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Being Realistic About Kosher 2013

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The subject matter of the kosher dietary laws is one which, I have to admit, tends to bring about a wide degree of personal consternation within me when I see it discussed. **I do not think that when the issue of *kashrut* being valid for God’s people in the post-resurrection era is brought up by contemporary Messianics, it tends to be addressed that well.** There are many passages of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament which remain quantitatively ignored by those of the pro-kosher side, or are at least addressed in a sub-standard manner, with important details left out (i.e., Mark 7:19; Acts 10, 11; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 10:24-33; 1 Timothy 4:14-16; Titus 1:14-16; Hebrews 9:8-10; 13:9-10; et. al.).¹ Too many Biblical passages, which may seemingly imply that the kosher dietary laws were intended only for the pre-resurrection era, have been either shuffled off by the wayside, or too overly-simplified, by many teachers and leaders within the Messianic community.

More important to be sure, regarding one’s dietary or eating preferences, is how many on the pro-kosher side can have a tendency to over-magnify the importance of this issue, beyond what is reasonably acceptable. Yeshua Himself said, about eating anything that enters into one’s mouth, “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man” (Matthew 15:17-18). Yet, there are many Messianic teachers, Hebrew Roots aficionados, and certainly scores of Messianic individuals—who either subconsciously or consciously place eating bacon or shrimp at the same offense level as murder or adultery. They consider themselves to be ethically and morally superior to many of their evangelical Christian brothers and sisters, because they do not eat the meats classified as unclean or *tamei* (טָמֵא) on the lists of Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14—even if they have no problem expressing a degree of malice or hatred toward them: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19).

Neither my family nor myself, in our Messianic quest—as we come from an evangelical background, have embraced our Hebraic Roots, and have striven to live more like Messiah Yeshua in obedience to God’s Torah—have denied that the kosher dietary

¹ These New Testament passages, among others, are addressed in the **Eating and Kosher in the Apostolic Scriptures** section of this publication.

Messianic Kosher Helper

laws have a role in such obedience. *We are hardly people*, especially serving in full time Messianic ministry, *who are going to tell others in our faith community that kosher has been abolished*. But, too many on the pro-kosher side **have just not made their case**. Many of them are tainted by negative attitudes toward those who do not share their convictions, and others have done a sub-standard job at offering some reasonable, alternative explanations *in detail*, of Biblical passages which have traditionally been viewed as nullifying the dietary laws. Furthermore, not a huge amount of patience or graciousness have been demonstrated toward those trying to implement a kosher or kosher-style diet in on-the-ground life circumstances, and are struggling to do so in various ways—with rigidity rather than reason too often prevailing or being forced upon them.

How do any of us, in a still-emerging and still-maturing Messianic movement, sort through some of the issues regarding “kosher”? How do we get a little more realistic about what we see among the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers within our faith community, remembering that not all people share the same views as we do, and allow for a little more grace and mercy to come forth—rather than any unfair or unnecessary condemnation? How many of our challenges have been caused by an insufficient or underwhelming handling of Bible passages—versus having been caused by an underwhelming level of spiritual maturity on behalf of too many people?

The Maccabees and Dying for Kosher

There is little doubting that at one significant point in Jewish history, Jews refused to eat pork, unclean animals, and other unacceptable animals—on the threat of death—which is a major element of contemporary *Chanukah* commemorations. The Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., when the Seleucid Greeks tried to impose Hellenism on the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, was something that decisively forbade the people from circumcising their sons, and forced consumption of unclean animals onto the people by law:

“And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die” (1 Maccabees 1:44-50).

The historical record is clear how “many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food². They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die” (1 Maccabees 1:62-63). In 2 Maccabees 6:18, one encounters how “Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine’s flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the

² Grk. *koina* (κοινὰ); more accurately “common” or “defiled.”

“But many in Israel remained strong and fortified themselves not to eat common things” (NETS).

rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.” These examples demonstrate how many of the Jews during this period did not eat pork, and paid for it with their lives.

The courage and dedication of the Maccabees, those resistance fighters who stood against the onslaught of Hellenism and drove out the invaders via guerilla warfare, are to be doubtlessly remembered and honored. The record of their deeds is to be studied and reflected upon as significant for Biblical history (cf. Hebrews 11:35-36).³ And, it is to be rightly observed how many Jewish people in subsequent history, when given the option of eating unclean things—either by force or by circumstance—have refused. Sue Fishkoff summarizes in her book *Kosher Nation*,

“Jews have suffered and died for kashrut throughout history. The Jewish principle of *pikkuach nefesh*, the preservation of life, takes precedence over almost any other commandment in the Torah. Jews are obligated to give their lives only to avoid perverse sexual relations, idolatry, or murder. But the kosher laws are so deeply ingrained within observant Jews that some will do whatever they can to avoid eating non-kosher food, even in the most dire circumstances. Some observant Jews in Nazi concentration camps and Soviet labor camps fasted on Yom Kippur, and throughout the rest of the year they picked bits of maggots meat out from their gruel, denying their starved bodies the little bit of nutrition that extra food would have offered.”⁴

It is to be noted, of course, that given the wide sectors of a diverse Jewish community, that unlike many of the Maccabees, there have been Jewish people who would eat pork when there was nothing else to eat (m.*Yoma* 8:6). They would not consider this in violation of the *pikkuach nefesh* or regard for human life principle. *But this has often had to be a last resort*, such as Jewish workers in a concentration camp on the verge of death having to eat something. For the most part, Jewish observance of kosher has enabled there to be some degree of separation between the Jewish community and outsiders. However, as Jewish history over the past several centuries has demonstrated, attitudes toward the kosher dietary laws have definitely changed. Whether you are aware of it or not: **a majority of today’s Jewish people do not adhere to a kosher or a kosher-style of diet.** And among those who keep, or try to keep, kosher, there are a variety of different levels—frequently with the more Orthodox and ultra Orthodox believing that their way is the only way.

