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A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions 2013

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To most outsiders who encounter the Messianic Jewish movement, when hearing something about kosher or *kashrut*, what they mostly think about are instructions within the Torah or Law of Moses which prohibit the consumption of unclean meats such as pork or shellfish. Much of the Messianic community has promoted what it considers to be “Biblically kosher,” which primarily begins and ends at not eating pork and shellfish. In traditional Judaism, however, what it means to be kosher is much more involved than observant Jews not eating certain meats labeled to be “unclean.” *Kashrut* involves classification of unclean meats to be sure, but also involves some significant traditions regarding the butchering of animals, how meat is to be prepared, what can and cannot be eaten together, separation of utensils and cookware—as well as a variety of theological and philosophical reasons proposed for the institution of these Biblical instructions, and their subsequent interpretation and application over the centuries by Jewish religious authorities and diverse Jewish communities.

Much of the broad Messianic movement¹ considers kosher to just involve not eating pork or shellfish, yet it is clear even from a reading of instructions in the Torah, that this is a rather simplistic and under-developed approach to this issue. Likewise, even with a diverse number of internal Messianic views on the theological aspects of the Torah’s dietary laws—but ones which are more positive than not regarding their continued validity in the post-resurrection era—there is not a huge amount of understanding for what it means to be **kosher** in much of traditional Judaism. Even if many Messianic people, for example, do not think that it is necessary to separate meat and dairy, or have multiple sets of dishes or utensils, or that most food items that they purchase have an *hechsher* or official symbol of kosher approval—they still, as members of a movement with an explicit mandate to declare the good news of Israel’s Messiah to the Jewish people, need to know a few things about Jewish kosher traditions and observance. Given the importance of the kosher dietary laws for Judaism and the Jewish people throughout the centuries, every Messianic person, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, should have a familiarity with how the Torah’s dietary laws have been interpreted and applied over the centuries.

How are any of us to understand how the kosher dietary laws have been approached by Judaism? George Robinson offers the significant thought of how, “One area of Jewish law and ritual

¹ When we mention the broad Messianic movement, our ministry is primarily considering it to involve Messianic Judaism, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, the Two-House sub-movement, and various Hebrew/Hebraic Roots persuasions. We interact with individual people all over this spectrum in our ministry activities.

Messianic Kosher Helper

that is probably...the most problematical for many contemporary Jews is the dietary laws."² This is, as one should see, true for any number of reasons. Orthodox Jewish interpretation and application of the Torah's dietary laws, is highly restrictive when it comes to interactions with the outside world, as Orthodox Jews will have to be widely constrained to their own communities to find food items and products which have been prepared according to their standards. On the exact opposite side of this is a Reform Jewish community, which makes up the majority Jewish population in the United States, thinking that the dietary laws were only important for Ancient Israel and today communicate no significant sense of holiness for Jewish people—and a majority of Reform Jews today do not keep any degree of kosher. There are other, more graded levels of kosher observance present in other branches of Judaism, such as the Conservative movement, allowing for more flexibility than the Orthodox. There are Jews who keep kosher for cultural, not Biblical reasons, and those who keep kosher for ecological, health, or some other personally preferred reasons.³

Given the diversity of approaches, both communal to various branches of the Synagogue and personal to individual Jewish people, it might not be possible for any one of us to understand all Jewish kosher traditions. But, it is very possible for us to have a better understanding and appreciation for how kosher has been widely followed and approached by the Jewish people at large. For, whether today's Messianic community is aware of it or not—a great many Jewish kosher traditions are observed by those who claim to *only* be following Holy Scripture! Many significant interpretations and applications of the Torah's dietary instructions, as actually instituted by the Rabbinical authorities, are observed by those who even just avoid pork and shellfish in their eating habits.

Clean and Unclean

A significant component of understanding what "kosher" involves, surrounds the terms "clean" and "unclean." While "clean" and "unclean" are logically to be associated with different meats regarded in the Torah as acceptable and unacceptable for eating, these same terms are also associated with a wide degree of human activities which render a person physically or spiritually contaminated, defiled, or engrossed in some sort of immoral or sinful behavior. A significant Jewish book written on the topic of kosher, *Kosher Living*, by Conservative Rabbi Ron Isaacs (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), actually has as its sub-title: *It's More Than Just the Food*. Being "kosher," as it were, extends far beyond what is considered to be an acceptable diet for God's people in the Torah; it also involves their behavior, attitudes, and actions. For presumably, as people learn how to separate things in their diet, they are trained and disciplined to likewise learn how to separate their thoughts, and make more well-informed and conscious decisions about their lives.⁴

Some of the main Hebrew terms employed in the Tanach for "clean" include the verb *taheir* (טהר), widely regarding "to be clean" (Qal stem) or "to cleanse, purify" (Piel stem); the adjective *tahor* (טהור), "pure" or "ceremonially clean" or "ethically clean"; and the noun *tahorah* (טהרה), "(ceremonial) cleanness," "establishment of ceremonial cleanness," "cleansing, purifying" (*HALOT*).⁵ As summarized by *IDB*,

² George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 247.

³ A number of important Jewish resources on the subject of kosher include, but are not limited to: Samuel H. Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1982); Yacov Lipschutz, *Kashruth: A comprehensive background and reference guide to the principles of Kashruth* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 1989); Lisè Stern, *How to Keep Kosher: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding Jewish Dietary Laws* (New York: William Morrow, 2004).

⁴ This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, "Kosher Living: More Than a Diet," by Mark Huey.

⁵ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:369, 370.

