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Organically Grown: The Sprouting *Eco-Kashrut* Movement

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

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Lewiston, Maine

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I would be delusional if I thought that I could get everyone who helped me with this process onto one page. So, please know that if you are reading this, I am so grateful for you.

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Introduction

Eco-kashrut: Setting up the Thesis

This thesis strives to answer the core question of how *eco-kashrut* sprouts organically out of Jewish values and traditions. Six specific traditional Jewish values receive special focus. They are *bal tashchit* (not ruining the earth), *shmitah* (the rhythms of allowing the earth to rest), *tzar'ar ba'alei chai'im* (respect for animals), *kavod habriot* (respect for all living beings), *sh'mirat haguf* (protection of one's own body), and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). These six values are selected because they focus on the earth, animals, humans, and the world-at-large, thus providing a comprehensive and full grasp of the movement. First, through scholarly analysis, I show how *eco-kashrut* is an inherently Jewish movement. Then, using interviews with Jewish practitioners, Jewish organizations, and scholars, I explore how *eco-kashrut* plays out for different individuals, in today's setting. Although the majority of the individuals with whom I spoke do not use the term *eco-kashrut* to describe their practices, I apply it as an umbrella term for everyday food-related practices grounded in environmental engagement and Jewish values.

Judaism is a tradition that is constantly changing and adapting to the modern era by using older traditions and values as a framework and guide for the present. Judaism is both a religion and a lens through which to look at the world. For so many individuals, practices associated with *eco-kashrut* provide a unique avenue to engage with current environmental questions while also being grounded in Judaism.

My first chapter gives some background by providing a brief history of traditional *kashrut* along with different theories regarding *kashrut*. The final part of this first chapter introduces the emergence of *eco-kashrut* and provides a brief history of the movement.

The subsequent chapters follow a similar format to one another. First, I provide a brief exploration of the particular Jewish value in question, through a review of scholarly literature on that value. I then complement the insights gained from this review with accounts and anecdotes from both Jewish environmental organizations and individual Jewish practitioners. These first-person narratives derive from a host of interviews that I conducted over the past few months. I carefully chose organizations and individuals based on their commitment to Jewish environmentalism, specifically as it pertains to the intentional ways in which people eat, approach, or harvest food. I believe that it is important to engage with a large array of individuals and organizations in hopes that I would be able to provide a wide range of current insights into, and a fresh analysis of, how *eco-kashrut* grows directly out of shared Jewish values.

Chapter 1: Brief History and Key Elements of Traditional *Kashrut*

Biblical & Rabbinic

Roots and key elements of Jewish dietary practices

Before undertaking the study of *eco-kashrut*, it is necessary to first understand *kashrut*'s rich and complex history. We turn to Leviticus to get started. In fact, a few key verses of Leviticus provide the direct reasoning for many dietary practices of Israelites and, later, of the Jewish people: God said so; therefore, you must do so.

The *Torah* makes one statement which provides a reason for a kosher diet: ‘And you shall separate between the animal that is pure and one that is impure, and between the bird that is pure and the one that is impure, and you shall not make your souls abominable by (eating) an animal or a bird or anything that creeps on the ground, that I have separated for you to be (considered) impure. And you shall be holy unto Me for I, the Lord, am holy; and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine.’ (Leviticus 20:25-26).¹

Biblical dietary practices provide a pathway so that individuals will have to intentionally think about God and religion in even the most mundane aspect of their life. In a book review of Jordan Rosenbloom's, *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World*, Zev Garber writes, “the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are divine utterances relating daily diet to the self and communal holiness.”² In short, “the reason is discernible as being a reminder of God’s presence, whereas no physical benefit is apparent.”³ Additionally, these laws appear to serve to create self-restraint. The laws “called upon the human capacities for discipline, obedience, and

¹ M. Katz, "The Jewish Dietary Laws," *SA Medical Journal*, (November 20, 1976), 2004.

² Zev Garber, "The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World by Jordan D. Rosenblum (Review)," *The Catholic University of America Press*, (2018), https://librarysearch.bates.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_crossref_primary_10_1353_cbq_2018_0063&contxt=PC&vid=01CBB_BCOLL:BATES&lang=en&search_scope=NZ_Everything&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=NZ_Everything&query=any,contains,jewish%20dietary%20laws,AND&mode=advanced&offset=0,324.

³ Katz, "Jewish Dietary," 2004.

mastery of oneself.”⁴ This sentiment reinforces the importance of self-control and an attempt to be holy in the eyes of God, as it relates to food; if an individual controls his urges in food, then he can control his other urges as well. In essence, “the observant Jew firmly believes that it is his duty to worship God in every aspect of his life – including the act of eating. He accomplishes this by blessing God before and after eating and by selecting his food according to the *Torah*, overcoming his physical desires in doing so.”⁵ Implementing rituals surrounding food practices creates a need for intentionality in relation to food. This internality is noteworthy because it shows how the ideology grounding *kashrut* is more representative of the mindset which one must undertake as opposed to the eating habits in which one partakes.

Modern Jewish Dietary Laws and Practices

Kashrut is the system of dietary laws that many Jewish individuals maintain to live a religiously observant Jewish life. To be technical, the Encyclopedia of Religions defines *kashrut* as the following:

Pertains directly to (1) permitted and forbidden animals, (2) forbidden parts of otherwise permitted animals, (3) the method of slaughtering and preparing permitted animals, (4) forbidden food mixtures, and (5) proportions of food mixtures prohibited *ab initio* but permitted *ex post facto*. The rules of *kashrut* are derived from biblical statute, rabbinic interpretation, rabbinic legislation, and custom.”⁶

Kashrut's three-letter root in Hebrew (כשר), found in the word *kosher*, translates to “fit” or “proper.” Although this root is not used in the Tanakh in direct reference to

⁴ “The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (2 Ed.),” Edited by Adele Berlin, 2011, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199730049.001.0001/acref-9780199730049-e-0848?p=emailAysG5botmYvhw&d=/10.1093/acref/9780199730049.001.0001/acref-9780199730049-e-0848>.

⁵ Katz, “Jewish Dietary,” 2005.

⁶ David Novak, Encyclopedia of Religion (Vol. 8. 2nd Ed.), Gale, 2005, https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&u=bates_main&id=GALE|CX3424501702&v=2.1&it=r.

dietary laws – we do not see this appear until later, in the Mishnah – the three-letter root is seen seven times in the Tanakh.⁷ Five of these appearances are in different verses of Ecclesiastes, one reference is in Esther and the last reference is in Psalms. The root “כשר” is used to say that something is prosperous (Psalms 68:7), successful/proper/suitable (Ecclesiastes 2:21, Ecclesiastes 4:4, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Ecclesiastes 11:6, and Esther 8:5), or to be proper or skilled (Ecclesiastes 10:10). Of note here is that each of these references echoes the root translation to be “fit” or “proper.”⁸

“To keep *kosher*” is a phrase that is well known among practitioners of Judaism. Any given individual may not necessarily know the specific laws or verses of the Torah from which each law originated, but there are some baseline understandings known to most Jewish individuals. The standard rules that most people know are as follows: do not eat shellfish or pork and do not mix meat and dairy products. Others who are more versed in Jewish law might know that, if someone is keeping *kosher*, they may only drink wine made by other Jewish individuals or that blood specks in an egg render this egg *unkosher*. If something is not *kosher*, then it is *treyf*. As theologian Deborah Willinger says, “eating *treyf* food pollutes body, mind, and soul. Hence, the rules of *kashrut* aim to prevent human pollution by controlling the process from selection to consumption.”⁹ As seen here, *kashrut* provides structure for a sacred eating practice.

⁷ “כשר.” Sefaria. Accessed October 20, 2023.

<https://www.sefaria.org/search?q=%D7%9B%D7%A9%D7%A8&tab=text&tvar=1&tsort=relevance&svar=1&ssort=relevance>.

⁸ “כשר.” Sefaria.

⁹ Deborah Willinger, “Purity and Kashrut,” *Cross currents (New Rochelle, N.Y.)* 69, no. 3 (2019): 268.

Key *Kashrut* elements: The biblical commandments on which they are based

Where do these *kosher* laws come from? We turn to the Torah. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy all contain different verses concerning food, whether directly referencing dietary laws or simply alluding to the manners of eating practices.

The first reference to food in the Torah is in Genesis 1:

God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food’ (Genesis 1:29-30).

One chapter into Genesis and already God has said to be vegetarian, and that humankind may eat the plants. In Genesis 6, God tells Noah to take pairs of animals onto the ark with him: “take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate” (Genesis 7:2). The language that is used here has both “clean” and “unclean” animals; the laws that were the basis for the Israelite – and then Jewish – dietary system divides animals into those that are permitted and those that are forbidden. These same laws provide details in the well-known story of Noah and the Flood. Shortly thereafter, the Torah states: “Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Genesis 9:4). This line presents the first law regarding food, which is interpreted as “flesh may not be torn from a living animal...and all animals and birds, but not fish, require ritual slaughter (*shehitah*), which alone renders the animal lawfully fit for consumption.”¹⁰ As the Torah unfolds, the principles upon which *kosher* laws and their interpretations are based become clearer.

¹⁰ "The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (2 Ed.)." edited by Adele Berlin, 2011. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199730049.001.0001/acref-9780199730049-e-0848?p=emailAysG5botmYvhw&d=/10.1093/acref/9780199730049.001.0001/acref-9780199730049-e-0848>.

In Exodus, four powerful lines form the basis of the rule that one must not eat dairy and meat products in the same meal. This rule does not appear just once. In two separate chapters of Exodus, the same statement is made, essentially word-for-word: “The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19) and “the best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 34:26). The most commonly accepted reasoning that is projected on this restriction is that a kid (or any mammal) should not be eaten in the milk that nourishes it (the milk of a mother). To create no possible mixing of these two, and “in order to create a ‘fence around the law’ the rabbis ordained that the separation of meat from milk must be as complete as possible.”¹¹ This law explains why Jews who keep a strictly *kosher* diet have different utensils, dishes, sinks, storage spaces, and cooking areas for cooking meat and dairy. Further, there is a strict time that one must wait between eating dairy products and meat; however, the actual time differs for different individuals.¹² The so-called “fence around the Torah” creates a buffer for those who keep *kosher* so as not to unintentionally break a commandment.

There is more. The next book, Leviticus, has extensive language on dietary requirements. First, in Chapter 7, specific parts of an animal that an Israelite cannot eat are detailed. “Speak to the people of Israel, saying: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any other use, but you must not eat it” (Leviticus 7:23-24). Chapter 11 provides extensive

¹¹ "Encyclopedia Judaica (Di-Fo)," In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd, 1972, 40.

¹² "Encyclopedia Judaica," 40.

instructions on what creatures are and are not allowed for food. Although it is quite long, I included this entire section here because it provides great insight into what the Tanakh says about food. These key verses are often turned to as the core of many *kosher* practices.

- <2> Speak to the people of Israel, saying:
From among all the land animals, these are the creatures that you may eat.
- <3> Any animal that has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed and chews the cud such you may eat.
- <4> But among those that chew the cud or have divided hoofs, you shall not eat the following: the camel, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.
- <5> The rock badger, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.
- <6> The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.
- <7> The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.
- <8> Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you.
- <9> These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the streams -such you may eat.
- <10> But anything in the seas or the streams that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters - they are detestable to you
- <11> and detestable they shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall regard as detestable.
- <12> Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.
- <13> These you shall regard as detestable among the birds. They shall not be eaten; they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey,
- <14> the buzzard, the kite of any kind;
- <15> every raven of any kind;
- <16> the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind;
- <17> the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl,
- <18> the water hen, the desert owl, the carrion vulture,
- <19> the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.
- <20> All winged insects that walk upon all fours are detestable to you.

<21> But among the winged insects that walk on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to leap on the ground.

<22> Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind.

<23> But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you.

<24> By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until the evening,

<25> and whoever carries any part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.

<26> Every animal that has divided hoofs but is not cleft-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean for you; everyone who touches one of them shall be unclean.

<27> All that walk on their paws, among the animals that walk on all fours, are unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until the evening,

<28> and the one who carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; they are unclean for you.

<29> These are unclean for you among the creatures that swarm upon the earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind,

<30> the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon.

<31> These are unclean for you among all that swarm; whoever touches one of them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening.

<32> And anything upon which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether an article of wood or cloth or skin or sacking, any article that is used for any purpose; it shall be dipped into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening, and then it shall be clean.

<33> And if any of them falls into any earthen vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break the vessel.

<34> Any food that could be eaten shall be unclean if water from any such vessel comes upon it; and any liquid that could be drunk shall be unclean if it was in any such vessel.

<35> Everything on which any part of the carcass falls shall be unclean; whether an oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces; they are unclean, and shall remain unclean for you.

<36> But a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, while whatever touches the carcass in it shall be unclean.

<37> If any part of their carcass falls upon any seed set aside for sowing, it is clean;

<38> but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.

- <39> If an animal of which you may eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening.
- <40> Those who eat of its carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening; and those who carry the carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening.
- <41> All creatures that swarm upon the earth are detestable; they shall not be eaten.
- <42> Whatever moves on its belly, and whatever moves on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the creatures that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are detestable.
- <43> You shall not make yourselves detestable with any creature that swarms; you shall not defile yourselves with them, and so become unclean.
- <44> For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth.
- <45> For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.
- <46> This is the law pertaining to land animal and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms upon the earth,
 <47> to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.
 (Leviticus 11:2-47)

What are we to make of these detailed laws? These rules are important to note because they are foundational to *kashrut*. Additionally, these verses outline whether the animals and insects that are deemed “clean” may be eaten, or even touched, if they have come into contact with something classified as “unclean.” More rules follow. A few chapters later, the Torah states,

Therefore, I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature its blood is its life; therefore, I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off (Leviticus 17:12-14).

This law not only pertains to Israelites but also pertains to those living amongst Israelites.

The chapters of Leviticus are crucial; they continue to provide insight into where the laws that modern-day Jewish people practice come from and why certain rituals are practiced the way that they are. The last mention of ritual food laws in Leviticus is in Chapter 20, and again points out distinctions between the animals:

“You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine” (Leviticus 20:25-26).

These verses yet again reinforce the important distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals.

The last part of the Torah that provides insight into where the *kosher* laws come from is Deuteronomy 14. These passages shed light upon the origins of current *kosher* laws that people know and practice to this day.

<2> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; it is you the LORD has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

<3> You shall not eat any abhorrent thing.

<4> These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat,

<5> the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain-sheep.

<6> Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof cleft in two, and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat.

<7> Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cleft you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you.

<8> And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses.

<9> Of all that live in water you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat.

- <10> And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.
- <11> You may eat any clean birds.
- <12> But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey,
- <13> the buzzard, the kite of any kind;
- <14> every raven of any kind;
- <15> the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind;
- <16> the little owl and the great owl, the water hen
- <17> and the desert owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant,
- <18> the stork, the heron of any kind; the hoopoe and the bat.
- <19> And all winged insects are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten.
- <20> You may eat any clean winged creature.
- <21> You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.
- You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. (Deuteronomy 14:2-21)

These Torah passages form a foundation for understanding *kashrut*.