Acknowledging Jewish Diversity with Kosher

To the Hebrew Scriptures and to Judaism, the kosher dietary laws are all about holiness, and in sanctifying oneself regarding what God’s people are, and are not, to eat:

“Hence I have said to you, ‘You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You are therefore to make a distinction between the

³ For further reference, consult the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁴ Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America’s Food Answers to a Higher Authority* (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), 36.

Messianic Kosher Helper

clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean” (Leviticus 20:24-25).

Many Christian leaders and figures throughout history have derided the dietary instructions of the Torah, as perhaps being only intended for Ancient Israel and the Jewish people of the pre-resurrection era, but not something intended for the universal faith of Christianity in the post-resurrection era. The attitude of many has been that *God really doesn't care what His people eat*.

While violating the kosher laws should not be regarded as bearing the same degree of stigma as murder or adultery, it is true that the Pentateuch does direct God's people to separate what they eat, so “you shall not make yourselves abominable” (RSV). The verb *shaqatz* (שׁקֹצֵה), appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), means “**detest** (as cultically unclean)” (*CHALOT*).⁵ An activity that people are supposed to enjoy, such as eating (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 9:7), is one which is still to be regulated by God, at the very least to convey important lessons to His people.

Consider the following perspective offered by Samuel H. Dresner, in his publication *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time*, where he offers some criticism of various traditional Christian views of eating, from a Twentieth Century Conservative Jewish standpoint:

“[I]t must be with the everyday, Judaism teaches, that we begin our task of hallowing. If we were to ask Christianity the question: how does a human being become holy, what is the mysterious process through which he attains this exalted quality, we would probably be told: by having the right feeling or thought, by possessing the proper creed or belief. Judaism would agree that feelings and beliefs are essential to holiness, but it would assert that the struggle for holiness on the part of a human being does not *begin* there (nor should it end there for that matter). Judaism is not a one-day-a-week religion, nor does it concern itself only with prayer or Synagogue or ritual, nor does it limit itself to catechisms. On the contrary, its great claim, as expressed throughout the entire range of its literature from the Torah to the latest responsum, is that it must compass the entirety of a man's being; that it is, in fact, a way of life, affecting all of one's days or none of them, relevant to one's total manner of living or to none of it, just as concerned with the seeming trivialities as with the exalted aspects of one's existence. Indeed, it would assert that it is precisely with these seeming trivialities, these common, everyday actions of ours which are matter-of-fact habitual and apparently inconsequential that we must commence, in order to create the holy man. And what is more common, more ordinary, more seemingly trivial and inconsequential than the process of eating? It is precisely here that Judaism would have us begin—with the everyday—claiming that it is more significant to learn how to prepare and eat our food than to reflect on a dogma, more important to say *ha-motzi* over a piece of bread than memorize a creed. Make something fine and descent out of the common practice of eating and you will have achieved more than reading a whole library of books on theology. Man, Judaism seems to teach, is not so much what he *thinks* as what he *does*. Indeed, it would claim, proper thinking may well follow proper doing. Attitudes often derive from activities.

⁵ *CHALOT*, 383.

"Now we can better understand what the mitzvah of Kashrut is attempting to achieve and can see it in its proper context. We are commanded to be a holy people. 'Thou shalt be holy for I the Lord thy God am holy.' 'Thou shalt be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Israel is commanded to be holy; again and again commanded to be holy. But how do we become holy? We become holy by making holy, by hallowing. We become holy by hallowing that which is not yet holy, the profane, the everyday. And it is through observing the mitzvot [commandments] that we are able to hallow and be hallowed. That is the purpose of the mitzvot. Thus before performing any mitzvah we are bidden to receive a blessing which begins: Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the world Who has *hallowed us by Thy mitzvot...* (*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-olam Asher Kid'shanu B'mitzvotav...*) Thus the mitzvah of Kashrut was given to Israel in order that they become holy. Israel is commanded to hallow the act of eating, and through making this holy, become holy. Judaism teaches us to hallow every aspect of life through fulfilling the mitzvot. The mitzvah of Kashrut helps us hallow the act of eating.