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

"The basic root for conveying the idea of 'cleanness' is טָהַר (active, 'to be clean' [Lev. 15:13; 22:4]; intensive, 'to cleanse' [Lev. 16:30; Num. 8:6]; causative reflexive, 'to cleanse oneself' [Num. 8:7; Josh. 22:17]; derived nouns טָהוּר, 'cleanness' [Exod. 24:10] or 'purifying' [Lev. 12:4], and טְהוּרָה, 'cleansing' [Lev. 13:7; Num. 6:9]; adjective, טָהוּר, 'clean' [Gen. 7:2; Lev. 11:47]). In...Ezekiel...the intensive and causative forms of the verb 'to sin' (חָטָא) are used of purification rituals, and are normally translated 'to cleanse' (Lev. 14:52; Num 19:19; Ezek. 43:20) and 'to cleanse oneself' (Num. 19:12-13, 20). The fact that the verb forms in question should mean 'offer a sin offering for' indicates the close relationship in OT thought between SIN and uncleanness; both represent a contamination of the true nature by an alien element."⁶

Some of the main Hebrew terms employed in the Tanach for "unclean" include the verb *tamei* (טָמֵא), widely regarding "to **become ceremonially unclean**" (Qal stem) or "to **defile**" or "to **declare unclean**" (Piel stem); the adjective *tamei* (טָמֵא), "**unclean**" or "**ceremonially unclean**"; and the noun *tumeah* (טִמְאוּת), "**state of ceremonial uncleanness**" (*HALOT*).⁷ *IDB* further details,

"The idea of 'uncleanness' is expressed by derivatives of the root טָמֵא, the direct opposite of טָהַר. The verb (טָמֵא) means 'to be unclean' (Lev. 15:32; 22:6), the passive form of 'to defile oneself' (Lev. 11:43; Num. 5:13), the intensive form 'to make or declare unclean' (Lev. 13:3, 8, 11, 15; Num. 35:34), the causative reflexive form 'to defile oneself' (Lev. 11:43; Ezek. 14:11). The noun (טִמְאוּת) means 'uncleanness' or 'filthiness' (Lev. 5:3; 7:20; Num. 19:13; Ezek. 22:15), and the adjective (טָמֵא) means 'unclean' (Lev. 11:35; Isa. 64:6; Ezek. 4:13)."⁸

The main Hebrew terms for "clean," *tahor* (טָהוּר), and "unclean," *tamei* (טָמֵא), are obviously different from the term **kosher**, which is seldom seen in the Bible itself. The *Jewish Study Bible* summarizes some of the main points regarding the term kosher, and how Judaism has approached much of it:

kosher (Heb 'fit' or 'proper') a general term used in postbiblical texts for dietary laws; usually applied to food, but also to other ritual objects and practices. Most dietary laws apply to meat: It may not be consumed with blood in it, certain kinds of internal fat are not to be eaten, it may not be consumed along with dairy products, and some meats (e.g., pork), sea creatures (e.g., shellfish), and "creeping things" (e.g., snails) are not permitted.⁹

A term more specific than *kosher* (כַּשֵּׁר), and which does carry with it some significant theological ramifications, is **kashrut** (כַּשְׁרוּת), "*fitness, worthiness, legitimacy*" (*Jastrow*).¹⁰ In her book *How to Keep Kosher*, Lisé Stern describes the significance of the terms *kosher* and *kashrut* for much of Judaism:

"Let's start with the word itself, *kosher*. It debuted in Webster's English-language dictionary in 1851, which traces its etymology to Yiddish and Hebrew. Indeed, *kosher* is a Hebrew word and goes back much further than the nineteenth century, though not as far back as one might think.

"In Hebrew most words are variations based on a three-letter root. The Hebrew root *kaf-shin-resh* (*K.Sh.R* [כֶּשֶׁר]) is the basis for both the words *kashrut* and *kosher*, which literally mean 'fit,' 'proper,' or 'worthy.'

"The word *kosher* is used to refer to a variety of concerns in Jewish laws, anything that has to be made or done according to certain halachic regulations, such as the proper way to tie the fringes when making a *tallit* (prayer shawl), or the correct production of *tefillin* (phylacteries, worn during

⁶ L.E. Toombs, "Clean and unclean," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:642.

⁷ *HALOT*, 1:375, 376.

⁸ Toombs, "Clean and unclean," in *IDB*, 1:642.

⁹ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 2132-2133.

¹⁰ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 678.

Messianic Kosher Helper

weekday prayers), or the way a Torah scroll is written. If the object or activity meets specific halachic specifications, it is fit, proper for use, kosher.

“While kosher *can* refer to more than just food, in general, the laws of kashrut refer specifically to the dietary laws. When people talk about keeping kosher, they are usually talking about food.

“Surprisingly, however, the word *kosher* does not appear in the Torah, in the Five Books of Moses, where the Jewish dietary laws are introduced. A word using the *K.Sh.R* root appears just three times in later biblical texts, but not in reference to food: twice in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where it means ‘succeed’; and once in the Book of Esther, where it means ‘appropriate’—close to the current meaning.”¹¹

Widely in extra-Biblical Jewish materials, the term *kasheir* (כָּשֵׂר) involves what is “fit, esp. *kasher*, ritually permitted, legal,” not only involving clean and unclean meats, but also involving things that are “worthy, honest, of noble conduct” (*Jastrow*).¹² The verb *kasheir* in a Biblical context largely relates to “be advantageous, proper, suitable, succeed” (*BDB*),¹³ as is seen in the places noted by Stern:

“Then she said, ‘If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him **and the matter seems proper to the king** [וְכִשְׂרָה הַדָּבָר לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, *v’kasheir ha’davar l’fnei ha’melekh*,] and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces’” (Esther 8:5).

“If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen *its* edge, then he must exert more strength. **Wisdom has the advantage of giving success** [וְיִתְרוֹן הַכְּשֵׁר חֻכְמָה, *v’yitron ha’kesheir chokmah*,]” (Ecclesiastes 10:10).

“Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing **will succeed** [יִכְשַׁר, *yikshar*,] or whether both of them alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

While in much English speech, it is common to simply hear the terms *non-kosher* or *unkosher* used as the antithesis of *kosher*, it is not uncommon at all to also hear the term *treif* used to describe non-kosher meats or animals. It is derived from the Hebrew of Exodus 22:31, “You shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat *any* flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.” Here, the term *tereifah* (טֵרֵיפָה) means, “animal torn (by wild beasts); torn flesh” (*BDB*).¹⁴ *Treif* (טרייף) is a Yiddish derivation that has been incorporated into the vocabulary of many Jews, now used to label unclean meats like pork.