The Ancient Rabbis: Innovations and expansions

Roughly two thousand years ago, a new group of Jewish teachers emerged; these teachers were called “the Rabbis.” This group sought to grapple with deep questions regarding, among other topics, *kashrut*, and hoped to provide some answers and insight. The Rabbis are critical to our discussion. Understanding how the Rabbis thought is crucial in that it provides yet another layer of nuance when attempting to grapple with our interpretation of, and relationship to, *kosher* laws. According to Arthur Waskow, the Rabbis “built a bridge of words from the old Biblical model of Temple sacrifice to the new model of prayer by communities dispersed in many lands.”¹³ These were the same men

¹³Arthur Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1995, 54.

who wrote the Mishnah, which Waskow describes as “the Rabbi’s version of culture.”¹⁴ In essence, Waskow is saying that the Mishnah is the Rabbi’s interpretation of the Torah in relation to the cultural practices and values of Jewish people at the time. This writing is seen as an “oral Torah.” It includes years of oral commentary and many laws of the Torah. In short, “they drew on the ancient texts by reinterpreting them...that is how the Rabbis were able to assert that the new life they were living was still a Jewish life.”¹⁵ We note this because it is the Mishnah – and subsequently the Talmud – that people turn to in order to understand the intricacies of *kashrut*.

The Mishnah and Talmud contain extensive commentary on questions of food. The Rabbis provided a post-Temple groundwork for how to live a Jewish life, which, of course, included eating in a “Jewish” manner. The debates among these Rabbis ranged from questions about what time of day (or night) a prayer must be said to details regarding the Temple food offerings. Their traditions remain the basis of an observant Jewish life to this day.

¹⁴ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 55.

¹⁵ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 56.

Theories about *Kashrut*: Functions and Meanings

In a concise and compelling 1979 article in *Commentary Magazine*, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” Hebrew and Comparative Literature scholar Robert Alter, presents the common, dominant theories surrounding the purposes of *kashrut* and then proceeds to call each into question. Alter leaves his readers with the conclusion that the historical and theological reasons for the wide range of Jewish dietary practices known as *kashrut* are diverse and complex. They cannot be simplified or boiled down to single conceptual systems for fear of omitting crucial information. Alter’s article provides an excellent basis for reviewing modern theories of *kashrut*, so I will use it as the basis for my brief discussion of the prevailing theories. He writes, “in broad terms, one can range the sundry reasons for the dietary laws that have been proposed over the centuries in three groups: pragmatic, symbolic, and therapeutic.”¹⁶ In what follows, I will dive into these common theories and then summarize his discussion of how each theory fails to suffice.

The Pragmatic Approach

Alter’s first category encompasses pragmatic explanations, generally meaning those that attempt to provide a practical understanding of the rules of *kashrut*. The overarching idea, as Alter writes, is that “the pragmatic explanations assume that some concrete benefit was conferred or was meant to be conferred on those who respected the prohibition.”¹⁷ Many different theories fall under this heading. One set of these concerns hygiene. Throughout different historical contexts, a common misconception has been that people who keep *kosher* are, therefore, largely immune to different diseases. This misconception is by no means a new phenomenon. In a mid-

¹⁶Robert Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” *Commentary Magazine*, Aug 1, 1979, 46.

¹⁷ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

twentieth-century handbook published in London by the Central Council of Jewish Religious Education, entitled, *The Book of Kashrut*, we find the claim that “the comparative freedom of Jews from the epidemics of the Middle Ages has been frequently attributed to these [kosher] laws.”¹⁸ But, worth noting is that there is no concrete evidence of the correspondence between dietary laws and the avoidance of diseases.

Fast forward several centuries, and we see a new disease emerge: tuberculosis. In his book, *The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine*, Mitchell Hart includes a chapter called “TB or Not TB, That Was a Jewish Question.” This chapter presents accounts of how Jewish dietary laws and food practices were seen as the reason that Jewish individuals did not suffer from tuberculosis to the same extent as their gentile peers during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hart notes that “the notion that Jews had proven relatively immune to tuberculosis, along with a host of other illnesses, served as a powerful impulse to the belief that the Jews and Judaism provided a model for Christians when it came to matters of health and hygiene.”¹⁹ Hart, earlier in this chapter, quotes “Emil Bogen, the Director of Laboratories and Research at Olive View Sanatorium,”²⁰ as claiming, rather than showing greater immunity, “Jews are more neurotic and given over to hypochondria when it comes to TB, complaining and taking a cure even before any physical symptoms appear.”²¹ Still, as noted, subsequent science has found no specific proof that Jewish individuals are more hygienic or resistant to tuberculosis (or neurotic, for that matter!) because of their eating practices. This

¹⁸ *The Book of Kashrut*, London, The Council, 1948, 27.

¹⁹ Mitchell Bryan Hart, “The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine,” Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 172.

²⁰ Hart, “The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine,” 167.

²¹ Hart, “The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine,” 167.

chapter by Hart provides context to the larger pragmatic approach of showing the fallacies of this way of thinking.

Alter does not stop there. He discredits this pragmatic approach about hygiene, in relation to ancient Israelites' avoidance of pigs, when he writes:

This line of reasoning will not stand up under scrutiny. It is not even certain that ancient Near Eastern pigs were bearers of trichinosis, and in any case, it is by no means clear why a consumer of clean vegetables like a rabbit should pose a greater health hazard than a goat, with its appetite for refuse as well as for vegetation.²²

There is no sound evidence supporting the theory that these laws were implemented for health benefits. Musings, yes. Proof, no.

The next pragmatic explanation that Alter addresses focuses on the idea that the ancient Israelites believed that their food practices held some kind of magical potency. Is it possible, wonders Alter, that “someone in a primitive society felt he was ingesting magical potencies and avoiding demonically contaminating substances by eating only the permitted foods.”²³ Yet just a sentence later he rejects this theory, making the observation that “what is actually said about eating in the Bible suggests that the ancient Hebrews were on the whole probably less given to magical fantasies about their food than the customers of modern health-food stores.”²⁴ Further, he says, it is likely that “the banned animals had some particular association with the abominations of the surrounding pagan cults, so that the dietary laws served to insulate ancient Israel from idolatrous practices.”²⁵ Therefore, it is clear that the assumption that *kashrut* can be traced back to “primitive” beliefs in the magical properties of particular foods fails to acknowledge the complexities and realities surrounding Levitical food practices.

²² Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

²³ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

²⁴ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

²⁵ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

The last pragmatic theory that Alter presents is closely related to the previous one, namely, the theory that Israelite food practices served to “separate Israel socially from all other nations.”²⁶ The problem with this theory, as he sees it, is that “there is little reflection in the Bible itself on the separatist consequence of dietary regulations”²⁷ and “there is not much evidence that this was the chief conscious purpose of the prohibitions.”²⁸ I find Alter’s view compelling. Although he writes that “one can hardly deny that in Diaspora *kashrut* has been a powerful agency of Jewish solidarity and of separation from the circumambient Gentile world,”²⁹ there is little evidence in the Tanakh, itself, that solidarity and separation form the primary, much less sole, underlying purpose of the dietary laws. Each pragmatic approach to explaining the impulses underlying Israelite food taboos, therefore, fails to comprehensively encapsulate ideas surrounding these dietary laws. As noted, I concur with these arguments of Alter. What I find most compelling is his ability to debunk each claim; he points out that *kashrut* can be somewhat arbitrary in law yet remains a viable way for individuals to partake in a sacred eating practice.

The Therapeutic Approach

The second group of theories that Alter addresses are ones that he labels “therapeutic.” Therapeutic explanations essentially state that, by following certain dietary practices, an individual obtains some personal benefit to health or wellbeing. In Alter’s words, “regimens of discipline may arguably be thought of in the abstract as good for the soul.”³⁰ Nonetheless, Alter observes, “the therapeutic notion is too general to be in itself a satisfactory principle of

²⁶ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

²⁷ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

²⁸ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

²⁹ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

³⁰ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

explanation: if renunciation is good for us, why this particular system, why no fried squid, or kid seethed in its mother's milk?"³¹ Alter is highlighting the inconsistency of this approach. Why is one action okay while another is not? Is it simply because that is what God said was true? Alter quotes a third century sage, referred to as "Rav," who articulates this very insight when he maintains that:

The commandments were given only to purify people. For what difference does it make to the Holy One whether one slaughters from the throat or the nape? Or what difference does it make to Him whether one eats unclean or clean substances? It follows that the commandments were given only to purify people."³²

This assertion suggests, once again, just how arbitrary the laws of *kashrut* appear to be. We note this arbitrary nature now because it undermines many individuals' false conceptions about why *kashrut* exists.

Alter writes that Rav:

Insists that what is clean and unclean is fundamentally a matter of definition. Once the system of definition has been granted, it serves as a regimen of spiritual discipline – presumably, as some later Jewish moralists would claim, because it involves delimitation and renunciation – through which man is purified, purged of his bestial dross, somehow elevated.³³

The dietary laws are a formality which intends to keep Jewish individuals fit and suitable for God's purposes. Alter observes that, "the very term adopted in post-biblical Hebrew for the dietary laws, *kashrut*, would tend to support Rav's notion of their conventional nature, for *kasher* does not mean clean or pure but fit, appropriate, suitable for a given purpose."³⁴ This quote encourages the reader to rethink the implications surrounding the theories of *kashrut*. We now can see that ideologies surrounding a food being "clean" or "pure" can undermine the actual

³¹ Alter, "A New Theory of Kashrut," 47.

³² Alter, "A New Theory of Kashrut," 46.

³³ Alter, "A New Theory of Kashrut," 46.

³⁴ Alter, "A New Theory of Kashrut," 46.

meaning of *kashrut*; Jewish dietary laws serve as an intentional way to live a God-oriented or spiritual life, but they do not, in fact, have any externalizable meaning: in this regard, they are arbitrary.

The Symbolic Approach

The last group of theories of *kashrut* that Alter talks about are ones that he calls “symbolic” explanations. Symbolic explanations for *kashrut* present the dietary rules as part of a symbolic system that attempts to impose sense and order on the world. Mary Douglas and Jean Soler both did extensive work in this field in the 1960s and 1970s, and captured Alter’s attention. Alter writes that “the underlying perception shared by Mary Douglas and Jean Soler is that dietary prohibitions are a kind of language, which is able, through a syntax of actions rather than of words, to order the world along the lines of a particular informing sense of reality.”³⁵ In 1966, Mary Douglas wrote a book titled *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. This book features a chapter entitled “The Abominations of Leviticus” in which she discusses other interpretations of *kashrut*. While some explanations “deny any significance,”³⁶ as they are based on arbitrary and irrational ideology, others serve as the foundational ideas for a logical approach.

Alter opens with Douglas; he writes that “Mrs. Douglas quite sensibly construes the dietary rules as a symbolic system intended to express the concept of holiness, which, with attention to its biblical usages, she defines as ‘unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind.’”³⁷ Alter sees her interpretation as cohesive. According to Douglas’s analysis, “those

³⁵ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

³⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1966, 45.

³⁷ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world. If one or more of the generic anatomical features of a particular class of animal is missing, the animal is considered unclean.”³⁸ Hence, “amphibians and reptiles are the prime model of unclean creatures in this gastronomic language of the holy because they belong to more than one element and because they exhibit an improper means of locomotion for their elements, neither swimming nor walking but slithering and ‘swarming.’”³⁹ As noted earlier, Alter finds Douglas’s analysis largely compelling.

At this point, we need a better understanding of Douglas’s views. Douglas’s argument is centered around the idea of holiness, found in Leviticus 11 of the Torah;

For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy (Leviticus 11:44-45).

In response to these verses, Douglas writes, “we can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused.”⁴⁰ She continues, “holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation. It therefore involves correct definition, discrimination and order.”⁴¹

It is essential to understand ancient Hebrew conceptions of holiness because, as seen in Leviticus 11, God is telling individuals to follow these guidelines for food practices so as to have a direct and tangible way to attempt to be holy. Douglas concludes her chapter on Leviticus with the suggestion that, “the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired

³⁸ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

³⁹ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

⁴⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 53.

⁴¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 53.

meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God.”⁴² Alter both affirms and critiques Douglas’s reading of ancient Israelite food practices as a system of symbol and metaphor. Despite his general affirmation of Douglas’s work, Alter goes on to highlight some shortcomings. Most significantly, he finds that Douglas ultimately “falls back on a characteristic excess of the traditional symbolic interpretations by assuming a very direct and unlikely psychological connection between the ingestive act and the spiritual reality under which it is subsumed.”⁴³ That Alter only agrees with part of Douglas’s analysis is significant because that tells us that it is virtually impossible to encapsulate all of the laws of *kashrut* in one simple explanation.

At the same time that Douglas was examining Leviticus, Jean Soler was exploring similar dietary prohibitions. Soler also caught Alter’s attention. According to Alter, Soler “agrees with Douglas about the need for unity and integrity in permitted things,”⁴⁴ however, he begins to formulate his own, somewhat divergent, analysis. Alter says that “Soler stands on safer ground, for what he suggests is not that the dietary rules can ‘translate out’ into biblical theology but rather that the biblical concept of God and creation and the concept of dietary restrictions exhibit the same syntax, the same mindset, the same ontological assumptions.”⁴⁵ Again, while generally affirming Soler’s approach and findings, Alter also critiques Soler for his “structuralist tendency to tidy up uneven data in order to preserve the perfect neatness of the semiotic system he is describing. This tidying up is achieved either by rhetorical manipulation of the data or by small factual distortions of data inconvenient to his thesis,”⁴⁶ while “other bothersome data resist

⁴² Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 57.

⁴³ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 48.

⁴⁴ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 48.

⁴⁵ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 47.

⁴⁶ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 48.

rhetorical manipulation and so must be ignored or altered in order to preserve the symmetry of the system.”⁴⁷ In other words, Soler tends to tweak or ignore those biblical elements that do not fit his schema.

A case in point is Soler’s use of the word: “cut.” Soler “claims that circumcision, the Sabbath, and the dietary code all ‘fulfill the same function’ because all involve a cut – ‘a cut on the male sex organ . . . , a cut in the regular course of days . . . , a cut in the continuum of the created animals.’”⁴⁸ Alter does not see merit in this explanation; he counters:

one could produce very different conclusions – indeed, almost any conclusions one wanted – by deciding to describe circumcision not as a cut but as an impairment, a wound, a transformation, a cosmetic improvement, an uncovering, and then applying *that* term metaphorically to the Sabbath and the dietary laws.”⁴⁹

Soler has attempted to make categories to unite diverse laws but fails to account for how a change in rhetoric completely dismantles his argument. Alter concludes that, “by making the logic of the system seem perfectly regular and consistent in all instances, Soler projects a model of the Hebrew mind that is utterly inexorable and automatic in its adherence to the principle of preserving sharp distinction.”⁵⁰ In Alter’s eyes, Soler adds some quality work to the field. Where Soler falls short, however, is that he attempts an impossible task: creating one unifying principle that encapsulates all the Israelite/Jewish dietary laws. Worth noting is that Alter believes that there is *no one theory* that can bring together all the laws of kashrut under one coherent and simple explanatory paradigm; therefore, Soler’s attempt to create such a singular theory – although convenient – inevitably fails to account for all the complex dietary restrictions.

⁴⁷ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 49.

⁴⁸ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 49.

⁴⁹ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 49.

⁵⁰ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 49.