"It is no simple achievement, however, this ennobling of our way of eating. It is a function we have in common with the animals. And there are many who are not greatly different from animals in this respect; they approach it with the same gluttony and coarseness and the same constant concern. Their meals are often vulgar and disgusting. To sit at their table is an ordeal. To hear as the central topic of conversation their discussion of food as served at this or that club, this or that restaurant, this or that party, of the need for dieting and helpless habit of overeating, is appalling. The descriptions we possess of Roman banquets and the revolting excesses indulged in there certainly remind one of animals. Our modern displays may be somewhat more sophisticated but are not really different in essence. The pagan glorification of elemental needs is still very much with us. Thus, since man is an animal and eating is a bodily function which he has in common with the animal, he may likewise approach his food as an animal—the only thought in mind being how best to satisfy his desires. That is one attitude, the pagan attitude. Conversely, the classical Christian attitude to the problem of food would lie in the denial of the body and all its desires as so many necessary evils which must be tolerated. For it is not the body but the soul which matters, not this world but the world to come. Man is a sinful creature and cannot curb his lust; he is an animal and cannot obey God's law. Therefore the enjoyment of food is often looked upon by Christianity as sinful. Therefore the rigid manner of fasts in which the church prescribes and the asceticism which has characterized the main stream of Christianity down to this very day."⁶

Dresner goes on to make the conclusion of how "The glory of man is his power to hallow. We do not live to eat; we eat to live. Even the act of eating can be sanctified; even the act of eating can become a means for achieving holiness."⁷ There is little denying Dresner's legitimate observations of how there have been Christians throughout history who have dismissed the idea that God would be concerned about His people hallowing so simple a life process as eating, to those Christians throughout history who have practiced asceticism and eschewed eating to various degrees. Dresner also interjects some useful thoughts about balancing inward integrity with outward practice. It is not just enough for

⁶ Samuel H. Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1982), pp 17-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

Messianic Kosher Helper

people to have appropriate thoughts or ideas in their hearts and minds, as they should be enjoined with the appropriate outward actions. *And yes, these can involve what people choose or do not choose to eat.* Dresner's assessment of the importance of the kosher dietary laws was rather fair, and he surely offers today's contemporary Messianic people much to think about and reflect upon.

Chapter 1 of this publication, "**A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions,**" goes into some detail in explaining some of the traditional Jewish approaches to *kashrut*. It mainly informs readers of how the Orthodox Jewish tradition, and to a lesser extent Conservative Judaism, have handled issues like ritual slaughter of animals, determination of which birds are acceptable for eating, the issue of mixing meat and dairy, what is pareve, and food storage and preparation. These are among the aspects of keeping kosher, to much of Judaism, where it believed that people can hallow their activities before the Lord.

While it is widely and rightly recognized that keeping kosher has served, certainly socially, as an identifier of the Jewish people throughout history, it needs to be kept in mind that not all Jews throughout history have kept kosher. This has been especially true since the rise of Reform Judaism in the mid-Nineteenth Century, which cast aside the kosher dietary laws as only being something important for Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East. Yet one might argue that a few of the seeds for many modern Jews wanting to throw away *kashrut* were planted many centuries earlier, though. Fishkoff explains,

"Even treyf can be kosher. The Talmud teaches that for every non-kosher food there exists a perfectly acceptable kosher equivalent. For centuries Jewish cooks have been inventing kosher versions of treyf dishes, substituting oil for butter in meat recipes and using chicken or beef instead of ham. Food historian John Cooper describes a medieval Italian Jewish dish made of veal and chicken known as *chazarello*, or 'little pig,' no doubt because the original was made of pork."⁸

Beyond this, however, is a very well known incident which took place in 1883, at a banquet to commemorate the first graduating class of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. The meal that was served blatantly offered non-kosher meat items to those gathered, much of the unclean fare actually being what would not be normally provided at a standard luncheon or dinner. This gathering really helped to assert the independence of American Reform Judaism from its more traditional, and far more observant, relatives in Central and Eastern European Orthodoxy. Fishkoff summarizes,

"ON JULY 11, 1883, Hebrew Union College, the rabbinical seminary of America's nascent Reform movement, held a gala dinner in Cincinnati to honor its initial graduating class, the first four Reform rabbis ordained in North America.

"The nine-course meal, which became known as the Trefa Banquet, was elegant, elaborate, and not at all kosher. It featured seafood—littleneck clams, soft-shell crab, shrimp, and frogs' legs—non-kosher beef, and, in flagrant violation of the prohibition on mixing milk and meat, ice cream for dessert. The menu was written in a sort of *franglais*—'Salade of Shrimp' and 'Grenouilles [*sic*] a la Creme and Cauliflower'—to underscore its Continental aspirations.

⁸ Fishkoff, 227.

"The Jewish press reacted harshly to what they saw as a slap in the face of traditional Judaism. In the *Jewish Messenger*, Henrietta Szold, a twenty-two-year-old reporter and later founder of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, recorded her 'indignation' at the lack of 'regard paid to our dietary laws.' She noted that two rabbis left the room when the first course was served, and several others sat stone-faced for the rest of the evening, refusing to touch the food.

"The Trefa Banquet has gone down in Jewish lore as an illustration of Reform's contempt for Jewish law and tradition. In fact, Reform leaders at the time were embarrassed by the incident, insisting the violation of kashrut was unintentional. Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise, president of the college and the preeminent voice of American Reform Judaism, initially blamed the caterer, telling the *American Israelite* in August 1883, 'We do not know why he diversified his menu with multipeds and bivalves.'

"By that fall, the Reform attitude had hardened. Buoyed by support from within his movement and angered at the continued brouhaha in the Orthodox press, Wise in November told *Die Deborah*, another Jewish publication, that he did not need to justify the dinner because most American Jews did not keep kosher anyway.

"There is still no consensus on who authorized the Trefa Banquet, although most scholars blame local lay leaders. It was not the first non-kosher meal sponsored by a Reform institution; in 1841, a Reform school in Hamburg, Germany, held a dinner featuring crab, oysters, and a pig's head. But the Reform movement in America had always been more circumspect. Although increasing numbers of American Jews no longer kept kosher by the middle of the nineteenth century, it was rare for a Jewish communal institution to so openly flout the dietary laws.

