component of its perceived Jewishness.

Throughout each of the texts from the Conservative movement, Drazen, Desner and Siegel, and Klein each view the social implications of *kashrut* as secondary to the central importance of *kashrut* as a *halakhic* practice. Each focuses specifically on how keeping kosher prevents social mixing with non-Jews. Drazen argues this is more a result not the intended impact of a kosher practice. Dresner and Siegel say this social separation has been an important barrier against assimilation. Drazen also states that most Conservative rabbis do not favor extra-*halakhic* stringencies for *kashrut*. This is because these rules aim to add extra social barriers between Jews and non-Jews which is seen as undesirable. There is an ever present tension trying to balance how many social barriers to maintain and what is the right amount of assimilation and intra-Jewish socializing. If the balance weighs too heavily to either side, Jewish survival is jeopardized. From the Conservative perspective *kashrut* observance is a major way one identifies themself as Jewish, which impacts identity markers and formation within and between Jewish communities. They all agree that *kashrut* observance provides more positive social benefits for individual Jews and Jewish communities than negative impacts.

Reconstructionist Approach

According to Rabbi David A. Teutsch in *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, in the Reconstructionist movement *kashrut* is positively valued as a way to create bonds within the in group, the Jewish community and strengthen identification with the in group. In reference to

[76] Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, 360.

Mordecai Kaplan's 'Judaism as a civilization' theology, Teutsch notes that *what* and *how* members of a civilization eat is a core mechanism to define a civilization. Teutsch offers a common reason that motivates Reconstructionist practitioners to observe *kashrut*, "This strengthens Jewish vitality and unity (*klal Yisrael*). … It is true that keeping kosher makes it possible for many more Jews… to eat with each other, creating another tie that links *klal Yisrael*."[77] Teutsch encourages one to observe *kashrut* as a social commitment to Jewish peoplehood through the value of *klal Yisrael*. Simultaneously, he acknowledges that there are some Jews who observe with such stringency that they do not respect other interpretations of *halakhic kashrut* and therefore would not eat at a Reconstructionist Jew's home.

After presenting the positive socio-cultural effect, Teutsch balances this value with the Reconstructionist practicality of living within a society they are a part of. There is flexibility that is considered acceptable such that one can maintain the essence of *kashrut*, avoid overt transgressions, and also eat with their neighbors. Teutsch affirms that Reconstructionist Judaism values full participation in broader society. While *kashrut* does not inherently prevent someone from participating in American society, practically it creates significant barriers. Therefore Teutsch commends those who have a *kashrut* that is permissible to eating in non-kosher establishments or homes. He offers the example of only eating dairy and fish, but not meat in those spaces as a way to navigate *kashrut* in an integrated society. Teutsch is most explicit in his rejection of kosher wine, outside of Passover *halakhah*, as it was originally intended to prevent interfaith mixing and this "clash[es] with our values."[78]

Rabbi Rebecca T. Alpert and Rabbi Jacob J. Staub, in *Exploring Judaism,* reflect a similar ideology to that of Teutsch. Their key argument is that one's own *kashrut* practice should

[77] Teutsch, *Everyday Living*, 532-533.
[78] Teutsch, *Everyday Living*, 547.

not inhibit who they eat with and that *kashrut* is a value, not a commandment. First, "Most feel strongly that, no matter what their home practice is, they respect others' differing approaches and do not allow *kashrut* to be a barrier to eating with others."[79] Alpert and Staub do not differentiate between uplifting *klal Yisrael* and eating with your neighbors. Instead, they meld the two into one argument, reflecting Kaplan's idea of one co-existing within two civilizations. The way a Reconstructionist Jew ought to eat according to them is not different practically or in values, regardless of who one eats with. The reason such a practice is possible is because, according to Alpert and Staub, "keeping kosher is not about *obeying* a divine commandment, but is rather a means of sanctifying their lives—a value that must be balanced with other values, such as creating community."[80] Because it is not understood as an obligatory command, but rather one of many values, including the importance of Jewish and larger community; it is not only permissible, but expected to have flexible eating practices in a Reconstructionist lifestyle.

Teutsch and Alpert and Staub both show the importance of the socio-cultural aspect of *kashrut* to the Reconstructionist movement. Each text reflects the importance of eating Jewishly to maintain and develop connections within Jewish community and maintaining flexibility to allow for social mixing with non-Jews. Within Reconstructionist practice there is a strong commitment to living in an interfaith community and creating Jewish community that is inclusive for a diversity of dietary practices. They also encourage personal *kashrut* practices that allow one to eat with diverse people and in responsibly diverse settings, which is possible because *halakhah* is not a binding authority. Most interestingly is Alpert and Staub's strong opposition to kosher wine as what makes wine kosher goes against the value of assimilating and integrating into the culture around the community. Reconstructionist practice focuses on balance,

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[79] Alpert and Staub, *Exploring Judaism, a Reconstructionist Approach*, 100.
[80] Alpert and Staub, *Exploring Judaism, a Reconstructionist Approach*, 100.

balancing a practice of *kashrut* that can welcome many Jews into one's home, while not restricting one's ability to socialize with non-Jews on the principle that food is a central part of cultural formation.