Meats Acceptable for Consumption

A huge part of contemplating the topic of “kosher,” is obviously being aware of what animals the Torah declares acceptable for consumption. The most minimal form of kosher understanding is recognizing that the Torah regards animals such as the pig, and all shellfish, as being unclean. Your average Bible readers in today’s Messianic community tend to focus almost all of their attention on Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Yet, it should be obvious that there are more instructions in the Torah that inform the reader what *kashrut* is all about, as well as some critical areas regarding human approaches to animals. And beyond this, whether some are consciously aware of it or not,

¹¹ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 18.

¹² *Jastrow*, 677.

¹³ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 506.

¹⁴ *BDB*, 383; cf. *Jastrow*, 554.

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

various Rabbinical traditions and rulings do play a role in classifying some things as “kosher” or “fit.”

Originally in the Garden of Eden, humanity was only permitted to eat fruits and vegetables (Genesis 1:29), and along with this it has to be noted that it was Adam and Eve’s crime of eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17; 3:6-24) which caused the Fall. At the time of the Flood, Noah was notably directed by God to take with him two pairs of every animal, but along with this seven pairs of clean animals (Genesis 7:2) were to be taken as well. Following the Flood, formal permission was granted to Noah to eat meat, provided that the blood of the meat was not consumed (Genesis 9:2-4).

With the formal giving of the Torah to Ancient Israel via Moses, what some of the clean and unclean animals actually are is detailed. The main requirements for *land animals* is that they have a divided hoof and chew a cud (Leviticus 11:3; Deuteronomy 14:7), which would include animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and various other wild game (Deuteronomy 14:4-6). Animals that are notably prohibited include the camel, the rock badger, the rabbit, and most especially the pig (Leviticus 11:4-7; Deuteronomy 14:7-8). Among the land animals consumed within a more-or-less traditional Western diet, not eating pork, and eating from cud-chewing animals with a split hoof like cows, sheep, and goats, is something that has notably distinguished the Jewish people over the ages, and which does serve as a sign of Jewish identity to many outsiders.

The issue of what regards clean and unclean *birds*, is a bit more complicated than those of land animals. There are a number of birds of prey regarded as unclean in the Torah, which include birds like the eagle, vulture, hawk, raven, and the ostrich (Leviticus 11:13-19; Deuteronomy 14:11-18). What notably does not appear within the lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, is what birds are considered clean and acceptable for consumption (Deuteronomy 14:20). Notwithstanding the fact that some of the birds prohibited by the Torah may be extinct today, birds which are considered to be kosher and acceptable for eating by the Jewish community, are those which have been ruled as kosher entirely by the Rabbinical tradition.¹⁵ Birds considered clean and eaten by Jews today include, but are not limited to, chicken, duck, and goose.

The role of the Rabbinic tradition in determining kosher birds has been especially key for classifying a New World bird like the turkey as kosher. One of the main rules for determining whether a bird is kosher or not, as witnessed in the Mishnah, is that “Any fowl which seizes is unclean. Any [fowl] which has an extra talon [the hallux] and a claw, and the skin of the stomach of which [can] be stripped off is clean” (m.*Chullin* 3:6).¹⁶ The classification for clean and unclean birds also extends to the eggs of such birds (b.*Chullin* 64b). Eggs which have a blood spot, indicating that fertilization has taken place, are to be discarded and not consumed.¹⁷

The instruction regarding clean and unclean *fish*, while fish can be eaten from both freshwater or saltwater sources, is that clean fish have both fins and scales (Leviticus 11:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:9-10). This seems to be straightforward enough, as while there are plenty of fish which have determinable fins and scales, and popular shellfish such as shrimp, crabs, lobsters, oysters, and clams are definitively unclean—there are enough fish which need some decisive ruling made on whether or not they might be kosher. A major ruling seen in the Talmud regarding fins and scales states,

“*Our rabbis taught on Tannaite authority: If [a species of fish has no fins and scales] now but is going to grow them later on, for example, the sultanit fish and the aphis fish, lo, this [species of fish] is permitted. If it has [fins and scales] now but is going to slough them off when it is taken out of the water, for example, the colias, scomber, swordfish, anthias, and tunny, it is permitted [b. A.Z. 39a]”* (b.*Chullin* 66b).¹⁸

¹⁵ Lipschutz, pp 18-19; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 26-27.

¹⁶ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 772.

¹⁷ Lipschutz, pp 51-53.

¹⁸ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary. MS Windows XP*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

Messianic Kosher Helper

As is seen in later Jewish practice, some of these guidelines have been altered a bit, as time has progressed and the Jewish community has spread worldwide, especially into places beyond the Mediterranean basin. Yacov Lipschutz, writing from an Orthodox Jewish perspective, summarizes,

“Scales’ are defined as one that can be scraped from the skin without tearing the skin from the flesh. These are cycloid (round) and ctenoid (comblike) scales. Other types of scales such as pacoid and ganoid (platelike, armorlike) are embedded in the skin, and it is necessary to remove some of the skin or flesh in order to remove them. Bony tubercles that protrude from the skin are not considered scales, and fishes with structures are non-kosher. The lumpfish, sturgeon, sharks, swordfish, and some of the turbot (European flatfish) are examples of fishes with types of scales that are not of the kosher variety. Catfishes, monkfish and sculpins are examples of fishes without any scales. Since crustaceans and mollusks (shellfish) have no scales, they too are non-kosher, as are the marine mammals: seals, dolphins, porpoises and whales.

“It is advisable for kashruth observers to become familiar with the kosher type of scale. This can be learned by simply examining the various kinds of kosher fishes and observing their scales. Although this does not make one an expert, it nevertheless does provide the experience needed to recognize fishes that are questionable. When a question does arise, the guidance of experts should be sought.”¹⁹

Multiple Jewish resources on kosher have provided various lists, some rather extensive, with the scientific names of specific fish, which are regarded as permissible and/or non-permissible for eating.²⁰ Yet, it has to be recognized that there is not agreement among all kosher-keeping Jewish sects that some fish are to be regarded as unclean. “The Committee of Laws and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly of America (Conservative) has ruled that both the sturgeon and swordfish are permitted, whereas in England the Ashkenazi authorities forbid sturgeon while the Sephardi permit it” (*EJ*).²¹

While not common to much of the traditional Western diet today, the Torah does permit various types of *insects* to be eaten. The requirements for insects being designated as clean is that they must walk on four legs, and have their feet joined for jumping (Leviticus 11:21). This would namely include the locust, cricket, and the grasshopper as being kosher for eating (Leviticus 11:22). Honey from bees is notably considered to be kosher (*b.Bekhorot* 7b), as bees merely transfer nectar from flowers to the honeycomb.