"The Trefa Banquet changed the rules. It represented, according to one scholar, a flexing of young Reform muscle, 'a midpoint between the general compliance with traditional kashrut at public events that characterized American Reform Judaism until the 1870s and a radical break with kashrut that increasingly characterized mainstream Reform Judaism beginning in the 1880s.'

"Reform Judaism emerged in Germany in the early nineteenth century as a reaction against what its Enlightenment-era founders considered the antiquated aspects of traditional Jewish practice and belief. Early Reform leaders viewed the Torah as a moral and spiritual guide rather than the word of God, its commandments no longer binding. They emphasized Judaism's ethical and universalist values; rituals and customs that no longer furthered those ideals, such as prayer shawls, ritual baths, and services conducted in Hebrew, were discarded.

"This new approach arrived in America in the 1820s, and in 1873 a handful of congregations that followed its practices formed the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now called the Union for Reform Judaism. They set down their core beliefs in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the foundational document of American Reform Judaism. Among other things, the platform declared Jewish laws regulating 'diet, priestly purity and dress' to be outmoded, their observance 'apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.' The kosher diet had no place in modern American society, the document declared; it was socially divisive, alienating Jew from Gentile, and culturally backward, relying on arbitrary norms that had no basis in science."⁹

While this 1883 Trefa Banquet, as it has become infamously known, has proven to be a major historical turning point for American Reform Judaism (and has interestingly enough, probably helped much of Conservative Judaism position itself between Reform

⁹ Ibid., pp 231-232.

Messianic Kosher Helper

and Orthodox Judaism), this gathering notably did not serve pork. Reform Jews of America, who today constitute the majority, do not keep kosher. But at the same time, though, it should be observed that there has been more of a *selective* kosher-style of diet present among Reform Jews—stemming from the fact that the Trefa Banquet served no pork. Fishkoff goes on to explain,

“Today most Jews assume that Reform Judaism rejects kashrut outright. In fact, the Reform attitude has always been more nuanced, shifting along with developments in American Judaism as a whole. Historian Jonathan Sarna suggests that what is most significant about the Trefa Banquet is not what was served but what was *not* served: pork. Shellfish was acceptable to this urbane crowd. Mixing milk and meat was fine. But no hint of bacon, ham, or lard was permitted. The much-maligned banquet is thus a prime example of the emerging practice of ‘selective kashrut,’ a pick-and-choose approach to Jewish dietary law that led to the kosher-style delis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

“Selective kashrut has never meant anything goes. It operates according to well-understood, if unspoken, societal rules, themselves influenced by where one lives and with whom one associates. In nineteenth-century America, especially along the eastern seaboard, the genteel Gentiles ate shellfish. In Boston that meant oysters; in Baltimore it was crab. Liberal Jews looking to climb the social or business ladder in those regions followed suit, often incorporating these *treyf* sea creatures into their own version of a Jewish diet.

“The custom persists among some Reform Jews in those regions. Rabbi Lucy Dinner of Temple Beth Or in Raleigh, North Carolina, grew up in the Reform community of New Orleans, where Gulf shrimp were a staple at festive meals. Her childhood synagogue held an annual seafood dinner as late as 2005. As rabbi of her own congregation now, she encourages greater observance of the dietary laws and eschews *treyf*—except when she’s in New Orleans, where she keeps what she calls ‘New Orleans kosher.’

“Pig was always different. One scholar writes that there were three kinds of Jewish diets in nineteenth-century America: ritually observant, non observant, and ‘pork-free.’ Shrimp salad and lobster bisque might be waved along with a friendly wink, but roast ham was a real statement.”¹⁰

The main reason why pork is still a major culprit among many Reform Jews who believe that kosher was for another time, has been because of how pork was forced upon Jewish people to renounce Judaism, during times like the Maccabean crisis or the Spanish Inquisition. However, over the past two to three decades, many Reform Jews have started to reevaluate their position regarding kosher and other Torah instructions, which their forbearers widely kept reserved to the distant past. In all likelihood, Jewish assimilation into much broader non-Jewish culture, has served as a factor for many Reform Jews wanting to reclaim their heritage. Fishkoff addresses this:

“By the 1980s, a new Jewish generation was coming of age at a time of greater spiritual exploration and ethnic identification. Whereas their parents and grandparents actively rejected Orthodox traditions, many younger Reform Jews were willing, even

¹⁰ Ibid., 233.

eager, to explore the potential these rituals might have to give meaning to their lives. The idea that ethical and spiritual ideals could be furthered rather than cheapened by observing Jewish ritual gained ground as the century progressed, engendering considerable push-back from older Reform Jews who hewed more closely to the Classical Reform line.

"The winter 1998 edition of *Reform Judaism* magazine addressed the issue head-on, with a cover photo of Rabbi Richard Levy, then CCAR president, wearing a yarmulke and kissing the fringes of his prayer shawl. The accompanying article published a draft version of Levy's 'Ten Principles for Reform Judaism,' intended as the basis for a new platform of principles to replace the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and its rejection of Jewish ritual. Levy's proposal encouraged Reform Jews to consider adopting certain observances, including kashrut, as part of striving to make their lives more holy....