Summary

Alter concludes that there is no single pattern that can account for all ancient Jewish dietary laws. I concur with Alter because he provides a comprehensive explanation and debunking of all the various theories of *kashrut*. As a variety of anthropologists and others have attempted to create a coherent and all-encompassing theory, each has left essential parts of *kashrut* excluded or overlooked. Alter understands this conundrum when he writes, “the system of laws through which holiness is to be realized must be in many respects enigmatic, proceeding with a logic that is often hidden and sometimes ungraspable.”⁵¹ The dietary laws are mysterious and difficult to interpret and thus it is virtually impossible to account for every detail by means of a singular theory. Each of these theories attempts to explain why the laws say that Jews may eat one thing and not another, why one food is forbidden, and another food is allowed. Alter sums up his own thoughts, saying:

In regard to the laws regulating diet, cult, dress, and sex, it is an advance in understanding to see them, as Jean Soler and Mary Douglas have proposed, not primarily as a response to pragmatic pressures of the environment or as direct, quasi-allegorical expressions of spiritual concepts but as interrelated, internally coherent systems for ordering the world.⁵²

Alter does a thorough job of presenting and expanding on all the possible theories surrounding *kashrut*, which serve as the foundation for our understanding of how we are where we are today. In fact, Alter’s analysis provides an ideal segue into the current thinking of *eco-kashrut*. We owe much to Alter’s insightful and original thinking.

⁵¹ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 52.

⁵² Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 52.

Eco-kashrut Today: Contemporary and postmodern theories

According to Leviticus, God is holy, therefore we should attempt to live our lives striving to be holy, to emulate God. But what does living a holy life in a modern world mean? Does it mean that we should strive to live by all the biblical commandments and follow the Torah word for word? Given that *kosher* literally means “fit, appropriate, suitable for a given purpose,”⁵³ it seems that the question that Jews should be asking ourselves is: how might one fashion a Jewish life that is “fit,” “appropriate,” or “suitable for a given purpose” in this modern world? Jewish people the world over are navigating precisely this question and have been doing so for millennia. We must take a closer look at these questions because, for many individuals, living a “fit” Jewish life goes hand-in-hand with sacred eating practices.

Further, how might one maintain a Jewish life with Jewish values as the environmental crisis is more pressing now than ever before? Environmental concerns are relevant to *eco-kashrut* in that the movement provides a deeply Jewish way to both engage in sacred eating practices and simultaneously be environmentally grounded. How might the ancient system of dietary laws be adapted to combat the ever-expanding environmental crisis? Questions like these resulted in the birth of the *eco-kashrut* movement. Enter Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi. In the 1970s he coined the term *eco-kashrut*.⁵⁴ In attempts to wrestle with the modern-day environmental crisis, he brought this new term into Judaism, and I suspect at the time that he did not realize the impact this simple term would make. But one scholar who did understand this concept’s potential is Arthur Waskow, an American rabbi and activist, and a proponent of *eco-kashrut*. He presents four questions in his landmark book *Down to Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life*, that help him to frame his case for *eco-kashrut* practices. These questions

⁵³ Alter, “A New Theory of Kashrut,” 46.

⁵⁴ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 117.

comprehensively gesture toward how larger philosophical questions linked to traditional Jewish values might be applied to day-to-day life in relationship to bettering the Earth:

1. Are tomatoes grown by drenching the earth in pesticide “kosher” to eat, at home or at a synagogue wedding reception?
2. Is newsprint made by chopping down an ancient and irreplaceable forest “kosher” to use to make a Jewish newspaper?
3. What about windows and doors so built that the warm air flows out through them and the furnace keeps burning all night? Are such doors and windows “kosher” for a home or for a Jewish Community Center building?
4. Is a bank that invests its depositors’ money in an oil company that befouls the ocean a “kosher” place for me or for the UJA to deposit money?⁵⁵

In the traditional sense, Waskow observes, “the category of ‘kosher’ does not apply to [these examples].”⁵⁶ But more importantly, to Waskow’s mind, a traditional, narrow sense of *kashrut*, in ignoring environmental impacts of food-sourcing practices, disregards other Jewish values and principles. This insight is at the heart of my thesis. I am constantly grappling with the question of which Jewish values I should seek to live out in my own life. When I partake in *mitzvot* that are at odds with other Jewish values, it gives me pause.

When these laws of *kashrut* were first written, pesticides and oil companies were, of course, not part of the equation. But just as the ancient Rabbis attempted to “give new life to dried-out Jewish practice,”⁵⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, too, worked extensively to find more suitable ways to understand Jewish laws in relation to the climate crisis. The result, a range of Jewish practices that collectively constitute a system called *eco-kashrut*, has

⁵⁵ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 117.

⁵⁶ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 117.

⁵⁷ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 118.

come to serve as a way for Jews to question and push themselves to propose new ways to think about their relationship with food. “The traditional prayer book, Schachter-Shalomi said, was like a cookbook: a guide to eating, but not the food itself.”⁵⁸ This ideology was the base for *eco-kashrut*. The traditional sources gave the building blocks to how to answer questions such as what meats could and could not be eaten or what blessings needed to be said before eating. But, in Schachter-Shalomi’s eyes, the actual execution of these laws, while being based on the building blocks, have more latitude; this flexibility gave him the agency to reshape these values and practices. Individuals and communities consciously develop their own thinking about the impacts of their consumption on the environment.

Kashrut prompts individuals to think about God and living a spiritual life. So, *eco-kashrut* provides a structure to live an intentional Jewish life in relation to food. This structure is the product of Jewish values and ideology, and thus helps create a recipe for how Jewish individuals should navigate their food consumption with an eye to everything from the physical environments of agricultural and food-processing workers to investments in agribusiness and related corporations, to a household’s or community center’s food purchases. I endorse this new way of thinking about *kashrut* because it is consistent with the ever growing and shifting practices that are modern-day Judaism, while remaining true to original values and ideologies.

Rabbi Jonathan Crane is a Professor of Bioethics and Jewish Thought, who has written a number of books, including, *Eating Ethically: Religion and Science for a Better Diet*, *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality* and *Narratives of Jewish*

⁵⁸ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 118.

Bioethics.⁵⁹ Crane’s work provides insight into Jewish environmental ethics, which help inform people’s relationship to food and the environment. Crane describes Jewish environmental ethics as falling into four different world views: the anthropocentric view, the theocentric view, the biocentric view, and the non-anthropocentric view.⁶⁰

The anthropocentric world view, which derives from Genesis 1 gives humans impunity and allows individuals to eat whatever they want, as long as it is within the vegetarian or fruitarian scope.⁶¹ The theocentric view holds that “the world is created for God, by God, for God’s ultimate purposes, and that everything is owned by God.”⁶² The biocentric view is centered around the environment; it says that there is a need to respect and accept all forms of biodiversity and different species.⁶³ The non-anthropocentric view maintains that “human beings are special but not overly important. We co-exist with all the other species.”⁶⁴ Crane concludes that “our [i.e., human] interests are important, but it does not give us *carte blanche* to use and abuse natural resources for human interests with impunity.”⁶⁵ Hence, “we need to consume the world very carefully that protects all of the other entities out there, including the biosphere itself.”⁶⁶

What are we to make of these four views? The non-anthropocentric view lends itself to the *eco-kashrut* movement. This ethic puts responsibility into human’s hands, by both expecting individuals to take ownership of their actions, with the understanding of repercussions, and by also ensuring that humans understand their situation in the world.

⁵⁹ “Jonathan Crane,” Emory University: Center for Ethics, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://ethics.emory.edu/who-we-are/our-people/faculty/core/crane-jonathan.html>.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Crane, in discussion with the author, March 5, 2024.

⁶¹ Crane, discussion.

⁶² Crane, discussion.

⁶³ Crane, discussion.

⁶⁴ Crane, discussion.

⁶⁵ Crane, discussion.

⁶⁶ Crane, discussion.

Environmental ethics are important in a comprehensive discussion of *eco-kashrut* because they provide insight into how Jewish environmentalists think about the world. This environmental ethic provides a tangible outline for using Jewish values “so that they might affirm and protect the wholeness of the earth precisely by affirming and strengthening Jewish life,”⁶⁷ in tandem with understanding our position in the environment and world. At the heart of the *eco-kashrut* movement is the attempt to eat in an intentional way to show a care for the earth and creation. There are many Jewish values that inform *eco-kashrut* practices. The most significant of these are: *bal tashchit* (not ruining the earth), *shmitah* (the rhythms of allowing the earth to rest), *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* (respect for animals), *kavod habriot* (respect for all living beings), *sh’mirat haguf* (protection of one’s own body), and *tikkun olam* (making the world a better place).⁶⁸ Each of these values is millennia old, rooted in ancient Jewish traditions, and yet is still essential to the way that many Jewish individuals live their lives in modern times. In *eco-kashrut*, the practice of ancient traditional values is coupled with more modern approaches. Waskow writes of his own community’s journey into discovering the potential of *eco-kashrut*:

The first layer was about food itself: What kinds of food protected the earth instead of wounding it???

Then we began to examine whether other kinds of “eating” – consuming energy, using paper, buying machines, investing money – might be enough like eating food that in our generation the guidelines of what is kosher and *treyf* might be applied to them.

Then we looked more carefully at the whole notion of Yes or No, On or Off, Kosher or *Treyf* – absolute distinctions – that has been at the heart of traditional *kashrut*.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 120.

⁶⁸ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 122.

⁶⁹ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 121.

Waskow and his community worked to create a more environmentally sound Jewish way of eating. I agree with Waskow that a narrowly traditional *kashrut* is not sufficient for the world that we are in today. He muses, “what if by eco-kosher we mean a broader sense of good everyday practice that draws on the wellsprings of Jewish wisdom and tradition about the relationship between human beings and the earth.”⁷⁰ Importantly, *eco-kashrut* seeks to have a relationship with food that also adheres to holistic Jewish values. We must understand that this introduction of holistic Jewish values means that it provides a Jewish sacred eating practice that is conducive to modern care for the environment.

The new practice of *eco-kashrut* provides an original groundwork that resonates with many individuals and communities, including Jewish environmental organizations, synagogues, community centers, and Jewish environmentalists. The groups with which this movement have gained traction seek to live a life bettering the Earth centered around Jewish values. Waskow understands this phenomenon well when he writes,

if keeping kosher is partly about making distinctions, then keeping eco-kosher deals with the issue of ‘distinctions’ in a new way: not by separating only, but by consciously connecting. Connecting what is uniquely Jewish with what is shared and universal. Choosing not Either/Or but Both/And.”⁷¹

In sum, this new form of eating created a space for environmentally concerned Jewish individuals to eat in a way that incorporated Jewish environmental values into their daily actions.

⁷⁰ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 117.

⁷¹ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 129.

Chapter 2: Earth

Bal Tashchit

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Bal tashchit (בל תשחית) translates to “thou shall not destroy.” A more modern understanding of this phrase is not ruining the Earth. In short, *bal tashchit* prohibits unnecessary destruction or harm to the Earth. The origins of this concept are often attributed to Deuteronomy 20:19. The verse reads as follows:

If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? (Deuteronomy 20:19).

In his essay entitled “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life and the Impact Thereof on the Environment: A Perspective from Deuteronomy 20:19–20,” Chris Van der Walt explores the intersection of *bal tashchit* and the environment. He writes, “the prohibition of bal tashhit is arguably the most important religious precept directly relating to man’s relationship with the environment. Deuteronomy 20:19, 20 introduces the prohibition of bal tashhit in the seemingly narrow context of preserving fruit producing trees during a wartime siege.”⁷² These verses, however, can and should be applied in broader contexts.

In setting up his analysis, Van der Walt writes, “‘nature’ is generally envisioned by humans as a pristine, almost paradisiacal environment, the current reality is far from that.”⁷³ The relationship between humans and nature is a concept that humans have grappled with for

⁷² Chris Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life and the Impact Thereof on the Environment: A Perspective from Deuteronomy 20:19–20,” *In die Skriflig* 50, no. 4 (2016), 5.

⁷³ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 1.

millennia. In his essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” William Cronon engages with this very question on human interaction with nature. We tend to have an idealized version of nature but fail to understand that “wilderness” is a physical space that is formulated by individuals in their desire to assert dominance over nature. Cronon elaborates:

The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history. It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it’s a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made. Wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural. As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires. For this reason, we mistake ourselves when we suppose that wilderness can be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationships with the nonhuman world, for wilderness is itself no small part of the problem.⁷⁴

As shown here, the whole idea of wilderness is a construct created by humans for humans. To Van der Walt’s point, the understanding of what nature is and what role humans play in the environment is romanticized, a view that Cronon also maintains. In contrast, Chapter 20 of Deuteronomy challenges individuals to reimagine what preconceived notions about one’s interaction with nature should be. Van der Walt writes, “the conviction that some humans were to be saved and others not, is not a norm in modern thinking. Nowadays every effort is made to prolong every human life even at the cost of other human lives and the environment. Deuteronomy 20 reflects a different stance.”⁷⁵ The stance that Deuteronomy presents does not elevate humans in the same way that society often does. Van der Walt presents two opposing

⁷⁴ William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995, 69.

⁷⁵ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 5.

ideas on the phenomenon that puts humans above animals: “on the one hand there is the human wish to prolong life almost indefinitely but on the other hand a well-known environmentalist warns that humans are a plague on earth.”⁷⁶ Instead, Van der Walt writes, “according to Deuteronomy 20 all human life is not of equal value and not necessarily superior to life in nature. Deuteronomy 20 challenged conventional thinking on the subject of human-nature relationships.”⁷⁷ It is with this understanding that we conceptualize *bal tashchit* in that humans must not elevate themselves above nature.

As noted above, *bal tashchit* is grounded in two verses of the Torah (Deuteronomy 20:19-20); albeit the phrase itself does not appear in the Tanakh. This phrase is found twenty-six times in the Talmud and tends to refer to the declaration that one must not destroy in a wanton manner.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, this value is foundational to shaping many Jewish lives. Van de Walt writes:

“The Biblical prohibition of *bal tashchit* is taught with the example of fruit-producing trees, which symbolize the life support system – the natural resources and natural processes that provide for man’s existence in this world. Therefore, the prohibition against the destruction of fruit-producing trees can be, and indeed has been interpreted in the Jewish tradition to include all resources – all useful materials and objects that are beneficial to man’s existence.”⁷⁹

This interpretation shows that *bal tashchit* does not stop merely at fruit trees, but instead extends to all resources that might aid one’s existence. *Bal tashchit* directs individuals to ensure that there is no deliberate destruction of any natural materials.

⁷⁶ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 3.

⁷⁷ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 1.

⁷⁸ “בל תשחית,” Sefaria, Accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.sefaria.org/search?q=%D7%91%D7%9C%20%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%97%D7%99%D7%AA&tab=text&tpathFilters=Talmud&tvar=1&tsort=relevance&svar=1&ssort=relevance>.

⁷⁹ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 6.

There are multiple examples in the Talmud that show the protection of the environment and the embracing of the value of *bal tashchit*. For example, “the phrase עץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדַע כִּי-לֹא-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל [trees that you know are not trees for food] establishes a direct link between the fruit trees and sustainable nourishment. Interpreted in this way, humans still have a responsibility towards the fruit trees because of their dependence on the tree.”⁸⁰ This quote yet again reinforces that humans must not elevate their status above trees – or nature as a whole – but instead they must treat nature with great reverence. Another example of this notion is something as simple as “trees provide fruit and should therefore not be cut down.”⁸¹ Van de Walt presents examples of why one should live by this value. This line of thinking has shaped the eating habits of many Jewish individuals; in embracing this biblically based injunction, their choices surrounding food have become a sacred practice.