Another important guideline, derived from Genesis 9:4, “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood,” is how it is morally and ethically reprehensible to eat flesh that has been torn from a live animal. While commonly perceived within Judaism as being a part of the so-called Noahide laws,²² the Talmud does record a connection made between Genesis 9:4 and eating the flesh torn from a live animal: “Is it possible to suppose that the prohibition of cutting a limb from a living beast should not apply to [the children of Noah]?’ Scripture says, ‘But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, you shall not eat’ (Gen. 9:4)” (*b.Sanhedrin* 59b).²³ Lipschutz makes the further points regarding how clean animals with various diseases and defects should not be regarded as fit, and thusly rendered as non-kosher:

“We are all familiar with the term ‘*treifah*’ (often shortened to *treif*), which is commonly used to mean any food that is not kosher. However, the specific meaning of *treifah* is ‘torn.’ The Torah passage (*Exodus* 22:30) from which this word is borrowed reads: ‘And you shall be a sanctified people to me. And the flesh that has been torn (*treifah*) in the field may not be eaten, and should

¹⁹ Lipschutz, pp 47-48.

²⁰ Dresner, pp 82-93; Lipschutz, pp 139-160; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 64.

²¹ Harry Rabinowicz, “Dietary Laws,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

²² Consult the FAQ, “Noahide Laws.”

²³ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

be cast to the dogs.’ The phrase ‘the flesh that has been torn in the field’ implies two kinds of *treifah*: (1) meat that has been torn from a live animal and is therefore forbidden; (2) animals whose organs have been damaged by being torn or diseased.

“The injuries and diseases that render an animal forbidden are defects that affect all the major organs, which are either missing, perforated, torn, poisoned, broken or injured in a fall. Included in these are the brain, heart, spinal column, jaw, esophagus, crop (in fowl), lungs, trachea, liver, gall bladder, spleen, kidney, womb, intestines, omasum, abomasum, rumen, reticulum, legs, ribs, and hide.

“Under normal conditions the majority of animals do not suffer from diseases or injuries in all of the above-mentioned organs. Therefore it is not necessary to examine them after [slaughter] unless there is an indication that injury or disease is present. Pus, blood, swelling, malformations and palsied actions of the animal are a few of the signs indicating that further examination of the affected organ is necessary.

“In countries where specific diseases are common in fowl or cattle, the organs that may be affected must be examined. For example, in the United States it is usually not necessary to examine the legs of chickens unless there is an indication of injury or disease. But in Israel and Mediterranean countries a form of tendonitis may affect the legs of fowl, and yet not be visible on the outside. Therefore, the legs require expert examination. In the United States it is customary to examine the intestines of fowl, since many birds have been found to have abscesses in that area.”²⁴

It certainly does make good sense for there to be some kind of examination of the internal organs of an animal, whose flesh one intends to eat!

A final Torah regulation to be aware of, which can be easily glossed over, is the direction, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall not eat any fat *from* an ox, a sheep or a goat’” (Leviticus 7:23; cf. 3:17). This is obviously not speaking of the *fat* that is naturally marbled into meat, because otherwise no one would be able to eat any meat. Rather, this is referring to the significant fat portions of the animal which need to be trimmed away by butchering.

Ritual Slaughter and Preparation

A definite requirement seen of eating meat in the Torah, is the need for the blood of animals slaughtered to be drained and not consumed. As is specified in Deuteronomy 12:21, 23-25,

“If the place which the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire...Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD.”

Given the Torah’s direction about blood being prohibited from consumption, there are extensive guidelines followed in Jewish tradition (b.*Chullin* 8a-9a) about how clean animals are to be slaughtered and butchered. Known as *shechitah* (שחיטה), “cutting the throat, slaughtering according to the Jewish ritual” (*Jastrow*),²⁵ they involve the selection of a sharp knife which will cut decisively into the animal, causing almost immediate unconsciousness, and for the most amount of blood to be drained. As is summarized by *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*,

“The law of ritual slaughtering is derived from the verse, ‘you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep...as I have instructed you’ (Deut. 12:21). The Rabbis interpreted this to imply that Moses had previously taught the people a method of slaughtering animals. However, since the precise details are not mentioned in the Torah, it follows that the Jewish method of ritual slaughter must have been communicated as part of the Oral Law. Today, the complex and minute regulations dealing

²⁴ Lipschutz, pp 22-23.

²⁵ *Jastrow*, 1547.

Messianic Kosher Helper

with ritual slaughtering must be carried out by a licensed *shochet*, who in addition to being a skilled professional must be a pious individual who is well trained in Jewish law.

"Jewish ritual slaughtering strives to prevent unnecessary suffering to the animal. It requires one continuous deep horizontal cut with a perfectly sharp blade with no nicks or unevenness. This severs the windpipe and all of the great blood vessels of the neck so that the animal instantly loses all sensation. Because an animal may not be eaten if it has not been properly slaughtered, the technical requirements must be strictly observed.

"In addition to slaughtering the animal, the *shochet* must also carry out a detailed examination (*bedikah*) of the carcass. Any defect of the major organs renders the animal *treif* and forbidden for consumption. Initially referring to the flesh of an animal torn by a wild beast or wild bird, the word '*treifah*' was later applied to the flesh of any injured or diseased animal that would not have lived for more than a year (Hul. 3:1). Eventually, *treif* became the generic term for any product that was not kosher, and thus not ritually fit for Jewish consumption. The *halakhah* permits certain abnormalities in the lungs that have been determined to be harmless. However, those Jews who are strictest in their observance of kashrut eat only *glatt kosher* meat—a term that is derived from the Yiddish word for 'smooth' and refers to animals with smooth, lesion-free lungs.