"Levy's draft immediately drew fire from Reform leaders who bristled at the specific practices he named, including keeping kosher, going to the mikveh, and wearing tallitot (prayer shawls) and tefillin (phylacteries). None of those rituals was mentioned by name in the final platform adopted in May 1999, which was revised to read: 'We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of mitzvot and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community.' The wording was a far cry from the hostility of 1885 but fell short of a hearty embrace of tradition, however altered or adapted.

"A decade later, openness to the spiritual potential of Jewish rituals was growing fast, at the grassroots and leadership levels. Several Reform congregations now have mikvehs, or ritual baths, which they use for a wide range of ceremonies in addition to the traditional purposes. Tallitot are common in Reform services, and some younger members are donning tefillin. And Jewish dietary practice, kosher or not, is a hot topic of discussion."¹¹

There is a growing resurgence in much of the American Reform Jewish community to keep, or at least appreciate—on some degree or level—the kosher dietary laws. What is more likely to be seen, more than anything else, is for today's Reform Jews reconsidering kosher to keep a very minimalist, kosher-style of diet, avoiding pork and shellfish, and perhaps also separating meat and dairy on some level. It is not too likely that Reform Jews reconsidering kosher are going to look for a *hechsher* on every food item they purchase, or even avoid eating at all restaurants. But, it will be more likely that Reform Jews reconsidering kosher are going to be considering flagrant violations of the dietary laws—such as eating shrimp cocktail or a ham sandwich—and what the more observant of the Jewish community might think of their actions.

Acknowledging Messianic Diversity with Kosher

If you have attended one of the thousands of Messianic congregations or fellowships across North America to be sure, but also in many other places across the world, then you are most probably aware of the diversity present within our faith community regarding the subject of "kosher." The spectrum of positions on the kosher dietary laws, their relevance and application, and their implementation *or* non-implementation in the lives of God's people—is quite diverse! On one side of the spectrum are those, similar to Reform Judaism, who generally believe that *kashrut* is a thing of past Biblical history, and was

¹¹ Ibid., pp 234-235.

Messianic Kosher Helper

probably abolished by various instructions witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament. On another side of the spectrum are people in the Messianic movement who observe a highly rigid, Orthodox Jewish level of kosher, and will often not join into fellowship meals with other people in the Messianic community. Generally speaking, though, the bulk of people in the Messianic community may be said to observe a kosher-style of diet, which basically avoids pork and shellfish. Many try to be flexible when interacting with evangelical Christian Believers who do not keep any form of kosher, and with those who observe an Orthodox Jewish level of kosher, making sure to be aware of all their sensitivities. (This should also include a wide degree of keeping one's comments or personal views, regarding someone else's habits, to oneself.)

During fellowship meal times at a local Messianic congregation, one is likely to encounter people who hold to a very low, a medium, or a very high or rigid view of the kosher dietary laws. It can be detected that there tend to be four distinct schools of thought present surrounding "kosher" within the broad Messianic movement. Each of us needs to be aware of these, as there will be probably individual people who hold to these views present within just about all Messianic congregations:

1. Kosher has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, but might be necessary to observe for Jewish evangelistic purposes:¹² It is detectable from various sectors of the Messianic movement, widely involving those organizations whose major purpose is to evangelize Jewish people with the good news of Yeshua, that they hold that the kosher dietary laws have probably been abolished in the post-resurrection era. Passages of the Apostolic Scriptures like Peter's vision of Acts 10-11 or Paul's direction of Romans 14, among others, are interpreted along traditional Christian lines. If kosher is to be really observed for anything, it would be via Jewish Believers being sensitive to various cultural concerns of Jewish non-Believers, but not out of any sense of obedience to the Torah. Jewish Believers in Yeshua may keep kosher out of a sense of loyalty to Jewish culture and the traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures, but do not have to if they do not want to.

2. A kosher-style diet should be encouraged for Jewish Believers:¹³ Much of today's Messianic Jewish movement, having built itself upon a foundation of the earlier Hebrew Christian movement—which was primarily interested in Jewish evangelism—does tend to encourage a kosher style of diet for

¹² This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Rich Robinson, ed., *The Messianic Movement: A Field Guide for Evangelical Christians* (Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2005), 102; Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Volume Four: New Testament Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), pp 273-282; Sam Nadler, *Messianic Foundations: Fulfill Your Calling In the Jewish Messiah* (Word of Messiah Ministries, 2010), pp 171-177; Michael Brown, *60 Questions Christians Ask About Jewish Beliefs and Practices* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2011), pp 64-67, 224-226.

¹³ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 1996), pp 97-110; David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement With an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), pp 139, 160-161; Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*, revised edition (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), pp 227-279.

Messianic Jewish Believers, which avoids pork and shellfish. It does not tend to theologially argue that the dietary laws of the Torah were abolished in the Apostolic Scriptures, but at the same time would not argue that the dietary laws are more important than the Ten Commandments or more ethical or moral instructions regarding human relations.

Frequently at many Messianic Jewish congregations, one will be told to only bring a “Biblically kosher” dish to fellowship gatherings. While this would quantitatively rule out someone bringing a roast ham, it might mean that someone could bring a meat lasagna, or even a bucket of fried chicken from KFC. Outside of the congregation, Messianic Jews who observe a kosher-style of diet would more than probably eat out at most restaurants (including fast food), but when ordering would tell the waiter to “hold the bacon” on various items, yet at the same time might order a cheeseburger.