In his book *Down-to-Earth Judaism*, Rabbi Arthur Waskow gives a definition of *bal tashchit* as it relates to the *eco-kashrut* movement. He writes:

Literally, “not ruining” the earth or protection of the environment. This norm began with the Biblical prohibition against cutting down the trees of an enemy – and then was extended to protect all trees and other aspects of nature, and even to prohibit the waste of furniture or other objects in which human labor was tied to the products of the earth. Members of the committee [in Waskow’s community] suggested that *bal tashchit* might be extended to prohibit poisoning the earth with chemical pesticides in order to grow food and to forbid eating foods grown that way, substituting “natural” or “organic” foods.⁸²

This understanding and interpretation of *bal tashchit*, regarding food, frames the rest of this chapter. In his article, “Curb Your Consumerism: Developing a *Bal Tashchit* Food Ethic for

⁸⁰ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 4.

⁸¹ Van der Walt, “Humanity’s Perceived Right to Life,” 4.

⁸² Waskow, *Down-to-Earth Judaism*, 121-122.

Today,” Kevin M. Kleinman navigates the question of how Jewish individuals should navigate *bal tashchit* in modern society. He writes,

The earth’s resources are becoming depleted at an alarming rate, causing species extinction, soil erosion, and famine that displaces millions of people worldwide. Factories are polluting the air, land, and water. The wide use of pesticides is changing the makeup of the soil in a way that is detrimental to human health. All of this combined, plus supplying enough energy for transportation, heating and cooling, and other individual household needs and desires, is changing the climate of our planet.⁸³

Today’s natural environment is deeply interconnected with technological advances. While some may view these technological innovations as forward thinking and a way to feed more people, the consequences on the environment can also be detrimental to natural resources. In this same article, Kleinman writes, “we must be responsible caretakers of the planet’s resources, to use only what it [sic] is necessary, and to be conscious of the negative impact that human beings can have on the ecosystems of the earth if we are not careful.”⁸⁴ This line of thinking plays directly into the *eco-kashrut* movement. The focus on not ruining the earth, or *bal tashchit*, is entirely in the hands of humans. Therefore, it is up to individuals to be intentional about where their food comes from; this means being cognizant of what the process of production of the food or ingredient was, from start to finish. Additionally, this way of thinking includes knowing if pesticides were used, if resources were depleted, if unnecessary amounts of pollutants were expended, and if conditions in the workplace are poor. Clearly, any of these actions have the potential to have harmful effects on the environment.

This is not to say that all technological innovations are harmful to the environment, or that there is any malintent present. It is “the unintended environmental consequences,

⁸³ Kevin M Kleinman, “Curb Your Consumerism: Developing a *Bal Tashchit* Food Ethic for Today,” In *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, edited by Mary L. Zamore, 161-171. New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 2011, 169-170.

⁸⁴ Kleinman, “Curb Your Consumerism,” 163.

endangering the health of both the planet and human beings”⁸⁵ that we must strive to be most aware of. Therefore, *eco-kashrut* serves as a framework for intentional eating practices which are grounded in Jewish values. Kleinman encourages individuals to turn back to more traditional texts to grasp this concept. He writes:

It is time to return to the wisdom of our ancient texts and traditions; time to examine our patterns of consumption and disposal of food, energy, and material goods; time to cultivate a different ethic. This paradigm shift will allow us to recognize our species’ unnecessary waste and wanton destruction of the planet’s finite resources.”⁸⁶

It is up to Jewish practitioners to take the steps forward to understand how their actions, in relation to food, either intentionally or unintentionally, may have harmful consequences on the environment; *eco-kashrut* provides a framework for individuals to attempt to mitigate these negative repercussions on the environment.

Different individuals embody or live by *bal tashchit* in disparate ways; however, each way of implementing this ideology encapsulates *bal tashchit*. In an essay called “Getting Back to the Garden,” Barbara Lerman-Golomb, the former executive director of Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL),⁸⁷ writes, “a garden, like the *Sh’ma*, is a wake-up call of interconnectedness, ‘a reminder not only that we are one with the earth and all of Creation, but that Creation is not a thing of the past, but an on-going process within our lives, and that God daily renews the work of Creation.”⁸⁸ For Lerman-Golomb, a way to interpret *bal tashchit* is to have a garden. When food comes from a garden, individuals know the full extent of the processes surrounding the production of their food. Additionally, for many Jewish individuals, a

⁸⁵ Kleinman, “Curb Your Consumerism,” 169.

⁸⁶ Kleinman, “Curb Your Consumerism,” 164.

⁸⁷ “Barbara Lerman-Golomb,” Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://rac.org/author/barbara-lerman-golomb>.

⁸⁸ Barbra Lerman-Golomb, “Getting Back to the Garden,” In *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, edited by Mary L. Zamore, New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 2011, 199.

garden serves as a connection to God. Therefore, to tend to a garden, for these practitioners, is to honor God.

Rabbi Joseph Aaron Skloot addresses the value of *bal tashchit* as well. He took a group of high school students to Costa Rica to complete *mitzvot*.⁸⁹ Rabbi Skloot shares a story about bananas. He writes:

Bananas-those ordinary staples of the American breakfast table don't come cheap. That day, the students learned that bananas are a natural wonder, scarcely found in the wild. To get those sugary, golden-hued fruit to our supermarkets, the U.S.-based companies that control banana cultivation the world over employ a cocktail of toxic fertilizers and pesticides known to harm human beings and animals. They clear acres of virgin forest and replace vibrant tropical ecosystems with banana monocultures. They burn remarkable amounts of fossil fuel to transport their product over vast distances far more than producers of other crops...The bottom line: transforming this wondrous and rare plant into an everyday breakfast item takes a tremendous ethical and ecological toll.”⁹⁰

This experience in the rainforest embodies the disconnect that people have from food. When someone picks up a banana off the counter in their kitchen, their mind does not typically go immediately to what fertilizers and pesticides were used, what forests were destroyed, or what fossil fuels were burned. Although this banana is “*kosher*,” it violates the principles surrounding *bal tashchit*. Therefore, *eco-kashrut* seeks to embody Jewish values, such as *bal tashchit*, by asking about what the history of the banana was, and what went into getting it to an individual’s kitchen counter. And, in some ways, *eco-kashrut* is more strict than traditional *kosher*, while *eco-kashrut* also allows individuals to have agency and practice as they deem fit. As Lerman-Golomb argues, gardens are one way to avoid the issues that Skloot presents.

⁸⁹ Joseph Aaron Skloot, “Real Life / Real Food: Let Your Table Be to You a Temple,” In *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, edited by Mary L. Zamore, New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 2011, 207.

⁹⁰ Skloot, “Real Life / Real Food,” 207-208.

ORGANIZATIONS

Adamah is a Jewish environmental organization whose mission is to “cultivate vibrant Jewish life in deep connection with the earth, catalyzing culture change and systemic change through immersive experiences, Jewish environmental education, leadership development, and climate action.”⁹¹ The organization is multifaceted; Adamah has many central guiding values that span from Community and Belonging to Jewish Wisdom, all the way to Nature Connection,⁹² to name a few. Adamah is a new organization that began in 2023, but it is the result of a merger between Hazon and Pearlstone, two other Jewish organizations, which are over a hundred years old. The values and ideology of Adamah have a fruitful history and have continued to sprout new ideas to keep up with the new times.

I had the opportunity to speak with Becky O’Brien who is the Director of Food and Climate at Adamah. When I asked her how *bal tashchit* is seen in Adamah, she said that to the organization it meant “do not waste.”⁹³ At first glance, this is a narrower interpretation of *bal tashchit*; however, when O’Brien expanded on her answer, it illuminated how *bal tashchit* is a foundational part of *eco-kashrut*. She said:

I will bring it up a lot around food waste because one of the things that we try to help people understand is that when you are wasting the food, you are not only wasting the food, you are wasting all of the inputs that went into it, so all the water, the land use, the labor, the dollars, fossil fuel inputs for the packaging for driving it from here to there. So, when you throw away strawberries, you are not only throwing away the strawberry, you are throwing away the imbedded water, the imbedded energy, the imbedded cost in dollars is all also going into the trash.⁹⁴

⁹¹ “Urban Adamah,” 2023, <https://urbanadamah.org/>.

⁹² “Urban Adamah,” 2023, <https://urbanadamah.org/>.

⁹³ Becky O’Brien, in discussion with the author, February 27, 2024.

⁹⁴ O’Brien, discussion.

O'Brien highlights that in our consumption of food, not harming the earth both means to treat the land with respect but to also be conscious of the process that happened to get the food onto your plate. She furthers this notion of not wasting food, because the simple act of wasting food is in itself, a larger act of waste. She shared that "composting is great, and it is better than landfill, but it is far better to reduce the amount of waste altogether. In our work, we try to emphasize that."⁹⁵ This is important to note, especially in the grand scheme of *eco-kashrut*, because it shows the different levels that someone can take to not ruin the earth. Some people may compost, and that is their way of integrating *bal tashchit* into their lives. Others may attempt to completely cut down on waste. Either way, it is embodying this Jewish principle. Adamah demonstrates one organization's approach to *bal tashchit*.

Another organization with whom I spoke was Eden Village Camp. Eden Village Camp is a Jewish, co-ed, summer sleep-away camp in Putnam Valley, NY. This camp does not cater to only one denomination of Judaism, but instead engages with a pluralistic mindset to ensure that all campers feel welcome and at home. At this camp, they "see Judaism as a path for living wisely and usefully with the whole of humanity."⁹⁶ While it is an undeniably Jewish camp, Eden Village Camp also centers its values around sustainable living and environmentally attuned practices.

Aliza Heeren is one of the assistant directors at camp. When asked how *bal tashchit* plays into the camp life, Heeren, interestingly, had the same answer as O'Brien; she said, "we use it to talk about not wasting."⁹⁷ She elaborated by sharing that "we talk about that with composting and food waste. We talk about where our materials come from. Or integrating it

⁹⁵ O'Brien, discussion.

⁹⁶ Eden Village Camp, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://edenvillagecamp.org/>.

⁹⁷ Aliza Heeren, in discussion with the author, February 26, 2024.

into the art room. We are very thoughtful about our materials, what we are using, and the impact they have.”⁹⁸ This is important to note because Heeren is showing the emphasis on *bal tashchit* in both the food sense and in the play space. This outlook creates a mindset that ingrains these principles into all areas of life. She shared that they “have an evening activity called ‘who stole the milk?’”⁹⁹ This activity is centered around *bal tashchit* and not wasting milk, or other products. This practice yet again turns a secular game into both a Jewish experience and environmental education, embodying *eco-kashrut*.

INDIVIDUALS

Dr. Rabbi Geoffrey Claussen is the Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Elon University as well as the Lori and Eric Sklut Professor in Jewish Studies. His professional experience is grounded in Jewish ethics and theology, and one of his main areas of research is animal ethics. Some of the works that he has authored on the subject include “Moses and the Kid, Judah and the Calf, and the Disavowal of Compassion: Reading Rabbinic Stories with The Question of the Animal and Religion,” “Jewish Virtue Ethics and Compassion for Animals: A Model from the Musar Movement,” and “Musar and Jewish Veganism.” He is both a practicing Jew and vegan.

In visiting with Claussen, I focused our discussion on values that resonated with him and that guided his eating choices. No surprise, he shared that one of his core values is *bal tashchit*. When asked to define how he eats, he responded, “part of what keeping kosher means to me personally, in my own practices of keeping kosher is being concerned for the environment and

⁹⁸ Heeren, discussion.

⁹⁹ Heeren, discussion.

for non-human animals and for the people who produced the food that might reach the table.”¹⁰⁰ The first of these three core values, concern for the environment, plays directly into *bal tashchit*. Claussen shared further, saying, “I do see good resources within the Jewish tradition for helping people live with compassion and humility and thoughtfulness, and hope that those resources can be harnessed in helping people to eat with those values in mind.”¹⁰¹ This quote epitomizes how Jewish values and traditions, such as *bal tashchit*, serve as a way to sacralize eating habits that are centered in a Jewish manner.

A casual observer might look at Claussen’s eating habits and say that he keeps *eco-kashrut*, and, in theory, the way that he practices and eats reflects this very concept. Yet, the term “*eco-kashrut*” does not necessarily fit all individuals. I note this distinction because an individual might lack knowledge of the term or may believe that the phrase carries certain connotations or connections within specific groups. Claussen said that he does “not often use the word *eco-kosher* to describe my own commitments”¹⁰² and speculated that “maybe that is a function of the popularity of that phrase within circles,”¹⁰³ such as the Reform or Renewal movements. I infer that his reluctance to use the term *eco-kashrut* might be driven by his desire to shy away from the connotations of this term which ground *eco-kashrut* in environmentalism, instead of in Jewish values. While the term “*eco-kashrut*” – which is more typically associated with the Renewal or Reform movements of Judaism – did not resonate with Claussen, the grounding principles of this movement mirror his own commitment to eating in a Jewish manner. When asked how he described his eating, Claussen simply responded that he “keeps kosher.” Yes, Claussen’s diet conforms to traditional *kashrut*, but his commitments to *kashrut* go deeper

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Claussen, in discussion with the author, January 18, 2024.

¹⁰¹ Claussen, discussion.

¹⁰² Claussen, discussion.

¹⁰³ Claussen, discussion.

than simply the conventional basics. Instead, his eating habits also encompass important ethical values, foremost among these being *bal tashchit*. His commitment to *kashrut* incorporates a Jewish tradition of care for animals and the environment, as well. Practices that others might label “*eco-kashrut*,” are, for Claussen, simply “*kashrut*.” In short, Claussen’s eating practices embody how values such as *bal tashchit* shape an individual's eating habits towards sacrality in a deeply Jewish context.

Wendy Rhein, unlike Claussen, is neither a Rabbi nor Professor, but instead is the owner of a homestead farm, named “Chutzpah Hollow.” Her story is that of an individual who embraces Judaism and Jewish values, which in turn shapes the way she lives and farms. Rhein grew up in the suburbs of Detroit, and her father, who was reared on a dairy farm, hoped that none of his children would ever farm. As a result, she says that she “did not grow up in any way in a farm setting, or in an agricultural or even food-centered household.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, this did not stop her. She shared that she “always had this connection to the idea of food and not just as something to feed your body, but as this place where people gather around and how important it is in culture.”¹⁰⁵ She followed a traditional path to college, she says, without thinking much about agriculture; however, she always felt a pull to agricultural life. Her first entrance into this world was when she “decided to spend nine months making [from scratch] anything that we ate that [previously would have come] from a box, a bag, a can, or a jar.”¹⁰⁶ She saw this as the foundation to start growing food as her passion, and as the first step towards eventually owning a farm. But, for Rhein, COVID-19 was the final breaking point; that moment meant that it was time to make a real change. That is when she bought a farm.

¹⁰⁴ Wendy Rhein in discussion with the author, February 8, 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Rhein, discussion.

¹⁰⁶ Rhein, discussion.