"*Shechitah* and *bedikah* of poultry are carried out in the same careful manner, though only the intestines are examined. There are no specific regulations about how fish are to be killed. After *shechitah*, the animal is suspended head down to drain as much blood as possible from the body..."²⁶

Given the strong words against consuming blood found in the Torah (Leviticus 7:26-27; 17:10-14), and the fact that even with traditional Jewish slaughter intended to quickly render an animal unconscious and see its heart pump out blood—there will still be traces of blood within meat. In traditional observance of *kashrut*, meat that has been butchered will be soaked in salt water within seventy-two hours, to assure for the meat not having any final traces of blood coagulated within it. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* further describes,

"The unequivocal biblical prohibition against the consumption of blood is the basis for the process of kashering meat (Lev. 7:26-27, 17:10-14). This is the only dietary law for which the Torah provides a reason: 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar.' Therefore, before meat is cooked, it is necessary to remove all traces of blood—by soaking the meat or by broiling or roasting it over an open flame.

"After being washed to remove all externally visible blood, the meat is placed in a large container and covered completely in lukewarm water for a half hour so that it softens and will absorb salt. The meat is then placed on a flat slatted board through which blood can drip or on a sloped board so that the blood can drain off into a sink or empty container. Coarse (kosher) salt is used because of its effectiveness in drawing out the blood from the meat. After being rinsed off several times, the meat is considered in proper condition for cooking. This entire process must be completed within 72 hours after ritual slaughter; otherwise, the blood is considered to have congealed inside the meat, which must then be broiled or roasted over an open flame before it can be eaten.

"Meat that is to be broiled does not need to be kashered, since the broiling process drains off at least as much blood as is removed by soaking and salting..."²⁷

One of the notable advantages of the religious freedom provided in the United States, as noted by Stern, is how "*shechita*, ritual slaughter, has always been permitted in the United States, without question."²⁸ This has not always been the case with all European countries.

²⁶ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 659-660; cf. Lipschutz, pp 19-21; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 33-37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 660-661.

²⁸ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 43.

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

Another aspect of traditional Jewish slaughter, based on Genesis 32:33, “Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s thigh in the sinew of the hip,” is how the hindquarters of cows and sheep are not typically eaten due to the placement of the sciatic nerve. A good part of a kosher-slaughtered cow, for example, is traditionally sold to non-kosher butchers. Yet, there are some trained Jewish butchers who do know how to cut out the sciatic nerve. Samuel H. Dresner notes how “Ashkenazic Jews, by and large, do not eat the hindquarters of beef; Sephardic Jews do.”²⁹

Milk and Meat

One of the most noticeable features of traditional Jewish observance of *kashrut*, is the separation of milk and meat products. This understanding is rooted from a statement appearing within the Torah: “You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother” (Exodus 23:19; cf. 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). As the Talmud comments on this statement,

“‘In its mother’s milk’ — [from this verse] all I would know is that [it is prohibited to seethe it in] its mother’s milk. What is the source of the assertion [that it is prohibited to cook meat] in its own milk? You may derive this as follows from an inference *a fortiori*. What is the case [regarding this law]? It was not prohibited to slaughter the offspring with other offspring on the same day. It was prohibited to slaughter the offspring with the mother on the same day. In a case where it was prohibited to cook the offspring with other ‘offspring’ [(lit.: produce) here taken to mean the milk] is it not logical to conclude that it was prohibited to cook the ‘offspring’ [i.e., the milk of the kid] with the mother? It comes to teach us, ‘In its mother’s milk.’ [By mentioning the phrase again it teaches that it is prohibited to cook it in any milk.]” (b. *Chullin* 114b).³⁰

Here, it is concluded that not only mixing a kid in its mother’s milk should be taken to mean that slaughtering a mother and its offspring at the same time should be prohibited—but that cooking meat in milk products is likewise prohibited. Various reasons have been proposed for the Torah regulation, including, as stated by *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, that it is “probably as a measure against paganism, which prepared charms by seething kids in their mother’s milk.”³¹ However, the Torah’s direction about not boiling or seething a kid in its mother’s milk has obviously been extrapolated to mean that neither milk nor meat products may be prepared or eaten together. The main dairy products that are not supposed to be served with meat, would obviously include things such as cheese, butter, sour cream, and fresh cream.

Usually among observant Jews, meat and dairy products are not consumed within a six-hour period of each other, although this does vary among Jewish communities. Stern summarizes,

“For Orthodox Jews, the most common wait time is six hours. According to Sephardic tradition, six hours is not merely tradition, but halacha, required by Jewish law. Ashkenazic tradition says that more lenient options are also halachically correct. Most agree that the meat meal should be concluded with appropriate blessings, signifying the meal is over. You should then clean and rinse your mouth and wash your hands. Some say one hour is sufficient time, and this has been the accepted tradition of Dutch Jews. German Jews follow a tradition of waiting three hours...

“These are three generally accepted wait-time traditions. However, even today, I’ve encountered people who’ve developed their own traditions within their communities. Some wait four hours after eating chicken, five hours after meat. Some start counting the wait time after saying blessings, some start counting as soon as they’ve swallowed the last bite of meat.

“With dairy foods, the wait time between dairy and meat is minimal. This is based on **Chullin 105a**, where it says, ‘How long must one wait between cheese and flesh? And he replied, Nothing

²⁹ Dresner, 55.

³⁰ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

³¹ “Dietary Laws,” in Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. et. al., *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing House, 2002), 215.

Messianic Kosher Helper

at all. Still, you should eat something like bread to effectively wipe your mouth of any milky taste, and you should rinse your mouth and wash your hands.”³²

Concurrent with the separation of eating meat and dairy items together, is how observant Jews also make sure that meat and dairy products are stored separately, and that there must be separate meat and dairy utensils in place for food preparation and serving. Lipschutz describes some of the main aspects of this, with which we need to be aware:

“Since meat and milk may not be mixed together, the preparation of dairy foods in pots that were used to prepare meat, or vice versa, is considered a meat and milk mixture. This is because when a utensil is used to heat food the pores of the container retain the flavor particles of the food substance and will release it when heated again. Thus if dairy food is cooked in a meat pot, the heated pot will release the meat flavor particles into the dairy food. This principle is the underlying reason for the traditional practice of keeping separate dishes, pots, pans, etc., for meat and dairy foods and the prohibition of using non-kosher utensils for kosher foods.