3. A kosher(-style) diet should be encouraged for all Believers:¹⁴ In the wider Messianic movement beyond Messianic Judaism, which would include non-Jewish Believers embracing their Hebraic Roots and a life of Torah pursuance on some level, are many who think that all Believers should be encouraged to eat kosher. This may include a kosher-style of diet similar to that observed by many of today’s Messianic Jews, to a more stringent kosher observance like that found in Conservative to Orthodox Judaism. Because this includes many people who hold to the common One Law/One Torah perspective promoted since the early 2000s, there may be some legalism regarding kosher present, including an elevation of the kosher instructions to a higher level of importance than would be Biblically appropriate.¹⁵ Yet, this is certainly not true of all those who are convicted that adherence to the Torah’s dietary instructions should be encouraged of all God’s people. And, people in this category will be widely prone to encourage a kosher(-style) diet not only out of obedience to Scripture, but also for various health reasons.

4. Traditional kosher should be observed, for the most part, only by Jewish Believers:¹⁶ Among Messianic Jews who either directly or indirectly adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology,¹⁷ it is often asserted that Messianic Jews have a Biblical responsibility to not just observe a kosher-style diet, but a

¹⁴ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Shelbyville, TN: Heart of Wisdom, 2012), 20; Tim Hegg, *Introduction to Torah Living* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), pp 187-199.

¹⁵ Consult some of the discussions offered in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹⁶ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp 49-96; Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012); Boaz Michael, *Tent of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2013), pp 44-45, 137; Carl Kinbar, “Messianic Jews and Jewish Tradition,” in David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts, eds., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), pp 72-81.

¹⁷ This issue has been addressed in the publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

Messianic Kosher Helper

responsibility to the Jewish people to observe most of the kosher regulations as prescribed by Orthodox Judaism. This sector is not at all a majority of today's Messianic Jews. Those within it typically have a negative disposition not only toward non-Jewish Messianic people who observe kosher on some level, thinking that it is for all Believers, **but** they even tend to have a negative disposition toward their fellow Messianic Jews who do not observe as high a level of kosher as they do.

In our family's experience since 1995, a fair majority of today's Messianic people would fall into the category of being what Fishkoff describes in her book as **kosher-style**. This is actually a level of kosher observance practiced by a fair number within today's American Jewish community as well, with a more heightened sense of kosher being present during the Passover season:

"Janice Drell of Glenview, Illinois, is not nonobservant; she is simply not fully kosher according to Orthodox standards. She keeps a kosher-style home, meaning she does not bring in pork or shellfish, but she will buy packaged food without kosher symbols. She reads the labels to make sure they contain no lard or other obviously non-kosher ingredients, like most Conservative and some Orthodox Jews. But when her children were growing up, she made the home completely kosher every year for Passover. The kids would draw pictures of skulls and crossbones to put on the pantry where the family sequestered all its bread, pasta, cereals, and other non-Passover foods, to indicate those were off-limits for the week. She would buy kosher-for-Passover food, from matzo to ketchup, even though ketchup without a kosher symbol was good enough the rest of the year."¹⁸

Among Messianic people, who are convicted from the Scriptures that the kosher dietary laws are not a thing of past Biblical history, **why do most at best keep a "kosher-style" diet?** From one side, there are those who would say that by following any kind of Old Testament code regarding food that these people must be legalists. But from the other side, there are those who would say that these people are compromised to various degrees, and should seek out only those food items which have a *hechsher*, a Rabbinic stamp of approval, and would for the most part only be eaten by members of the Orthodox Jewish community.

While among many contemporary adherents of the environmental movement, there are definitely people (more liberal than not politically) who adhere to either a **vegetarian** or **vegan diet**—this is simply not an option for most people. Unless significantly convinced because of a health condition, or thinking that it is best not to eat animal flesh or products for conservationism purposes—most people, Jewish or non-Jewish, are not going to eliminate meat, fish, and/or dairy completely from their diets. While adhering to a vegetarian or vegan diet would certainly be a quick solution to the kosher issue, especially when interacting in public, most people are not willing to make this commitment. Various Messianic congregations, perhaps even following the lead of various non-Messianic synagogues, might choose to only allow for vegetarian meals at fellowship

¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

gatherings, mainly so that all present can eat. Yet, the people at large, both in leadership and membership, are not likely to do this in their homes.

The main issue regarding a kosher-style diet for contemporary Messianics, surrounds the sources of **meat** and **poultry** which are available to people. It is a fact that if someone lives outside the confines of a city which does not have a large Jewish population, that the option of acquiring meat products which have been slaughtered and butchered according to the traditional Jewish practice of *shechitah* (שחיטה), is going to be very limited. Even among those who live in a city or town with a large Jewish community, where kosher markets may be present and/or a major supermarket chain may have a kosher market sub-section, the biggest deterrence to buying authorized-kosher meat is not that many Messianic people are unwilling to buy it; **it is the cost**. When one goes to a supermarket with a kosher market sub-area, and can compare the cost of authorized-kosher meat versus the more standard meat—with some of the authorized-kosher meat costing between 300-500% more—it is not difficult for the Messianic consumer to make an economic decision to observe a kosher-style diet, purchasing the cheaper product.