Interestingly, before moving to the farm, she had never stepped foot on the property. “I had absolutely no agricultural experience besides growing things in pots.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, she still chose to dive into this experience, to honor her Judaism and connection to the land. The name of the farm, in and of itself, is Jewish. It took *chutzpah* for her to leave everything that she knew and start a new life. But her Jewish values gave her an outline and understanding of what she needed to do and how she needed to go about this process. She articulated this point, saying, “this is very much a Jewish farm, and being so far from a synagogue and from a Jewish community, because there just isn’t that here, I create being Jewish, and I live being Jewish.”¹⁰⁸ For Rhein, the connection to the land, the respect for the land, and her interactions with the land – all values which come back to *bal tashchit* – embody sacred Jewish eating practices. This practice also brings Rhein back to her ancestors. She said, “when our people were living in shtetls and other places, they had to create a Jewishness in their own homes long before they could in a synagogue.”¹⁰⁹ Rhein’s farm serves this exact same purpose. It is a Jewish haven for her. This approach provides an interesting contrast to that of Rabbi Claussen. Although both Rhein and Claussen use Jewish ethics to ground their eating habits, the ways that these individuals practice those Jewish ethics show a stark difference.

Bringing this discussion back to *bal tashchit*, Rhein shared that we “don’t till our garden and try to not tear up the ecosystem that exists in the land. We do our best to work with the land as opposed to trying to change it for our own behavior.”¹¹⁰ This principle embodies *bal tashchit*. Like others, Rhein understands that the earth is not ours to destroy. By the simple practice of not tilling the garden, she takes a step towards trying to help the earth return to a more natural state,

¹⁰⁷ Rhein, discussion.

¹⁰⁸ Rhein, discussion.

¹⁰⁹ Rhein, discussion.

¹¹⁰ Rhein, discussion.

a state that is less influenced by modern technologies. In short, Rhein wishes to give space for the earth to rest. The practices and steps which she pursues to take care of the land embody Jewish practices centered around eating; she, thus, practices *eco-kashrut*.

Over the course of my conversations with Claussen and Rhein, I was able to understand how two individuals with starkly different backgrounds approached the same Jewish value, which is foundational to how they look at life. This is important to note, in the greater scheme of *eco-kashrut*, because it shows how disparate individuals use *bal tashchit*, an inherently Jewish value, to shape the way they think about the environment, in relation to their eating habits.

Shmitah

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Shmitah (שמיטה) refers to the sabbatical year that comes every seventh year. *Shmitah* is found four times in the Tanakh and 135 times in the Talmud.¹¹¹ Each time that *shmitah* is used in the Tanakh (Deuteronomy 15:1, 2, 9, and 31:10), the term is used in reference to the seventh year. The idea of a seventh year is of note to scholars of *eco-kashrut* because it puts an emphasis on allowing the earth time to rest, therefore not overworking the natural environment. This practice is a core value in both the wider environmental movement and in Judaism. *Shmitah* alludes to the idea that one must take a break, allowing the earth to rest from agricultural uses. If one does not take time off from working the land, the earth will be slowly destroyed over time. The cycle of seven can be seen as parallel to how we are required to take time off on the seventh day – Shabbat – to rest. The earth, in this sense, is not excluded from this need for rest. Animals and humans must also rest.

In Exodus, this same sentiment around the importance of land rest is echoed. We find in Exodus this passage: “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard” (Exodus 23:10-11). In the seventh year, the land is not farmed, yet there are still plants that will sprout and grow on their own. These plants are left, unharvested, for poor individuals to eat, who would not otherwise have access to food. This gleaning is in accordance

¹¹¹ “שמיטה,” Sefaria, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.sefaria.org.il/search?q=%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%98%D7%94&tab=text&tvar=1&tsort=relevance&svar=1&ssort=relevance>.

with the ideology surrounding *eco-kashrut*. In *eco-kashrut*, it is crucial to allow the land to rest so to not overwork and take advantage of the land and critical to ensure that all people have access to healthy and good food. The last sentence of this verse of Exodus is key. It basically means that the grapes and olives must be left to be freely taken by poor individuals who do not own land. This action embodies two different Jewish values. First, *tzedakah*, which translates to “righteousness,” but has come to be understood as meaning “charitable giving.” The second value epitomized here is *pe’ah* (פֶּאֵה), which translates to “corner.” *Pe’ah* is a subsection of *tzedakah* because it is the requirement to leave the corners of one’s field open so that those who are poor can take it from these corners – as well as glean any grain that falls to the ground. Therefore, these two lines are crucial, in that they lay out both how one must treat the land, and also treat other individuals. In fact, these two lines are often interpreted as the basis of *shmitah* laws and are in direct accordance with ideology surrounding *eco-kashrut*.

In her Ph.D. dissertation, “Unlikely Ground: Lived Spirituality on a Jewish Urban Farm,” *shmitah* and *yovel* ground much of Alena Coons’s argument. *Yovel* is the jubilee year which is observed every fifty years. Coons understands that “the Biblical perspective on shmita and yovel are framed always in terms of cycles of release (Waskow, 2000).”¹¹² Coon’s use of Waskow to frame her argument yet again reinforces the importance of allowing the earth to rest in both the religious sense and a more environmentally focused sense. She furthers this assertion with the following statement:

During the shmita year, the land is allowed to lie fallow and grow wild, signifying the land’s ultimately divine providence and relieving humans and the farmed land to rest. Jubilee, yovel (YO-vell) in Hebrew, is the fiftieth year in an agricultural cycle, which releases humans from their debts to one another as a means of preventing irreversible poverty and steep economic class divides (Davis, 2009). The laws demanding these

¹¹² Alena Coons, “Unlikely Ground: Lived Spirituality on a Jewish Urban Farm,” PhD dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies, 2019, 59.

different practices of release are extremely significant to Jewish agrarianism, and while neither practice was carried out in full, some participants in my study engaged in conversations about the underlying spiritual and social meanings of *shmita* and *yovel*.¹¹³

It is a commandment, or *mitzvah*, to allow the earth to rest during the fiftieth year. In the religious sense, this notion can be understood as returning to the roots and sentiment that were presented in the Tanakh. In an environmental sense, allowing the earth to rest gives the environment the needed break, so as not to overwork the land with no rest or time for rejuvenation. While *shmitah* (and *yovel*) are not necessarily followed exactly, as Coons says, the sentiment and meaning which they express are not only deeply rooted Jewish values but also environmental values. This notion must be understood first as reinforcing ways in which *eco-kashrut*, which values ideals surrounding *shmitah* (and *yovel*), grew organically out of Jewish tradition. Finally, we must note that this reinforcement is important because it points to the understanding that *eco-kashrut* is based in Jewish values and traditions that are grounded in the Tanakh.

The idea of rest is one that is important in Judaism and is a grounding practice for Jewish individuals the world over. Judaism plays out differently for every individual. In relation to the concept of rest, some Jewish individuals are *Shomer Shabbat*, the practice of observing all commandments associated with Shabbat. At the other end of this spectrum are those who simply say prayers on Friday night, and others fall between these two practices on the continuum. A parallel can be drawn between Shabbat, on one hand, and *shmitah* on the other. We note this parallel because it yet again grounds foundational ideologies in the *eco-kashrut* movement in Jewish ideology and practice. Coon reinforces this idea, writing that,

Each of these practices marks periods of time set aside for rest and release: once every week, every seven years, and after seven seven-year cycles. Each of these laws requires a

¹¹³ Coons, "Unlikely Ground," 58-59.

cyclical observation, is directly related to agriculture, and informs the Biblical worldview regarding the human relationship to the natural world.¹¹⁴

The sentiment that she expresses above is essential to understanding *eco-kashrut*. Let us dig deeper into this matter. There are periods of time, such as *shmitah* and *yovel* years, when one must intentionally set aside time to allow the earth to rest. The cyclical nature of this tradition creates a consistent and grounding force to which individuals can turn. Coons explains that “with the central theme of release, the practices Shabbat, *shmita*, and *yovel* ensure a day for people to be released from working the land, a year of release for the land every seven years, and a society-wide release from debt after 49 years.”¹¹⁵

What do we learn here? Most importantly, this practice is not simply about the land but also about individuals, which is a foundational element of *eco-kashrut*. The way in which humans and workers fit into the *eco-kashrut* movement will be explored more in the chapter on *kavod habriot*. Yet, this sentiment about and awareness of the environment are grounding to *eco-kashrut*. The bottom line is that this ideology comes back to the very idea of creating an intentionality surrounding food. The *eco-kashrut* movement encourages individuals to think about where their food came from and the consequences of their eating habits on the environment. *Shmitah* provides a Jewish way to create a rest for the environment, thus embodying both the environmental ethics and Jewish sides of the coin.

It is critical to consider, however, that while *shmitah* was seen in the Tanakh, the rejuvenation of this ideology is more recent. Coons writes, “Shabbat has traditionally been practiced through much of history, but *shmita* has not been practiced across all societies

¹¹⁴ Coons, “Unlikely Ground,” 59.

¹¹⁵ Coons, “Unlikely Ground,” 230.

throughout Jewish history.”¹¹⁶ Yet, different organizations “observe this tradition most appropriate to their contemporary setting and context.”¹¹⁷

In his article, “Shmita Revolution: The Reclamation and Reinvention of the Sabbatical Year,” David Krantz echoes the understanding that the *shmitah* revival is a rather new movement that takes older Jewish values and implements them in our current day and age.¹¹⁸ But Krantz focuses on the more secular Jewish individuals who are finding their way back to their Jewish roots. He writes, “over the last seven-year *shmitah* cycle ... the Jewish environmental movement has rediscovered shmita, promoted it as a core concept of Judaism, and led activities in North America, Europe and Israel that have reintroduced shmita to world Jewry.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the revival of *shmitah* perfectly encapsulates the sentiment behind the larger *eco-kashrut* movement. Krantz writes, “shmita values are echoed through the field of sustainability, particularly via its frameworks of social-ecological and social-ecological-technical systems.”¹²⁰ *Shmitah* is no longer simply a commandment in the Tanakh but is also now a way to think about environmental sustainability in a Jewish manner. It is a practice that epitomizes the *eco-kashrut* movement.

The Jewish environmental movement, under which *eco-kashrut* falls, has – to no one’s surprise – embraced *shmitah*. Krantz writes, “the Jewish environmental movement at large adopted and developed shmita as a paramount Jewish environmental concept as well as an organizing principle.”¹²¹ In this same article, Krantz gives the reader principles that one can choose to live by. He articulates foundational principles to *shmitah* that align those of the *eco-kashrut* movement:

¹¹⁶Coons, “Unlikely Ground,” 230.

¹¹⁷ Coons, “Unlikely Ground,” 230.

¹¹⁸ David Krantz, “Shmita Revolution: The Reclamation and Reinvention of the Sabbatical Year,” *Religions* 7, no. 8 (2016): 1.

¹¹⁹ Krantz, “Shmita Revolution,” 1.

¹²⁰ Krantz, “Shmita Revolution,” 2.

¹²¹ Krantz, “Shmita Revolution,” 17.

Holistic sustainability that is beyond humans; Land and community stewardship; Psychological release and dignity; Leveling of the economic playing field and preventing cycles of poverty; Engaging long-term thinking; Developing deep connections with Earth's rhythms; Thinking about the common good versus the individual good, scarcity versus abundance, and cooperation versus competition.¹²²

Each of these principles directly relates back to *shmitah* and are foundational principles to the *eco-kashrut* movement, as well. As Krantz suggests in his presentation of principles, *shmitah* and the *eco-kashrut* movement go hand-in-hand.

In her article "'A Shmita Manifesto': A Radical Sabbatical Approach to Jewish Food Reform in the United States," Adrienne Krone also highlights the importance of *shmitah* in Jewish society, especially at it pertains to food ethics. Echoing Coons's point about the parallels of *shmitah* and Shabbat, Krone takes this analysis one step further. She writes, "shmita is a sabbath for the land. Similar to the weekly sabbath, a day of rest after six days of work, shmita is a year of rest for the land after it has been worked for six years. Shmita highlights both the importance and the sacred qualities attributed to land in Judaism."¹²³ This sentiment conveys the significance of allowing the earth to rest, in Jewish tradition. While it is a commandment to allow one's body to rest on Shabbat, it is also an expectation to allow the land to rest, in Judaism. I repeat this concept now because it reinforces the ways in which *eco-kashrut* relies on and is grounded in traditional Jewish ideology; *eco-kashrut* holds both environmental and religious practice to high standards, allowing neither to falter.

Krone points out that "most of the Jews drawn to the practice of shmita in the Diaspora are not Orthodox Jews. They are Jews who seek to reinvigorate American Judaism through

¹²² Krantz, "Shmita Revolution," 17.

¹²³ Adrienne Krone, "A Shmita Manifesto: A Radical Sabbatical Approach to Jewish Food Reform in the United States," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 26 (2015), 303.

environmentalism.”¹²⁴ Of note in this concept is that even though non-Orthodox Jews – or Jewish individuals who do not tend to follow every single commandment on a day-to-day basis – are not required to live their life according to the practice of *shmitah*, it is these very same Jewish individuals who have found their way back to this ancient practice. She writes, “the reimagined shmita year is based on these biblical and rabbinic sources but it differs in its overall vision for the shmita year based on contemporary environmental concerns.”¹²⁵ This thinking is the epitome of what *eco-kashrut* is and ought to be. The values are grounded in Judaism. These individuals use these Jewish values to shape their relationship with the environment, especially as it pertains to food. Krone calls *shmitah* “an invitation to American Jews to stop taking the soil for granted, to enter into or deepen their relationship with the land their food comes from.”¹²⁶

Scholars have noted that the reverting back to *shmitah* happened both on an individual basis and on a more community-based scale. Krone explains that “accessible options for individuals looking to participate in shmita include shopping at local farmers markets and participating in a locavore challenge. These options provide familiar suggestions for American Jews interested in observing the unfamiliar shmita year.”¹²⁷ On a larger scale, reverting back to *shmitah* looked like providing “an opportunity for a number of Jewish organizations that work both separately and together on these issues to reclaim the sabbatical year in order to raise awareness among Jews of the environmental issues facing America.”¹²⁸ Furthering this idea, Krone writes how organizations are “encouraging American Jews to consider an environmentally

¹²⁴ Krone, “A Shmita Manifesto,” 310.

¹²⁵ Krone, “A Shmita Manifesto,” 310.

¹²⁶ Krone, “A Shmita Manifesto,” 319.

¹²⁷ Krone, “A Shmita Manifesto,” 321.

¹²⁸ Krone, “Shmita Manifesto,” 323.

sustainable permaculture model and a diet based on ethical food production, consumption and food security.”¹²⁹

For each individual or organization, reverting to the traditional *shmitah* ideology takes different forms; however, the key take-away here is that each interpretation serves as a step in the direction towards embodying *eco-kashrut*.

ORGANIZATIONS

There are many organizations that incorporate *shmitah* into their mission. The Shmita Project is one of these organizations:

The Shmita Project is working to expand awareness about the biblical Sabbatical tradition, and to bring the values of this practice to life today to support healthier, more sustainable Jewish communities. The Shmita Project works across the Jewish landscape to elevate the role that shmita – the year of rest in a seven-year cycle of Jewish life – plays in today’s society.¹³⁰

This section of the mission statement is important because it shows the foundational principles which one such organization embodies. But the Shmita project goes even further. Another part of the organization’s mission statement focuses on the multiple and complex ways in which they conceive of the practice *shmitah*:

[W]e don’t simply want to raise awareness of shmita. We also want to explore the ways that traditional teachings about shmita shed light on a significant range of contemporary issues that are directly or indirectly referenced in the concept of “shmita,” including rest and work, relationship to land, relationship to community, relationship to debt and debt relief, definitions of community, and the issue of consumption itself.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Krone, "Shmita Manifesto," 323.