“As a practical implementation of this principle, the observant kosher home maintains a full separation of all meat and milk utensils, with each readily identifiable. This avoids the possibility of using one to prepare food for the other. The maintenance of a kosher home or kitchen facility requires that a separate storage area be set aside for meat and dairy utensils, including pots, pans, dishes and flatware. If it is not feasible to assign separate cabinets, the shelves and drawers should be clearly designated for each type of utensil. Furthermore, the meat and dairy utensils should be of substantially different color and design, to facilitate immediate identification and to avoid confusion. All members of the household should be made thoroughly familiar with the proper storage locations, and the distinct designs and colors of the separate sets.

“In some instances it may be practical to maintain a set of *pareve* pots and pans, in which vegetables and other goods can be cooked and later used for either type of food. These too should be distinct in design or marked, so that they do not become mixed with others. *Pareve* is the term used to describe foods of a neutral nature, neither milk nor meat...”³³

While the separation of meat and dairy, in traditional Jewish observance of *kashrut*, does carry with it the implication that popular treats such as cheeseburgers or a beef lasagna would be off limits—there are a significant number of items classified as *pareve* or “neutral” in *kashrut* law. These mainly include fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and grains,³⁴ which may be served with either meat or dairy products. “Pareve foods cooked by themselves in a pot used for meat may be served at a dairy meal, and pareve foods cooked by themselves in a pot used for dairy may be served at a meat meal” (Dresner).³⁵

Also not to be overlooked, as described by Stern, are various issues and positions present among sectors of Judaism regarding milk. This not only concerns milk from kosher animals, but differences of opinion between Orthodox and Conservative Jews concerning which milk products may be consumed:

“Milk itself has particular kashrut issues.

“Determining the kashrut of dairy products can get surprisingly complex. Milk is milk, yes—fairly straightforward, right? Not necessarily. The milk we drink must come from a kosher animal, which practically means cow, goat, or sheep, in terms of what’s generally available. Before the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees dairy production, set up stringent standards of inspection in the United States, a more recent development, milk carried with it a Talmudic commandment—Jews could drink only *chalav Yisrael* (literally, ‘milk of Israel’), milk that had been supervised from milking to bottling by a Jew. The concern was that milk from a nonkosher animal

³² Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 53.

³³ Lipschutz, pp 43-44.

³⁴ Dresner, 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

(such as a camel or pig) might be mixed with the milk from a kosher animal, thereby rendering it unkosher. Milk that has not been supervised by a Jew through the entire process is called *chalav akum*.

“But in the United States, and several other countries, the dairy industry is carefully monitored by a federal institution such as the USDA. Only cow’s milk is allowed into containers that are labeled ‘cow’s milk.’ A dairy would incur heavy fines and could lose its license as a dairy if it attempted to dilute the cow’s milk with milk from another animal. (And anyway, since dairies are set up for cows, milking another animal with a quite different body shape, such as a horse or pig, would likely only increase the dairy’s expenses.) Because of the strict government regulations, the late Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the leading Orthodox halachic authorities of the twentieth century, wrote a Responsum regarding milk. He determined that, in the United States, the production of milk was thoroughly supervised; fear of government fines and other repercussions would ensure that only cow’s milk is used, and thus Jews could drink milk that was not constantly supervised by a Jew. Feinstein determined that such government-regulated milk was a separate category, *chalav stam*, ‘neutral milk.’ Feinstein’s Responsum applies only to milk from commercially regulated dairies, not small, local farms. However, Feinstein did say that, if possible, it is still preferable to drink *chalav Yisrael*, when it is available. There are many observant Jews who do not choose the more lenient option and prefer to consume *chalav Yisrael* products. This means that anything containing dairy products must use *chalav Yisrael*, such as milk chocolate, cream soups, ice cream.

“Cream and butter historically did not need a hechsher, nor did they need to be made from *chalav Yisrael*, because cream from a nonkosher animal will not easily separate from the milk, and it will not easily coagulate into butter through traditional methods of making butter and cream. But modern technology makes it possible to separate cream from milk of nonkosher animals, so there are some issues in butter production today. Also there are additives added to butter and cream that may have kashrut concerns, so you may want to stick with hechshered butter and cream.

“*Chalav stam* does not generally need a hechsher. Vitamin D is added to all milk, to help with the body’s absorption of the calcium. Vitamin D is usually produced synthetically, and is not a kashrut issue. However, there was a case of a large commercial dairy in the Boston area that was using shark oil for its vitamin D source. If the milk says ‘natural’ on the label, you may need to check the source of the vitamins, since sharks are not kosher. Flavored milk does need a hechsher.

“Conservative kashrut does not require milk to be *chalav Yisrael*.”³⁶

Modern Jewish Approaches to Kosher

While much of what we have summarized in this article involves various traditional, Orthodox and/or Conservative Jewish approaches to the Torah’s dietary laws and their application—we have to be reminded that there are many, many modern Jews today who do not keep kosher. Even among those who keep a kosher diet in the modern era, and throughout multiple centuries of Jewish history, there have been a diverse number of reasons proposed for the dietary laws. What is the purpose of *kashrut*? Does it just pertain to obedience to God? Does it just involve Jewish distinctiveness or exclusivity, when compared or contrasted to the nations? Are there any physical or psychological or spiritual dynamics to the dietary laws? The *EJ* article on “Dietary Laws,” describes a number of the main reasons which have been suggested for kosher:

“Throughout the ages, many attempts have been made to explain the dietary laws. The Pentateuch itself does not explain them, although in three separate passages in the Bible they are closely associated with the concept of ‘holiness.’ Thus, Exodus 22:30 states: ‘And ye shall be holy unto Me; therefore ye shall not eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.’ Leviticus repeats the idea: ‘For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy, for I am holy; neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of swarming thing that moveth upon the earth’ (Lev. 11:44-45). Finally, Deuteronomy 14:21 states: ‘Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself; thou mayest give it unto the stranger that is within thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto a foreigner; for thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God.’ The

³⁶ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 59-60.