Many of today's Messianic people—not because of failure to obey but because of stewardship issues—have chosen a kosher-style diet, because they have to be careful with their financial resources. And, it is a place where they have looked more to keep the essential substance or spirit of the Torah (cf. Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6), and allow for some degree of fluidity, given both the proclivity and need of many to still eat meat. For not only Torah observant non-Jewish Messianics, but even Messianic Jews raised in a Reform Jewish home, **giving up pork and shellfish has come with great difficulty**. It can cause tension when interacting with one's friends, and does cause tension at various family gatherings, even when one's dietary preferences are not made into an issue. But, it can be downright insulting to many—who have made significant sacrifices to give up certain recipes and dishes with sentimental value—to be told by a rigid observer of kosher, "Someone who has stopped eating unclean meat has certainly taken steps toward observance, and many of these steps are necessary and praiseworthy...[but] still, they have no platform to call themselves 'kosher'" (Boaz Michael).¹⁹

It may be true that a wide number of today's Messianic people in 2013-2014, who have gotten a little too comfortable with saying that they adhere to "Biblically kosher," should get more used to using the terminology "**kosher-style**." But a much bigger issue surrounding kosher, is in recognizing those circumstances where the interests in seeing people brought to Messiah faith *clearly takes precedence over diet*. This is an area regarding the whole topic of "kosher," where far too much of the Messianic movement—even among those who adhere to a very minimalist kosher-style of diet that avoids pork and shellfish, but would mix meat and dairy and eat out at most restaurants—does not score very highly. Acknowledging and improving our attitudes on this, is absolutely imperative for our long-term future.

Being Served Unclean Things by Others

While it is to be commended that most of today's Messianic people are committed to following the kosher dietary laws, on some significant level—it is also true that almost all

¹⁹ Michael, pp 44-45.

Messianic Kosher Helper

of us interact with other people who eat unclean things on a regular basis. Most significant among those who eat unclean things are our evangelical Christian brothers and sisters, and notably among those will be close family and friends. And also not to be overlooked, Messianics are often prone to interact with various Reform Jews, who are not too keen on eating kosher. What are we to do with various social circumstances in everyday life, when we might be fellowshiping with others, and not only are unclean things present for eating—but we might be served them ourselves?

Many interreligious gatherings that include evangelical Christians and Messianic people, will often provide some sort of a buffet. Obviously at a buffet, people can not only individually choose what they want or do not want to eat, but how much they want to eat. For Messianic people who follow a more-or-less kosher-style of diet, eating out with groups of friends or colleagues, widely means that one's dietary preferences can be asserted as a personal choice, when a waiter comes around to take an order. It is when fellowship takes place at one's home or place of business, and things are put on one's plate, that potentially tense situations will arise. I have heard more than my fair share of stories from Messianic people, who are rigidly kosher, that they have made a scene (via a rude comment) when being served bacon and eggs at a breakfast—when they could have eaten the eggs and left the bacon quietly off to the side.

The Holy Scriptures are clear that what a man or woman eats is quite secondary to the way he or she acts. If in their observance of the kosher dietary laws, Messianic people make little effort to treat others with love, grace, or mercy—then they have lost the focus of what separating clean and unclean tries to convey. *It is not enough to try to keep kosher in one's diet, when a person may come up short at keeping kosher in separating out any ungodly or unsanitary thoughts about one's fellow human beings.* Most of us are going to have situations arise in our lives, when we will be served things like pork or shellfish, by well meaning family or friends, and we are going to have to have an appropriate attitude about it.

There are, of course, many stories of missionaries who travel to remote areas, who have little choice in eating what they are served by native peoples, in order for them to gain favor as outsiders, in developing some kind of relationship with them, that they might be open to hearing the good news. *Many of these native peoples are impoverished, and missionaries being offered some of the local grubs and worms is like them literally being granted a banquet by their host.* Most of us, though, are not going to be placed into those sorts of circumstances. Instead, what we are likely to encounter is something similar to the Corinthian Believers, who may have been invited to a non-Believer's home for a meal. We might get asked to supper at a person's home, where no form of kosher is observed, and we may have to make a decision on what to, and not to, eat.

1 Corinthians 10:24-33 tends to totally stump today's Messianic people who are rigidly kosher, as they often fail to realize that the Apostle Paul, in instructing the Corinthian Believers, does direct them to eat whatever is set before them at a meal at a non-Believer's home. Yet, Paul does direct how they were to refuse if it became public knowledge that the meat served had been sacrificed to idols:

"Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S,

AND ALL IT CONTAINS [Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 89:11]. If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat *it*, for the sake of the one who informed *you*, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other *man's*...Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the [assembly] of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the *profit* of the many, so that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:25-29a, 31-32).

What Paul has definitely done in this passage, is place the spiritual interests of other people and their redemption in Yeshua *ahead of* any Torah instructions regarding food and diet. When he communicates, "If an unbeliever invites you over and you want to go..." (1 Corinthians 10:27a, TLV), this is obviously a conditional statement given to the Corinthians, as there may have been circumstances present where an invitation to a non-Believer's home was not ideal and could have been refused. Furthermore, what can catch people totally off guard sometimes, is how Paul's word, "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake" (1 Corinthians 10:25), does not so much concern the Corinthian Believers going out and purchasing meat that had been sacrificed to idols among the local butchers, but instead what their potential non-believing host would have purchased. The verb *pōloumenon* (πωλούμενον) is actually a present passive participle, making "being sold" (LITV, Brown and Comfort)²⁰ an action outside the control of the Corinthian Believers.