¹³⁰ “About the Shmita Project., The Shmita (שמיטה) Project, Accessed February 17, 2024, <https://shmitaproject.org/about-project/>.

¹³¹ “About the Shmita Project., The Shmita (שמיטה) Project, <https://shmitaproject.org/about-project/>.

The key take-away here is that organizations such as this one serve to educate and provide insight into a multifaceted Jewish value. As Krone puts it, “the Shmita Project encapsulates a multivalent environmentalist strain of American Judaism that is deeply concerned with climate change, industrial agriculture and food insecurity and often expresses itself through food reform.”¹³² *Shmitah* is not simply about allowing the land to rest but is also about relationships within a community and among individuals, which are values that are embodied in *eco-kashrut*. Projects such as these help to provide scaffolding for individuals who wish to be conscious about their eating habits, while also maintaining a Jewish eating identity. As the Shmita Project’s own literature makes clear, “the Shmita Year invites us to rethink the world that we live in and to tune into the ways in which we can actively make a difference.”¹³³ This doctrine suggests that we must be intentional about our interaction with the environment, especially as it pertains to our eating habits and food. *Shmitah* epitomizes how *eco-kashrut* grows organically out of Jewish values.

Other organizations adapt *shmitah* in their own ways. One such organization is Eden Village Camp. Eden Village has been in existence through two cycles of *shmitah* years. Although the camp has opted to continue to farm during the *shmitah* years, they still acknowledge this special time. Aliza Heeren, one of the assistant directors of Eden Farm, shared what the camp does in response to *shmitah* years. This includes both teaching the children about what the *shmitah* year is and also having practices that are not in keeping with non-*shmitah* years. For example, Heeren shared that they “leave all of the gates open on the farm,”¹³⁴ that

¹³² Krone, ““A Shmita Manifesto”: A Radical Sabbatical Approach to Jewish Food Reform in the United States,” 304.

¹³³ “About the Shmita Project., The Shmita (שמיטה) Project, <https://shmitaproject.org/about-project/>.

¹³⁴ Aliza Heeren, in discussion with the author, February 26, 2024.

they have a large *shmitah* plot which they “scatter with wildflowers and just let it grow,”¹³⁵ and lastly, they have a *pe’ah* plot where all the things grown there get donated to the local food bank. All in all, Eden Village ends up donating about ten percent of their harvest to the local food bank, to give back, which is directly in keeping with the values surrounding both *shmitah* and *eco-kashrut*.

Another organization of note is Coastal Roots Farm, which is a Jewish nonprofit community farm, based in Encinitas, California. Their mission statement reads as follows: “Coastal Roots cultivates healthy, connect communities by integrating sustainable agriculture, food justice, and ancient Jewish wisdom.”¹³⁶ Coastal Roots Farm does educational work in addition to organic farming. They also have a farm stand that is pay-what-you-can, which both creates inclusive and accessible healthy food for any individuals who wish to take advantage of this and also “uses sustainable practices”¹³⁷ that reflect “generations-old Jewish agricultural traditions.”¹³⁸

Rebecca Fletcher, the Director of Jewish Life at Coastal Roots Farm, shared that the farm observes *shmitah*, to some extent, at all times. Fletcher told me that “rest is built into the way we farm, and we uplifted that more”¹³⁹ during *shmitah* years. They also use this time to teach about *shmitah*, and they “haven’t hit the *yovel* challenge”¹⁴⁰ yet. Both farms – Eden Village and Coastal Roots – chose to both honor *shmitah* while also understanding that to completely live by *shmitah* and not use the land at all would not be sustainable or practical for their respective communities. That does not diminish, however, their commitment to incorporating *shmitah* into

¹³⁵ Heeren, discussion.

¹³⁶ Coastal Roots Farm, Accessed February 14, 2024, <https://coastalrootsfarm.org/>.

¹³⁷ Coastal Roots Farm, Accessed February 14, 2024, <https://coastalrootsfarm.org/>.

¹³⁸ Coastal Roots Farm, Accessed February 14, 2024, <https://coastalrootsfarm.org/>.

¹³⁹ Rebecca Fletcher, discussion with the author, February 27, 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Fletcher, discussion.

their organizations, and committing to this practice to the best of their abilities. As part of the larger *eco-kashrut* movement, both these organizations exemplify a commitment to Jewish values surrounding the environment, in relation to their food and land practices.

INDIVIDUALS

So, how do individuals implement *shmitah* (and *yovel*) in their lives? Right off the bat, when Rhein was sharing her story with me, she observed that, “we moved here during a *shmitah* year.”¹⁴¹ Without being prompted by a question, Rhein already had the Jewish understanding of *shmitah* at the forefront of her mind. Allowing the earth to rest and understanding her life choices in relationship to the environment are two values grounded in Jewish ideology. She shared, “when I’m replanting the garden or recognizing the newness, or the first time we do something, to me that’s also part of it;”¹⁴² the “it” refers to her Judaism and relationship to the natural world.

Recentering this discussion in *shmitah*, she told me that “there’s that level or respect for the land and the property and just feeling connected to the seasons and to the way in which we recognize the monthly cycles that are observed.”¹⁴³ Observing the cyclical nature of the environment is not simply an environmental approach. Instead, to Rhein, this is part of living out a fundamental Jewish value. It is up to Jewish individuals to understand themselves in relation to the larger world, and to allow the earth time to rest to be able to thrive to its greatest potential. “I think it is more ancient Jewish,”¹⁴⁴ Rhein told me the “it” here refers to the values and practices in her farm, which she attributes to ancient Jewish traditions. To bring this

¹⁴¹ Wendy Rhein, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2024.

¹⁴² Rhein, discussion.

¹⁴³ Rhein, discussion.

¹⁴⁴ Rhein, discussion.

discussion back to *eco-kashrut*, individuals such as Rhein embody practices that both pay tribute to Jewish values and attend to environmental impact.

Rhein's relationship with *shmitah* is clearly not the only approach that one can take. Robbie Cape is an entrepreneur who was raised in the Conservative Jewish movement. Cape started Mt. Joy, in Seattle Washington; Mt. Joy is a chicken sandwich joint that focuses on the environmental impacts and processes that go into having a chicken sandwich on the table in front of you. At the heart of his endeavor is what he calls "regenerative agriculture." Regenerative agriculture is a philosophy and process that seeks to rehabilitate and restore soil through enhanced farming practices.

When I asked Cape if he thought about *shmitah*, in the sense of allowing the soils to rest, he answered with an emphatic "yes." He said, "letting the land rest is just good farming, so yes, it is built into the laws of kashrut, but at the end of the day it comes down to good farming."¹⁴⁵ For Cape, the practice of allowing the land to rest while farming is an inherently Jewish value. Regenerative agriculture, while not being a Jewish practice, *per se*, overlaps with practices of the *eco-kashrut* movement, especially as it relates to the land's rest. Cape shared that, in regenerative agriculture, "you are rotating your crops and your animals through your land, so the concept of monocropping or consistent, constant cropping are outside of the values of regenerative agriculture."¹⁴⁶ The ideology and sentiment behind *shmitah* is consistent with that of regenerative agriculture. Cape said:

In regenerative agriculture you need to be constantly letting your land rest, it is all part of the cycle. You use the land to grow hay on the land, and then you cut the hay, and then you move your cows through that land to then take the rest of the hay, and then you bring your chickens through that land to let the chickens turn over the soil, and then you let the land rest for several months before you plant your hay again. Therefore, it is this

¹⁴⁵ Robbie Cape, in discussion with the author, March 6, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Cape, discussion.

constant resting of the land which I believe fits in absolutely perfectly with the underlying value of *shmitah*.¹⁴⁷

This quote gives a detailed breakdown of how the type of farming that Cape centers his business around aligns with *shmitah*. Although his interpretation does not conform to the traditional seven-year cycle, he understands it to resonate with this ancient Jewish tradition.

At the heart of contemporary Judaism is the practice of pulling values from the old sacred texts to apply to an ever-changing modern world; this is exactly what Cape does. For some, it may be easy to look at the *eco-kashrut* movement and say that it is a cop out, but, in reality, it is quite the opposite. *Eco-kashrut* grows out of Jewish values such as *shmitah*. What these looks like in practice differs for different individuals, but the ideology and grounding principles remain the same.

¹⁴⁷ Cape, discussion.

CHAPTER 3: ANIMALS

Tzar'ar ba'alei chayim

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Hebrew phrase *tzar'ar ba'alei chayim* (צער בעלי חיים) translates to “respect for animals.” Although this phrase does not appear in the Tanakh, it occurs sixty-three times in the Talmud.¹⁴⁸ The sentiment that this phrase expresses is that we must spare animals from unnecessary abuse, pain, and suffering. In other words, it is critical to take care of animals and treat them as beings that warrant respect. This sentiment appears throughout the Tanakh, as well.

At the time the Tanakh was written, there was no way to predict the world we live in today; factory farming, for example, would have been unfathomable. Yet, modern day Jewish individuals still turn to Jewish texts – such as the Tanakh and Talmud – to shape their eating habits to maintain a Jewish diet based on Jewish values. *Tzar'ar ba'alei chayim* is one such value that many modern Jewish individuals point to when internalizing a Jewish, sacred eating practice. The actual practice of eating Jewishly plays out differently for different individuals; *tzar'ar ba'alei chayim* and the principles guiding this value are underlying factors for many individuals who are concerned about animals. This value is a key component of *eco-kashrut*.

A common misconception is that *kosher* laws result in minimal suffering caused to the animals that are raised and slaughtered in a *kosher* fashion. If this were true, then traditional *kashrut* would embody the spirit of *tzar'ar ba'alei chayim*. Unfortunately, this is not the case. A case in point is the now notorious slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, whose abuses were

¹⁴⁸ “צער בעלי חיים,” Sefaria, Accessed February 24, 2024, <https://www.sefaria.org/search?q=%D7%A6%D7%A2%D7%A8%20%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%99%20%D7%97%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D&tab=text&tvar=1&tsort=relevance&svar=1&ssort=relevance>.

brought to light in a 2008 video. The practices revealed at this *kosher* meat-packing plant epitomize how compliance with *kosher* laws is no guarantee against harm and lack of care for animals. For context, “Hasidic Jews bought a slaughterhouse near Postville, Iowa, and started a large kosher meat enterprise there.”¹⁴⁹ While the *kosher* butchers were not outwardly or intentionally violating *kosher* codes, the animals still suffered greatly. A video from the slaughterhouse:

shows workers tearing the tracheas from cattle seconds after the animals' throats are slit. The animals are then shown being dropped several feet to a floor where some moan and stumble for up to three minutes. PETA contends the animals are fully conscious during the first stages of slaughter and suffer unnecessary pain.¹⁵⁰

The real lesson seen in this case study shows how, even if something is technically deemed *kosher*, Jewish values like *tzar'ar ba'alei chai'im* are not necessarily honored in the process. In short, basic *kosher* laws can be satisfied without also satisfying other Jewish values. I would venture to say that if a process lives up to *kosher* standards but violates other Jewish values, then it is not in keeping with Judaism. Therefore, it is up to individuals to be intentional about understanding the process of how their food – especially meat – is prepared, to make sure that this process truly embodies Jewish values. In a chapter entitled “The Virtues of Keeping Kosher,” Elliot Ratzman writes, “I and many others like me have sometimes found ourselves annoyed with the insistences on certain forms of kosher supervision where concern to meet Orthodox standards is undertaken *at the expense of justice and loving-kindness.*”¹⁵¹ In this same book, *Feasting and Fasting: The History and Ethics of Jewish Food*, Aaron Gross voices a

¹⁴⁹ Yaakov Ariel, “Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America,” *American Jewish History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Dan Haugen, “PETA Calls for Prosecution of Postville, Iowa, Kosher Meat Plant,” *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News*, Washington: Tribune Content Agency LLC, 2004, 2.

¹⁵¹ Elliot Ratzman, “The Virtues of Keeping Kosher,” in Aaron Gross, et al, eds., *Feasting and Fasting: The History and Ethics of Jewish Food*. (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 305.

similar sentiment. Gross writes, “speaking from my own perspective as a Jew who cares about animal suffering, I find the limitations of this venerable ban on cruelty that dominate the conventional kosher industry today offensive to my Jewish sensibilities.”¹⁵² *Eco-kashrut* draws on values, such as *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*, to provide an intentionality when eating or interacting with animals, to maintain a sacred eating practice that is as inherently Jewish as it is humanely committed.

To eat in a way that conforms to *eco-kashrut* means that one must think carefully about the process of the journey that our foods take to arrive on our plates. For example, failing to acknowledge the likely cruelty behind the chicken that one eats for dinner disregards *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*, which, as I have shown, is a grounding aspect to living an ethically Jewish life.

Rabbi Dr. Julia Watts Belser, in an essay on ecotheology, provides insight into this idea:

Increasingly, such questions run at odds with the institutional systems of kashrut, which largely prioritize ritual practice without regard for ethical or environmental concern. Many Jewish activists contend that the factory-based system of kosher slaughter—like other industrial systems of meat production—represents a grave violation of Jewish ethical principles. As Aaron Gross has documented, the 2008 raids at the Agriprocessors kosher slaughter plant in Postville, Iowa, uncovered egregious animal cruelty and brutal violations of worker rights.¹⁵³

Watts Belser is correct, in my view: it is up to practitioners of Jewish ethics to consider the origin of their food when deciding what is going into their bodies. This notion is especially applicable in relation to factory slaughter. *Tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* is of key interest because it creates an intentionality surrounding the treatment of animals, all the way from how they are conceived and raised, through the end of their lives.

¹⁵² Aaron Gross, “The Ethics of Eating Animals,” in *Feasting and Fasting: The History and Ethics of Jewish Food*. (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 348.

¹⁵³ Julia Watts Belser, “The Bible and Ecotheology,” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, Oxford University Press, 2022, 365.

Dr. Andrea Dara Cooper writes that “the subfield of ‘animals and religion’ is in conversation with Jewish studies.”¹⁵⁴ This assertion yet again reinforces the idea that Judaism and animal treatment are inextricably interconnected.

Maimonides, a distinguished twelfth century rabbi and philosopher, “believed that there was no difference between human pain and the pain of other living beings.”¹⁵⁵ This attitude towards animals sets one standard for how animals should be treated. Aaron Gross also turns to Maimonides for insight. Gross writes,

The principle of tza’ar ba’alei - hayyim, Maimonides expounds, ‘is set down with a view to perfecting us so that we should not acquire moral habits of cruelty and should not inflict pain gratuitously without any utility, but rather that we should intend to be compassionate [to have rahamim] and merciful even with a chance animal individual.’¹⁵⁶

Our interaction with animals is representative of our interaction with humans and our deepest moral character. This conclusion is grounded in fundamental Jewish values and provides insight and real-world applications with regard to Jewish food practices.