Messianic Kosher Helper

Pentateuch classifies the dietary laws as *hukkim*, 'divine statutes,' which by definition are not explained in the text (Yoma 67b). It has been variously suggested that the underlying motivation for the dietary laws are hygienic and sanitary, aesthetic and folkloric, or ethical and psychological.³⁷

From a theological or philosophical standpoint, this same article goes on to detail,

"In Ezekiel 33:25,³⁸ the prophet equates the eating of blood with the sins of idolatry and murder. One interpretation of this verse teaches that the dietary laws are ethical in intent, since abstention from the consumption of blood tames man's instinct for violence by instilling in him a horror of bloodshed. This is the view expressed in a letter by Aristeas, an unknown Egyptian Jew (probably of the first century B.C.E.), who states that the dietary laws are meant to instill men with a spirit of justice, and to teach them certain moral lessons. Thus, the injunction against the consumption of birds of prey was intended to demonstrate that man should not prey on others (Arist. 14:2-7).³⁹ Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, also suggests that creatures with evil instincts are forbidden lest men, too, develop these instincts (Spec. 4:118)⁴⁰.⁴¹

While there are surely going to be various ancillary reasons proposed for the Torah's dietary laws—which may include the association of unclean animals with pagan idolatry, hygiene and health, and what the behavior of various animals may teach human people⁴²—the main reason as stated in Scripture itself is **holiness**. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* is right to direct our attention,

"Many attempts have been made to explain the dietary laws. The Bible defines them as *hukim*, divine statutes that by definition are not explained in the text. However, the underlying rationale for the laws of kashrut is stated in the verse, 'You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I [your God] am holy' (Lev. 11:44). This commandment has two aspects: the positive aspect of imitating God by manifesting such divine traits as being merciful and loving, and the negative aspect of withdrawing from things that are impure and abominable. Thus Jews were required to avoid anything that could defile them, either physically or spiritually. The consumption of nonkosher food

³⁷ Rabinowicz, "Dietary Laws," in *EJ*.

³⁸ "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "You eat *meat* with the blood *in it*, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land?"'" (Ezekiel 33:25).

³⁹ "So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law. In general everything is similarly constituted in regard to natural reasoning, being governed by one supreme power, and in each particular everything has a profound reason for it, both the things from which we abstain in use and those of which we partake. For illustration I will briefly give you one or two examples. Do not take the contemptible view that Moses enacted this legislation because of an excessive preoccupation with mice and weasels or suchlike creatures. The fact is that everything has been solemnly set in order for unblemished investigation and amendment of life for the sake of righteousness. The birds which we use are all domesticated and of exceptional cleanliness, their food consisting of wheat and pulse—such birds as pigeons, turtledoves, locusts, partridges, and, in addition, geese and others of the same kind. As to the birds which are forbidden, you will find wild and carnivorous kinds, and the rest which dominate by their own strength, and who find their food at the expense of the aforementioned domesticated birds—which is an injustice; and not only that, they also seize lambs and kids and outrage human beings dead or alive. By calling them impure, he has thereby indicated that it is the solemn binding duty of those for whom the legislation has been established to practice righteousness and not to lord it over anyone in reliance upon their own strength, nor to deprive him of anything, but to govern their lives righteously, in the manner of the gentle creatures among the aforementioned birds which feed on those plants which grow on the ground and do not exercise a domination leading to the destruction of their fellow creatures" (*Letter of Aristeas* 142-147; R.J.H. Shutt, trans., "Letter of Aristeas," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 [New York: Doubleday, 1985], 22).

⁴⁰ "Thus, in each of the parts of the universe, earth, water, and air, he refuses some kinds of each description of animal, whether terrestrial, or aquatic, or aerial, to our use; and thus, taking as it were fuel from the fire, he causes the extinction of appetite" (*Special Laws* 4.118; Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 627).

⁴¹ Rabinowicz, "Dietary Laws," in *EJ*.

⁴² These reasons, and others, are explored in Chapter 10, "Is Eating Kosher Really Healthier?"

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

impedes people's ability to elevate and sanctify themselves, dulling their spiritual potential and creating a barrier between Jews and their perceptions of holiness."⁴³

While the Torah prescribes *holiness* or *sanctification* as being the main reason for God issuing the kosher dietary laws, many Jewish people today—perhaps even the majority of worldwide Jewry—do not keep a high level, or any level, of kosher. *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* records how while kosher eating has been historically viewed as a major component of Jewish identity, things changed substantially in the Nineteenth Century with the advent of Reform Judaism, which rejected the importance of the dietary laws as conveying any sense of spirituality or holiness to Jewish people. Conservative Judaism is less stringent on particulars of kosher than Orthodox Judaism, and in the late Twentieth to early Twenty-First Centuries there has been a resurgence of kosher observance within much of the Jewish community:

"Until the modern period, *kashrut* was one of the touchstones of Jewish observance and one of the unmistakable marks of Jewish identity. The 19th-century REFORM movement in Germany decided that the dietary laws were connected with the Temple ritual and were to be regarded as a temporary regulation, not integral to the Jewish religion. American Reform Judaism rejected the dietary laws at its Pittsburgh Conference of 1885, declaring that 'they fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness,' and that 'their observance in our day is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.' Today, the dietary laws are disregarded by a large segment of the Jewish people. CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM adheres to the laws of *kashrut*, although there is a tendency to select the more lenient options available in the *halakha* over stricter rulings that may have previously gained acceptance. Observance of the dietary laws has recently enjoyed a certain revival in various Jewish communities with numerous kosher products widely available and new kosher restaurants opening. In the State of Israel, nearly all food products are produced under rabbinical supervision to ensure conformity with the dietary laws. In the Israel Defense Forces and public institutions, the dietary laws are observed."⁴⁴

While both the Orthodox and Conservative sects of Judaism accept the kosher dietary laws as being valid for Jews of the modern era, there are differences in their application to be sure. As *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* states, "For the Conservative movement, the dietary laws are binding, but they are interpreted and applied somewhat differently from at least some forms of Orthodox practice. Swordfish, for example, is accepted as kosher by Conservative, but not Orthodox, rabbinic rulings, and Conservative Jews are more likely than Orthodox Jews to find it acceptable within the requirements of Jewish law to eat dairy and *parev* foods in non-kosher restaurants."⁴⁵ Conservative Jews have, at times, notably had to struggle with keeping relatively kosher homes, but then eating non-kosher meat items outside of the home—and this has contributed to intermarriage and assimilation and a dismissal of Jewishness. Dresner writes about this issue, and considers it a major problem that modern Jews, interacting with larger non-Jewish society, will have to contend with:

"Hallowing the act of eating is an acceptable concept to most people, but being set apart from others by virtue of this hallowing is not so acceptable. To many the whole idea of a democratic society in which ghetto walls are broken down and all peoples and faiths mingle freely and easily militates against such an impregnable food barrier as *Kashrut*. It is looked upon as a deterrent to good interfaith relations and was, therefore, one of the first parts of the Law which the early German Reformers dropped in their attempt to eliminate the non-universalistic aspects of Judaism. Indeed, even those who do keep Kosher homes do not hesitate to part company with these observances once they leave the privacy of their homes. 'At home a Jew, in society a man,' as the

⁴³ Eisenberg, 665.