What can really get rigidly kosher Messianic people upset, is that Paul did direct the Corinthians, "eat whatever is set before you, without raising matters of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:27b, TLV). This meant that, if in accepting an invitation by a local pagan family, a non-Jewish or Jewish Corinthian Believer was to eat whatever beef, lamb, fowl, *pork*, or *shellfish* were set before him. If when finding out that the meat was involved in pagan rituals, it was then to be refused (1 Corinthians 10:28). The principle at work, which exceeds the importance of *kashrut*, is "Give no offense either to Jewish or Greek people or to God's community" (1 Corinthians 10:32, TLV).

Has Paul thrown out the dietary laws, or the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21), in 1 Corinthians 10:24-33? I do not read his instruction in this way. But the interests in seeing other people brought to saving faith in Israel's Messiah—as sharing the good news would have been the main reason for a Corinthian Believer to accept a dinner invitation from a non-Believer—does take precedence over the Torah's dietary laws. Paul said, "I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, **so that they may be saved**" (1 Corinthians 10:33, NRSV). The Corinthians needed to be respectful to their non-believing hosts, in eating what they had prepared with gratitude.

In my own ministry experiences, there have certainly been occasions when I have not only been served unclean things, but I have eaten them. I have also found it necessary, on occasion, to eat unclean things as a matter of courtesy to others. Following the end of my Vocation of Ministry class at Asbury Theological Seminary in December 2005, there was a brunch held for all of the students. This was a buffet prepared by some older women in a

²⁰ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 602.

Messianic Kosher Helper

local Methodist church in the Orlando area—what we would more commonly just call *little old church ladies*—in their late seventies and early eighties. The main fare at the brunch was a classic egg and sausage casserole. Recognizing the significant Torah importance of, “You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:32), I put two small pieces of the egg and sausage casserole on my plate, I said to two of these women “Thank you for hosting us this morning,” and then I sat down and ate them. I did not go back and have any more, but as a matter of respect to these older women—some of whom looked like they should be in a retirement community—I ate a pork product.

There would certainly be many Messianic people who would say what I did was wrong, but **I made a conscious decision in deciding that honoring my elders was more important than what I ate.** These elderly women did not have to take hours of their time cooking for us as seminary students, and extend their congratulations for us for finishing our class, but they did. I decided that their honoring of us needed to be reciprocated.

These sorts of situations are admittedly few. When our family interacts with our larger Christian family today—which certainly does not keep kosher—they know that we no longer eat pork and shellfish, and both we and they do not try to make a huge issue out of it, especially since there are also vegetarians in our larger family. Yet like many non-Jewish Believers who have adopted a kosher-style of diet, I definitely went through a past phase when I thought that eating a sausage egg McMuffin from McDonald’s *was more of a problem* than other, far more problematic violations of the Torah and Scripture (perhaps like looking at pornographic images of women). *Why was this the case?* Was it just because, at one point in going through puberty, I was still spiritually maturing, hormonally unbalanced, and needed to work through some things in terms of inward morality and outward holiness? Or, was it also widely influenced by the fact that many Messianic people who make a point to “keep kosher”—and who in turn influence much of our overall spiritual culture—**do not make too much of a point to emphasize ethics and morality?**

Being Realistic About Kosher

The Lord told the Ancient Israelites, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deuteronomy 8:10). In the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), the verb *savah* (שָׂוָה) can mean: “to eat one’s fill,” “to drink one’s fill,” or quite possibly also “to eat one’s fill of, satisfy oneself with” (*HALOT*).²¹ Eating is definitely to be a positive experience, as it is to not only provide people with sustenance for living, but that people get to partake of the good Creation of God. Far too often in much of Christian history, eating has not been viewed as an act to be sanctified and enjoyed, as much as it has just been a necessary act of human living. Judaism has had a much better approach to sanctifying the act of eating, not trying to separate physical and spiritual things to the same degree as historical Christianity.

There should be little doubt that the widespread, positive emphasis we see today in the Messianic community on the kosher dietary laws, is helping many of God’s people to

²¹ *HALOT*, 2:1303.

consider that it is important that we all sanctify the act of eating. At the same time, there has not often been that realistic or balanced approach to what the Holy Scriptures communicate about food, clean and unclean meats, and how there is a much higher priority to be placed on how we treat other people than what other people eat, as there should be. A situation arose among the Messiah followers in Rome, most probably over what was being served at fellowship meal gatherings, where there were people unnecessarily judging one another over what they would and would not eat. Paul issued the sharp rebuke: “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Too many people who strive to keep kosher, unfairly look down on others who do not. And, among many people who keep kosher, there are those who look down on others who do not keep as stringent a level of kosher as they do.

It does not seem likely that, similar to the diversity one encounters in the Jewish community regarding “kosher,” there is going to be any uniform “kosher” standard practiced by any person or group in the Messianic movement. Because of this, each of us needs to (regularly) check our attitudes and how we look at the actions of how other people choose to eat. This needs to be enjoined with more detailed analyses of Biblical passages, in both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, so that we might have a better handle on what *kashrut* is all about, and what it means for us living in the post-resurrection era. More than anything else, those who have been convicted by the Lord that kosher eating has not been abolished, need to balance how they sort between clean and unclean meats—with how they sort between clean and unclean thoughts, ideas, and statements they might make. **They need to decisively demonstrate a kosher way of how they interact with their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, and how they interact with a fallen world which has far bigger concerns than people who eat pork or shellfish on a regular basis.**