Gross muses that “if animals are killed in the wrong way—for example, without concern for their suffering—then killing can have dangerous effects on one’s character.”¹⁵⁷ This thinking, yet again, reinforces the importance of respecting animals in Judaism. This very value teaches us today that if one wishes to live a life that embodies Jewish values, it is imperative that one thinks about their relationship to different animals. In an essay titled “The Ethics of Eating Animals,” Gross writes “far from telling Jews whether or not it is ethical to eat meat and how, the narratives of the Bible have instead given Jews (and others) a vocabulary to discuss the

¹⁵⁴ Andrea Dara Cooper, “Writing Humanimals: Critical Animal Studies and Jewish Studies,” *Religion compass* 13, no. 12 (2019), 3.

¹⁵⁵ Reza Barmaki, “Torture, Judaism and the Law,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 10, no. 1 (2016), 33.

¹⁵⁶ Aaron S., “Animals, Empathy, and Rahamim in the Study of Religion: A Case Study of Jewish Opposition to Hunting,” *Studies in religion* 46, no. 4 (2017), 514.

¹⁵⁷ Gross, “Animals, Empathy, and Rahamim in the Study of Religion: A Case Study of Jewish Opposition to Hunting,” 516.

ultimate questions of meaning associated with meat.”¹⁵⁸ As has been shown throughout this thesis, and as Gross so astutely points out, biblically based vocabulary and values encourage Jews (and others) to engage in reflection and conversation about the deeper meanings of eating meat. Ratzman echoes this perspective when he writes that, “the approach I advocate here reframes kosher observance as a unifying spiritual discipline.”¹⁵⁹ Yet again, we see this more modern push towards creating a set of sacred food practices, for Jewish individuals, that is in conversation with other Jewish values and commitments.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz draws attention to a biblical commandment that can be interpreted as a dictate that animals ought to be cherished and honored. He writes, “Judaism also embraces the idea that animals must be treated respectfully. The prohibition against cruelty to any living creature (*tza’ar ba’alei chaim*), is implicit in the Ten Commandments, where we are told that even beasts of burden must rest on the Sabbath.”¹⁶⁰ Schwarz is cleverly alluding to the following verse in Exodus: “But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns” (Exodus 20:10). Here, all people and all animals are given the same rest.

What must be noted here is that there are multiple laws and guiding principles for living a Jewish life, as seen in the Tanakh and the Talmud. These principles are violated when an individual disregards the principle of *tza’ar ba’alei chai’im*. Watts Belser elaborates on this theme:

The Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut*-associated with the practice of keeping kosher – likewise reflect concern for animal suffering. The Jewish practice of not cooking or

¹⁵⁸ Gross, “The Ethics of Eating Animals,” 346.

¹⁵⁹ Ratzman, “The Virtues of Keeping Kosher,” 306.

¹⁶⁰ Rabbi Sid Schwarz, “Judaism and Social Justice: Five Core Values from the Rabbinic Tradition,” *Religions: A Scholarly Journal* 2012, no. 2 (2012), 19.

eating meat together with dairy is rooted in the biblical injunction against ‘boiling a kid in its mother's milk,’ which appears in Exod 23:19, 34:26, and Deut 14:21.¹⁶¹

The three verses which she references are as follows: “The choice of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19), “the best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 34:26). And “you shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Deuteronomy 14:21). *Tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* is seen here in an entirely new way. Although the practice of not mixing milk and meat is a traditional *kosher* law, the sentiment reflected here embodies *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*, which is a foundational principle for *eco-kashrut*.

Watts Belser continues:

growing environmental consciousness has helped spur the rise of a new Jewish food movement, one that has led a new generation of Jews to engage directly with food production, including reclaiming the practice of shechitah (kosher slaughter) on an intimate scale, in ways that aim to recognize the sacrality of animal life.”¹⁶²

To understand the sacrality of an animal’s life is to respect its life, once again honoring the principles of *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*. This idea yet again reinforces how the *eco-kashrut* movement grows out of individuals’ intentionality to live a Jewish life.

In the Talmud, the Gemara answers questions on animals by saying, “it is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili, who says that the requirement to prevent suffering to animals is by rabbinic law” (Bava Metzia 33a). One such example is the verse that reads, “you

¹⁶¹ Watts Belser, “Bible and Ecotheology,” 365.

¹⁶² Watts Belser, “Bible and Ecotheology,” 365.

shall not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together” (Deuteronomy 22:10). Although this verse might seem like a simple prohibition, a deeper understanding of these words sheds light upon the fact that like animals must be yoked together to evenly share the load. Otherwise, it would not be healthy for the animals. As Eric Katz writes:

Tzar’ar be’alei chayim requires a concern for the well-being of all living beings – if not a full-scale sacred reverence for all life, at least an attitude of universal compassion. The laws of kosher slaughtering, as well as the law forbidding the yoking together of animals of unequal strength (Deut 232:10), are based on this compassion for animal suffering.¹⁶³

These laws yet again emphasize how interwoven this value is in Judaism.

The Talmud takes this concept even further. When talking about how one must treat an enemy’s animal, the Talmud explains,

The enemy with regard to which they stated the *halakha* that one must assist with his animal is a Jewish enemy and not a gentile enemy. The Gemara asks: If you say that the requirement to prevent suffering to animals is by Torah law, what is it to me if it is a Jewish enemy and what is it to me if it is a gentile enemy? In either case, failure to unload the burden will cause the animal suffering” (Bava Metziah 32b).

This quote from the Talmud illuminates, but in a new way, the importance of caring for animals and making sure that they cease to suffer unnecessarily. Jewish individuals who wish to embody the values surrounding *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*, when thinking about what food they ingest, clearly take inspiration from Talmudic writings. We can see these values articulated in Bava Metziah. This is important as it reinforces that *eco-kashrut*, with one of its foundational pillars being *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*, is grounded deeply in the commitment to Jewish values.

¹⁶³ Eric Katz, “Judaism and the ecological crisis,” *The Bucknell Review* 37, no. 2 (1993), 62.

ORGANIZATIONS

Jewish Veg is a Jewish nonprofit that, as indicated on their website, “educates and builds community to encourage plant-based lifestyles, celebrations, and conversations about Jewish values.”¹⁶⁴ Their “vision is a future where the Jewish community embraces plant-based lifestyles as an expression of the Jewish values of compassion for animals, care for our health, and concern for the environment.”¹⁶⁵ We can accurately guess from its name that Jewish Veg is a proponent for veganism; the organization sees committing to a vegan lifestyle as a very tangible way to care for both the environment and animals. On their website, they have a Rabbinic Statement signed by seventy-five rabbis who are all committed to the mission; a careful reading of this list reveals that the rabbis belong to different denominations of Judaism. This diversity of thought shows that *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* is a widespread Jewish value. Jewish Veg does work in consulting, educational trainings, community programming, and more.

Organizations like Jewish Veg have taken it upon themselves to embody these values as they work to combat animal suffering, especially as it pertains to food choices. No surprise, one of Jewish Veg’s primary guiding practices is *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*. Their website quotes a verse of the Talmud saying, “causing a living creature to suffer is a Torah prohibition. And a matter prohibited by Torah law comes and overrides a matter prohibited by rabbinic law” (Shabbat 128b). They elaborate:

The Torah offers very specific instructions, in fact, on how to prevent suffering: from forbidding animals of different sizes and strengths to be yoked together to plow (Deuteronomy 22:10) to forbidding the muzzling of oxen while threshing (Deuteronomy 25:4). In debating *tza’ar baalei chayim*, the Talmud discusses at length the commandment to help an overloaded donkey who is struggling with their burden—even when the donkey is your enemy’s (Exodus 23:5)!¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Jewish Veg, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://jewishveg.org/>.

¹⁶⁵ Jewish Veg, <https://jewishveg.org/what-we-do/>.

¹⁶⁶ Jewish Veg, <https://jewishveg.org/animals/>.

The combination of drawing on verses of both Tanakh and Talmudic interpretations closely links the sacrality surrounding food practices to treatment of animals.

I spoke with Lisa Apfelberg who is on the Board of Directors at Jewish Veg. She is a committed vegan and takes great joy from sharing plant-based eating practices with others. She warned “if we are charged to repair the world, by participating in animal agriculture, we’re participating in the destruction of it.”¹⁶⁷ In Apfelberg’s eyes, consuming animals is a violation of Jewish values. She made the notable point, also, that when a talk on veganism is advertised by a synagogue turnout is typically small. Alternatively, when the exact same talk is shaped around Jewish values, the masses come flocking. This insight shows how inextricably linked *eco-kashrut* is to Jewish values. Apfelberg was clear that they do not confine their outreach to Reform and Reconstructionist communities. Jewish Veg has a deep commitment to ensuring that their information be shared and made available to all Jewish individuals and communities.

And then there is the math. Jewish Veg bases their work in statistical analyses:

In 2022, the Jewish Initiative for Animals released a study that shows nearly half of American Jews (48%) mistakenly believe that kosher-certified animal products represent a higher standard of life for the animals. But the truth is, the animals brought to kosher slaughterhouses are bought from the same miserable factory farms that 99% of all U.S. animal products come from.¹⁶⁸

So, who are the people behind this research organization, the Jewish Initiative for Animals (JIFA)? Their own website states that JIFA “support innovative programs to turn the Jewish value of compassion for animals into action while building ethical and sustainable Jewish American communities in the process.”¹⁶⁹ The organization commits to this mission by doing

¹⁶⁷ Lisa Apfelberg, in discussion with the author, March 1, 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Jewish Veg, <https://jewishveg.org/animals/>.

¹⁶⁹ JIFA, Accessed January 27, 2024, <https://www.jifanimals.org/>.

both educational programming for a vast array of individuals and communities and also doing consulting work to help Jewish institutions find more sustainable alternatives. Just like Jewish Veg, JIFA is not limited to one denomination of Judaism, instead has a larger, encompassing reach.

JIFA engages significantly and well with the question of the intersection of the kosher slaughter of an animal and the concept of *tzar'ar ba'alei chaim*. This organization makes the astute observation that “the original architects of Jewish law likely couldn't have imagined a system of farming as massive and as destructive as the one we have today: more than 99 percent of farmed animals in the US are raised on factory farms, including those that supply the kosher market.”¹⁷⁰ Individuals often equate *kosher* slaughter with humane slaughter; however, a new term, “kosher humanewashing” much better describes the actual state of affairs.

Humanewashing creates the illusion that because something is *kosher* it is therefore humane. *Eco-kashrut*, and the principles it encompasses, call for understanding and combating *kosher* humanewashing.

INDIVIDUALS

Eating in a way that upholds *tzar'ar ba'alei chai'im* can look different for different Jewish individuals. I note these different viewpoints now because it is imperative to understand how different individuals come to the same conclusion despite different backgrounds.

Geoffroy Claussen commits to an environmentally aware Jewish life by being a vegan. For him, “the place where I really draw the line is being committed to veganism, and not eating animal products.”¹⁷¹ Some might view this devotion to veganism as extreme, yet, for Dr. Rabbi

¹⁷⁰ JIFA, <https://www.jifanimals.org/values/kosher/>

¹⁷¹ Geoffrey Claussen, in discussion with the author, January 18, 2024.

Claussen, his Jewish dietary commitment is the best way that he sees for respecting the earth and animals. Additionally, he embraces the ever-changing nature of the world and adapts his eating habits to honor and take care of both animals and the earth. Claussen’s decision-making shows his commitment and concern for animals as well as how Judaism shapes the way he looks at his dietary practices. Claussen shared that “my own practice of keeping kosher is being concerned for the environment and for non-human animals and for the people who produced the food that might reach the table.”¹⁷² In response to a query as to what values ground his eating habits, Claussen immediately answers that *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* is a major touchstone of his decision making.

Claussen said that he does “not often use the word ‘eco-kosher’ to describe my own commitments”¹⁷³ and speculated that “maybe that is a function of the popularity of that phrase within circles.”¹⁷⁴ While the implications of the term *eco-kashrut* – which is more typically associated with the Renewal or Reform movements of Judaism – did not resonate with Claussen, the grounding principles of this movement mirror his own commitment to eating in a Jewish manner. When asked how he described his eating, Claussen simply responded that he “keeps kosher.” While his eating habits conform to traditional *kashrut*, his commitment to *kashrut* goes deeper than simply the conventional basics; as I have demonstrated above, his approach encompasses other important Jewish values, such as *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im*. His commitment to *kashrut* incorporates a Jewish tradition of care for animals and the environment, as well. To be clear, practices that others might label *eco-kashrut*, are, for Claussen, simply *kosher*.

¹⁷² Claussen, discussion.

¹⁷³ Claussen, discussion.

¹⁷⁴ Claussen, discussion.

Claussen is not the only individual I interviewed who chose veganism to honor his or her Judaism. Debra Alberts comes to the table with a different background from Claussen, yet still draws similar conclusions. Alberts was raised in a Conservative Jewish household in Chicago, Illinois. She is Jewish but does not work professionally for a Jewish community or organization. It is important to bring her into the conversation because she provides an example of a lay individual's commitments to *tzar'ar ba'alei chai'im*. Today, she resonates more with the Reform Jewish movement. She is the child of a Holocaust survivor. Her Judaism shaped her upbringing. She shared a fascinating and revealing story about her grandmother. Ms. Alberts said, "we were very traditional. And I certainly can cook a pretty mean brisket handed down from my grandmother. She would always say, you need to cut it on the base, that was the big thing. It wasn't going to be like a pot roast, ... that was not brisket,"¹⁷⁵ she recounted with a chuckle. Food was a huge part of her Jewish upbringing and identity; her love for animals was just as strong.

Alberts was raised in a family with a strong connection to the Earth, and that upbringing has since informed how she eats. She grew up in a house full of pets, became a vegetarian, and then more recently has made the commitment to veganism. She said that "just in the way that I cook, I think about the connection to the Earth and to the animals."¹⁷⁶ As with many others in this study, Albert's Judaism and relationship to food are deeply interconnected. Alberts said that "my Judaism is about social justice,"¹⁷⁷ and the closest social justice issues to her heart are food and animals. Before I spoke with Alberts, she had never heard the term *eco-kashrut*. After our long interview, she affirmed that *eco-kashrut* described her eating practices. Alberts is clearly

¹⁷⁵ Debra Alberts, in discussion with the author, January 24, 2024.

¹⁷⁶ Alberts, discussion.

¹⁷⁷ Alberts, discussion.

not alone. Her approach is representative of many Jewish individuals who wish to honor their Judaism by being cognizant of how their food choices affect animals; this way of thinking once again sheds light upon the fact that aspects of *eco-kashrut* – such as *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* – are deeply grounded in Jewish values that arise from long-standing Jewish traditions.

Other individuals with whom I spoke entered this discussion with a similar approach. Elliot Ratzman is one such individual. Ratzman said “for me it is about not wanting to participate in the creation of suffering.”¹⁷⁸ As with Claussen’s, Ratzman’s veganism encompasses *kashrut* while also offering a more holistic outlook on food and consumption. He has been a vegan for thirty years and colorfully equated eating meat to “putting waste in my mouth.”¹⁷⁹ The incorporation of *tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* into his life, however, does not stop merely at his food consumption; whenever he kills a mosquito, he first asks forgiveness.¹⁸⁰ This demonstrates the importance of this value beyond practices associated with eating. Like other important values, it can and should be applied to all aspects of life.

All three of these individuals came to the same conclusion about how their Judaism interacts with and guides their eating habits. *Tzar’ar ba’alei chai’im* – the principles guiding Jewish treatment of animals – are a powerful and grounding force that shapes these individuals’ relationship with food, and their participation, acknowledged or not, in the broader Jewish movement known as *eco-kashrut*.