⁴⁴ "Dietary Laws," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 216.

⁴⁵ "Dietary Laws," in R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Widoger, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 202.

Messianic Kosher Helper

old Haskalah adage had it. Edmond Fleg, the distinguished French author, tells us in his moving autobiography, *Why I Am a Jew*, how, as a young boy, this double standard Kashrut of convenience drove him from his religion. 'Once I was taken on a journey by my parents and at the hotel where we dined the fat and the lean were mixed, and cheese was served after meat. Even ham appeared on the table. My parents ate and permitted me to eat of this forbidden dish. Then the food forbidden at home was no longer forbidden when one was away from home? The law was law no longer?' Such inconsistency on the part of the parent is the surest way to guarantee that the next generation will abandon the Dietary Laws altogether. Such double standards can only be retained by virtue of an emotional nostalgia which is rarely, if ever, inherited. Either Kashrut is taken seriously as a means of singling Israel out as a people set apart for the Lord's service, every meal, therefore, being an opportunity to give witness to this fact, a regimen having significance not only in the confines of the home but outside the confines of the home as well, or it is doomed to extinction."⁴⁶

Interestingly enough, over the past two decades or so, Reform Judaism—while not at all encouraging Jews to keep the Torah's dietary laws—has begun something of a reinvestigation of various Torah instructions. The Reform community, while not exactly encouraging observance of *kashrut*, will not, however, prohibit it either. Stern describes some of this change:

"Kashrut, according to Reform principles, can include traditional halachic kashrut. The principles also advocate what some call 'ethical' kashrut, or 'eco-kashrut,' which includes concerns as the labor conditions of the workers who produced a particular product, the environmental friendliness of the packaging used, and the treatment of the animals before being slaughtered."⁴⁷

Many Reform Jews then, may choose to adhere to the "spirit" of the kosher dietary laws, by making sure that many food items they purchase are labeled either "organic" or "fair-trade"—among many possible designations that would get them to pay attention to what they eat.⁴⁸

Perhaps because of issues of modern Jewish identity, too much multi-culturalism in the West, too much intermarriage and assimilation—or any number of other factors—there has been a resurgence of some degree of kosher observance by many people within the Reform Jewish community. Robinson observes,

"Today, an increasing number of Jewish families are choosing to observe *kashrut*, including many Reform Jews. They are faced with a wide range of options. Of course, one can observe strict *kashrut*, eating only foods that have a *hechsher* and that have been prepared in a kosher kitchen. Others observe 'biblical *kashrut*,' abstaining from those foods that the Torah calls *tamei*, still others take that one step farther and eat only kosher meat. These days some Jews have chosen vegetarianism altogether, which moots the point. For many of them, this is a *Jewish* choice, expressing a commitment to the sanctity of animal life."⁴⁹

Messianics Approaching Traditional Jewish Kashrut

In our experience as a Messianic family since 1995, for the most part our observance of the kosher dietary laws has been limited to abstention from pork and shellfish⁵⁰—which is the same basic level of kosher observance present within the broad Messianic community. There are, as one will find, however, various Messianic Jewish people who do look much more carefully for a *hechsher* seal of approval on various, if not most, food items they purchase; the meat that they purchase will be from authorized kosher butchers; and there will be those who separate out meat and dairy. On the whole, though—even among many Messianic Jews who were raised in strictly observant

⁴⁶ Dresner, pp 44-46.

⁴⁷ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 9.

⁴⁸ A further examination of how the topic of kosher, and eating in general, has been approached by contemporary Reform Jews, is witnessed in Mary L. Zamore, ed., *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011).

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 252.

⁵⁰ This is discussed in Chapter 7, "Our Family Experiences Going Kosher" by Margaret McKee Huey.

A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

homes—there is more the tenor of “Biblically kosher” as would be seen in the resurgent sectors of the Reform Jewish community, which means not eating the flesh of non-kosher animals, birds, and aquatic life. There are various Messianic congregations which will insist, for congregational events at the congregational facility, that meat and dairy be separated, or that *pareve* be observed with a menu only consisting of fish and cheese—but then not insist upon this at extra-congregational activities at a private home, where meat and dairy will be mixed, and some form of “Biblically kosher” observed.

It is doubtful, even with Messianic people being aware of the different levels of *kashrut* observance present within the major sectors of contemporary Judaism, that very many are even going to practice a Conservative Jewish level of kosher keeping. Most are going to limit their observance—some because of practical issues regarding extended family and friends, and others far more because of budgetary constraints—to basically abstain from pork and shellfish, with some nominally separating out meat and dairy, and perhaps with purchasing authorized kosher meat on occasions when it is available and affordable. **This does not, however, mean that today’s Messianic people should remain ignorant or unaware of the major traditions associated with kosher present in Judaism.** Too many Messianic people, in their witness to Jewish people who do not know Yeshua—even if they are Reform Jews who do not keep kosher—are too quick to dismiss the separation of meat and dairy, or the presence of a *hechsher*, as some sort of vain “traditions of men.”

We need to do much, much better in understanding what some of the major Jewish traditions are regarding kosher, the Biblical passages they are based upon, and how we can be more sensitive to the needs of others—even if we might not necessarily follow such an elaborate level of kosher eating ourselves, or in our homes. For, if we do not at least try to understand the position of someone else, regarding the convictions they have in interpreting God’s Torah—perhaps in the words of the Apostle Paul, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV)—how will we be able to establish some common ground and valued trust to communicate the truths of the good news, to Jews who need to know their Messiah?