Comparative Analysis

Conservative Judaism sees *kashrut* as a *halakhic* obligation that can have secondary benefits. Reconstructionist Judaism encourages its practitioners to adhere to some form of *kashrut* as it builds internal community, but discourages stringency as it can prevent their inclusion in broader society. Reform has gone through its own transformation more recently from a staunch rejection of *kashrut* for the sake of assimilation to encouraging Reform Jews to find a meaningful Jewish eating practice and one of the main benefits is the social cohesion within the Jewish community.

Conservative observance of *kashrut* is not a value to be interpreted and put into practice balanced with other values, rather *kashrut* observance is an obligation to follow. The social implications are secondary effects of living within the structures of *halakhah*. Ultimately, social implications are secondary effects; the balancing of positive and negative social implications lack the authority to dismiss Conservative *halakhah*. This is because the Conservative authority of *halakhah*, Conservative sources cannot engage with balancing of different values as a way of determining food practices as Reform and Reconstructionist Jews can do.

Reform and Reconstructionist Jews both present *kashrut* as something that has a degree of flexibility for individual interpretation and practice. Both denominations believe people can figure out how they can meaningfully integrate Jewish food practices into their day to day lives. This allows Reform and Reconstructionist Jews to imagine creatively how food, a central part of the human experience, can help form their Jewish identity. Reform Judaism has had the greatest

shift in its message to practitioners and the most dissonance amongst those teaching Reform Jews how they ought to eat Jewishly. Conservative and Reconstructionist movements have offered answers to people who want to practice that have not varied greatly throughout their practice. In sharp contrast, Reform Judaism went from a strong rejection of any observance of *kashrut* as one pathway towards broader social acceptance to encouraging some amount of Jewish eating, which may include some practices of *kashrut*, as a way to develop internal Jewish community, including across communities. While each movement has its own idea around how internal and external communities should affect Jewish eating, none deny how much eating together builds community.

Conclusion

I have explored the approaches to eating Jewishly within practical guides and introductory resources for adult learners created by the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative movements. I compared the denominational perspectives on eating Jewishly through the lens of ethics, engagement with the divine, and sociocultural implications. The three different comparative analyses each offer insight into the overall characteristics that distinguish the differences between the denominational Judaisms and the elements which all three Judaisms share.

Each of these movements' practices around eating Jewishly hold as many similarities as they do differences both between each other and internally. A recurring theme across all three chapters is that the Conservative movement is a *halakhically* bound Judaism; whereas, Reform and Reconstructionist both engage with *halakhah*, but are not bound to it. The *halakhic* obligations of a movement reflect how a movement encourages its followers to see ethical *mitzvot* as part of *kashrut*. In Reform and Reconstructionist practices there is room for many different ways to eat Jewishly or kosher making these texts descriptive; in contrast because the Conservative movement is obligated to *halakhah* the texts read as prescriptive. Additionally, within Conservative Judaism the observance of *kashrut* reflects a larger framework within the movement of an obligation to the mitzvot. This obligation lessens individual choice, but provides opportunity for consistency within their community and thus can be an avenue for building Jewish community internally. All three movements root themselves in the same textual tradition and develop their own contemporary tradition. Each movement, regardless of their view on *halakhah*, believes that to eat Jewishly requires intentionality, being in relationship to the textual

tradition, and a sacred relationship with the divine. In each of these movements, the engagement with *kashrut* reflects the larger balancing project of American and Jewish identities. These texts reflect that rabbis will write how to do Judaism one way and that laity will practice their Judaism in the many ways it will work in their own lives.

If I had more time and resources I can imagine many different ways to expand this project. First, I would want to expand the scope to allow research on Orthodox traditions and Renewal Judaism, and other Jewish communal practices. There is a possibility to explore how eating Jewishly differs outside the American context, especially as American Judaism is unique in its prevalence of non-Orthodox practices. I would be most interested in doing a longitudinal study or examining a different specific time period. This could be defined by the first rabbis in the United States in the 1840s, the creation of any one movement and how it affected the landscape, and even since 1948 and the creation of the state of Israel. This would also open up the possibility of different primary source materials. I could study how synagogues and Jewish spaces are currently doing Jewish eating. I could look at more non-rabbinic source materials, like cookbooks or magazines, where Jewish eating is encouraged or explained in different parts of the text. Cookbooks in particular reflect an earlier guidebook prior to the popularization of adult education in Jewish space. This would also allow me or others to explore how the American context may have permitted or prohibited earring Jewishly based on geography, social norms, and access to a *shochet*, kosher butcher or even a Jewish community. I could do this same project on an entirely different aspect of living Jewishly, like prayer or civic engagement. All of these are exciting paths to explore and offer many insights into the American Jewish landscape at the intersection of the synagogue and the Jewish home.

My hope is that my scholarship shows Jews that there is more common ground than differences between each other. As a rabbi I seek to build Jewish community cross-denominationally and support the collaboration between synagogues. I see food as an avenue for this type of community building, whether it is a Shabbat dinner or a collaborative holiday celebration. כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֵבִים זֶה בָּזֶה – All Jews are responsible for one another.[81]

[81] Shavuot 39a, Babylonian Talmud.

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