¹⁷⁸ Elliot Ratzman, in discussion with the author, February 27, 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Ratzman, discussion.

¹⁸⁰ Ratzman, discussion

Chapter 4: Humans

Kavod Habriot

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Kavod habriyot (כבוד הבריות) is a Hebrew term that translates to respect for all living beings, or the honor of the created beings. This Hebrew phrase, while not appearing in the Tanakh, comes up forty-three times in the Talmud.¹⁸¹

Kavod habriot is a foundational part of *eco-kashrut* as it touches on the importance of treating all lives with dignity and respect, thus including the human individuals who are farming or toiling in factories. Judaism is a religion that is constantly changing and adapting to modern times. Therefore, this value of *kavod habriot* as an inherently Jewish value cannot remain stagnant in our understanding of the term. Instead, it must continue to change and be applied to modern day situations. Rabbi Sid Schwarz, a Reconstructionist Rabbi, explains, “*kavod habriot* is the Jewish principle that requires we accord every one of God’s creation a level of dignity.”¹⁸²

If we understand *eco-kashrut* to “mean a broader sense of good everyday practice that draws on the wellsprings of Jewish wisdom and tradition about the relationship between human beings and the earth,”¹⁸³ then *kavod habriot* embodies these principles. Even in the most mundane parts of our life, such as the practice of eating, to be a Jew is to respect all living things because it is a way to respect God. Schwarz writes, “when we treat others with dignity, Judaism teaches, we are indirectly paying our respects to God.”¹⁸⁴ I agree with Schwarz. He does an

¹⁸¹ “כבוד הבריות,” Sefaria, Accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.sefaria.org/search?q=%D7%9B%D7%91%D7%95%D7%93%20%D7%94%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA&tab=text&tpathFilters=Talmud&tvar=1&tsort=relevance&svar=1&ssort=relevance>.

¹⁸² Sid Schwarz, “Judaism and Social Justice: Five Core Values from the Rabbinic Tradition,” *Religions: A Scholarly Journal* 2012, no. 2 (2012), 18.

¹⁸³ Waskow, 117.

¹⁸⁴ Schwarz, 19.

ideal job of sharing how respect can and should be applied to animals, humans, and the environment. Additionally, to have respect for human beings must not stop at respecting Jewish individuals. Rabbi Josh Weinberg, a Reform rabbi who is passionate about the environment, in an essay entitled “In the Image...,” writes the following:

The notion in Genesis of being created in the divine image gave rise to the rabbinic virtue of *Kavod Habriyot* כבוד הברייות (*respect for creations*), or more loosely translated as “individual dignity.” This is the quality of respecting human dignity and each person’s basic needs. Protecting a person’s human dignity is a fundamental value in the Torah because of our tradition’s emphasis on the sanctity of humankind.¹⁸⁵

It falls under the umbrella of *eco-kashrut* to be concerned about the conditions of the workers who are preparing, harvesting, or engaging in any other process that goes into creating food. Whether or not these individuals are Jewish, they all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

ORGANIZATIONS

Kavod habriot, as we have seen, is not as well-known a Jewish value as some others that have been discussed. Worth noting is that of all the organizations that I researched, there were no organizations that listed *kavod habriot* as a core value; however, one organization that I researched is Jewish Veg, which, under the “Health” section of their webpage, wrote about protection of one’s body. Although this value was listed under *shmirat haguf*, the ideology presented here is more in keeping with *kavod habriot*. Jewish Veg’s website writes as follows:

Factory farms and slaughterhouses are incredibly dangerous: for the workers, for those who are forced to live nearby (often a form of environmental racism), and for all of us. Billions of sick animals living and dying virtually on top of each other in unclean conditions is an animal rights crisis, but it’s a human health crisis, too. After all, avian

¹⁸⁵ Rabbi Josh Weinberg, “In the Image...,” Arza, October 16, 2020, <https://arza.org/in-the-image/>.

flu, swine flu, E. coli, and many, many others originated in factory farms, and Covid-19 and monkeypox are zoonotic in origin as well.¹⁸⁶

This section of the organization’s website highlights the impact that unhealthy farming has on factory workers in addition to those who ingest this food. Lisa Apfelberg, who is on the Board of Directors of Jewish Veg, shared a similar sentiment in her interview. She said:

Do you know where factory farms are located? Do you care about people, even if you do not care about animals? Well, they are located near where people who are living in poverty are. Who don’t have resources or finances to get up and move. They are mostly people of color, and they don’t have fresh air and freshwater because of the numbers of animals that are killed right in their backyard, and what happens to the waste and the blood? So, these people are often very sick with mental health and other medical issues.¹⁸⁷

In sharing this, Apfelberg hoped that individuals could be made to understand all the effects of factory farming. At the heart of this issue, for her, was the fact that, even if a person does not care about animals, they should at least have the human decency to have respect for other humans; and, as has been shown time and time again, workers who labor in large scale processing plants are almost always treated poorly. Additionally, factory farms also often affect those who live in the general vicinity, thus potentially having a harmful impact on a large number of people. *Eco-kashrut* thinks about these problems in our current food system and attempts to find ways to combat these very issues with Jewish values, such as *kavod habriot*.

INDIVIDUALS

Although *kavod habriot* was not a term that he was familiar with before our conversation, upon discussion of its meaning, Cape affirmed that the values and principles of *kavod habriot* are

¹⁸⁶ “Health: Shmirat haGuf: Protecting the Body,” Jewish Veg, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://jewishveg.org/health/>.

¹⁸⁷ Lisa Apfelberg, in discussion with the author, March 1, 2024.

foundational in his thinking about how workers are operating. He observed that “a core value of regenerative agriculture is how the workers who are in the supply chain are operating: how they work, where they work, the repetitiveness of their task.”¹⁸⁸ Just as Apfelberg did, he believes that the way that many individuals work, in factories or large supply chains, is unhealthy for the human mind and soul. Cape shared his thoughts on this very notion:

One thing that we believe and people who believe in regenerative agriculture believe is that human beings were not meant to slaughter animals forty hours a week under any circumstance. It is simply a job that, even if it is your job and you are used to it, it still is draining to the soul. Which means that you shouldn't be doing it five days a week, eight hours a day. You should be doing it maybe a few days a week, a few hours a day, and then you should circulate into a different job. In fact, a business preferably would not be slaughtering animals every day of the week, anyhow. They would be cycling through different responsibilities throughout the week. We think very deeply about how the workers in the processing plant are treated and we are big believers that [to say that] the industrial food complex of the United States takes advantage of the workers in the supply chain and processing plants, would be an understatement.¹⁸⁹

In short, Cape highlights the unnatural ways that many large-scale farming ventures operate. In such spaces, there is little thought or care about the individuals who spend hours on end repeating the same menial task. He expands on this thought:

It stretches beyond just the workers [in processing plants]. It is all of the workers in the supply chain; it is how the farmers are treated. If you look at how these industrial farmers are treated, the chicken farmers in particular, these are indentured servants to their companies. Their jobs are absolutely horrible, and they have no choice but to stick with it; they can't get out. Even once they discover these are horrible jobs, they are literally stuck in them because they are indentured servants.¹⁹⁰

The individuals who are working in large-scale farming lose agency. They are no longer free. In essence, they are treated as less than human, which denies them respect or a sense of self-

¹⁸⁸ Robbie Cape, in discussion with author, March 6, 2024.

¹⁸⁹ Cape, discussion.

¹⁹⁰ Cape, discussion.

possession; this pattern violates the core concept of *kavod habriot*. *Eco-kashrut* gives tangible ways to think about how to treat workers better and in a way that gives them respect and agency. The ideology behind this value deeply shapes the way Cape and others look at how workers are treated.

For Cape, the treatment of workers does not stop simply at those within the supply chain. He shares that one must also think and “talk about how the workers at retail restaurants are treated. I think all of it needs work and help, and the values of Judaism are one hundred percent in line with the underlying values”¹⁹¹ of *eco-kashrut*. As Cape and I were talking, I was interested when he said of his company and its practices that “we are probably even more stringent than the underlying value of *kashrut*.”¹⁹² Cape’s business is in keeping with *eco-kashrut*, as it provides more rigorous guidelines throughout the food process, linked to concern for the environment. This, at its very core, is the epitome of *eco-kashrut*. Jonathan Crane shared a similar sentiment to Cape. He said that “it is not only the workers who are involved, but also the businesses. Businesses have their own interests too; they want to survive and make a modest profit. What is a reasonable profit for a food company to make? We shouldn’t deny them from making a livelihood.”¹⁹³ Part of *eco-kashrut*, as Crane points out, is also supporting small and local businesses. If we only rely on big chains which are complicit in factory farming, then we are not committed to these Jewish values.

In this same vein, Geoffrey Claussen has a similar stance of *kavod habriot*. He shared:

Eating organic when possible and avoiding food that was created in exploitative conditions for other human beings is also part of the ideal there that I look for. Sometimes its mechanism is in some ways a more firm guiding principle because it’s easier to find things that are labeled accordingly than the things that are labeled in terms

¹⁹¹ Cape, discussion.

¹⁹² Cape, discussion.

¹⁹³ Jonathan Crane, in discussion with the author, March 7, 2024.

of ethical treatment of workers or where it's clear that other sustainable practices are in place. I try to myself and encourage others to be mindful of those things as well for sure.¹⁹⁴

It is important to remember that Claussen does not identify with the term *eco-kashrut*, although his is still a textbook response for how *kavod habriot* is a foundational value that makes up *eco-kashrut*. It is important to see how different Jewish practitioners – a Jewish professor, a Jewish Rabbi, professor, and vegan, and a Jewish chicken business owner – all approach the same question with grounding from the same Jewish ideal of *kavod habriot*. Their views are of note because they show a range of ways in which *eco-kashrut* is lived out by different practitioners.

¹⁹⁴ Geoffrey Claussen, in discussion with the author, January 18, 2024.

Sh'mirat haguf

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Sh'mirat haguf translates to protection of one's own body. In the first chapter of the Tanakh, there is a verse that reads, "so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Human beings are made in the image of God, so if one were to harm one's own body, that would also be harming the image of God. In short, it is a *mitzvah* to take care of one's own body, mind, heart, and soul. *Sh'mirat haguf* is often attributed to the specific verse of Deuteronomy: "But take care and watch yourselves closely" (Deuteronomy 4:9). It is a commandment to be attentive and take care of one's own body.

The clearest articulation of the Jewish value of taking care of one's body dates to the twelfth century. Maimonides grappled with this very idea in his *Mishneh Torah*. In an article written for the *Texas Jewish Post*, Laura Seymour, director of Camping Services at the Aaron Family Jewish Community Center, writes the following in a reflection centered on *sh'mirat haguf*:

Shmirat haguf, which means guarding the body, is a key responsibility for all of us. The 12th-century sage Maimonides (who was a physician) wrote a whole section of his *Mishneh Torah* about caring for your body. In the opening of this section, the Rambam (acronym for Maimonides) wrote: 'Since it is God's will that a (person's) body be kept healthy and strong, because it is impossible for a (person) to have any knowledge of his Creator when ill, it is, therefore, his duty to shun anything which may waste his body, and to strive to acquire habits that will help him preserve his health.'¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Laura Seymour, "Shmirat haguf: Keeping those self-improvement resolutions," *Texas Jewish Post*, January 5, 2017, <https://tjpnnews.com/shmirat-haguf-keep-those-self-improvement-resolutions/>.

Shmirat haguf, although apparently arising later than other values that I am discussing, has still become central to Judaism. As we look back at the history of Jewish thought, there is a consistency in the evolution of the religion; the values and principles are grounded in the oldest texts, but scholars and rabbis take this literature and interpret it in their own day and age. There is an old Jewish joke that if there are two Jews, then there will be three opinions. So much of Judaism is centered around debate and the creation of new ideas. *Shmirat haguf* is one example of this phenomenon.

Sh'mirat haguf has been correctly adapted by many individuals who comprise the *eco-kashrut* movement. The importance of *sh'mirat haguf* in *eco-kashrut* is clear: individuals cannot complete *mitzvot* and live a Jewish life if they do not first sustain their bodies. It is necessary to eat foods that help the body thrive and to fuel one's life. If individuals do not eat because there is no *kosher* food available, then they are harming their body, thus breaking a *mitzvah*. Alternatively, if individuals choose to ingest foods that are healthy – not overridden with genetically modified organisms – and they know where the food came from, then that food is “clean,” in a different but deeply meaningful way. Calculations like this have come to represent both the principles of *sh'mirat haguf* and *eco-kashrut* for many Jews. In her thesis, “Eco-kashrut and Jewish Tradition,” Clary Rooda writes the following:

Schachter-Shalomi emphasizes the principle of taking care of one's body, *shmirat haguf*, based on this example from the Talmud, in relationship to eating, which was not the original context in the Talmud. When talking about one's body and *eco-kashrut*, you could say that it is not only forbidden to eat too much, but also that it is forbidden to eat food that harms one's body.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Clary Rooda, “Eco-kashrut and Jewish Tradition,” Levisson Institute, October 2013, 23.

Rooda articulates the importance of not partaking in gluttonous behavior while balancing that caution with eating foods that will help sustain one's body. Both ideals are in keeping with *eco-kashrut*. Our body is a gift, and it is up to us to treat our body well and with the utmost respect.

ORGANIZATIONS

Jewish Veg is an organization whose membership thinks deeply about how the body interacts with food. Their primary focus is on educating Jewish individuals about plant-based options, through the lens of Jewish values. On Jewish Veg's website, under the heading "Learn" one finds a list with four subsections, one of which is "Health." Jewish Veg centers their "Health" education around *sh'mirat haguf*. Jewish Veg frames this value in traditions which Jewish individuals can easily understand. For example, when describing the importance of a healthy lifestyle, according to their website, "the rabbis instruct us to ignore mitzvot—such as fasting on Yom Kippur—if performing the mitzvah would impair our health."¹⁹⁷ In fact, if fasting is harmful to one's body, then one is not allowed to fast. This framing around Yom Kippur can and should be applied to all individuals' relationships with food. Jewish Veg insists that "since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of God... one must avoid that which harms the body and accustom oneself to that which is helpful and assists the body become stronger. — Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 4:1."¹⁹⁸ This quote epitomizes the ways in which Jewish tradition puts an emphasis on not harming one's body.

Unlike Jewish Veg, Adamah does not list *shmirat haguf* as one of their foundational values, but the ideology behind it resonates with the mission of Adamah. Becky O'Brien, of

¹⁹⁷ "Health: Shmirat haGuf: Protecting the Body," Jewish Veg, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://jewishveg.org/health/>.

¹⁹⁸ "Health: Shmirat haGuf: Protecting the Body," <https://jewishveg.org/health/>.

Adamah, shared that “it is a thing that we think about, but more from the environmental angle: pesticides are not good for your body.”¹⁹⁹ Although Adamah’s approach to *shmirat haguf* is more centered around the environment, as opposed to the individual, the concept is still present. O’Brien wishes that people eat “good, whole foods, not overly processed foods.”²⁰⁰ This desire presents itself in many ways. At Adamah, they focus on “growing foods on our farm in ways that are not going to hurt the human body.”²⁰¹ We see the intimate approach to people’s interaction with food, which ends up being a formidable endeavor because it ensures that people are making an intentional effort to eat in this way. So much of cultural Judaism is wrapped up in food. This way of thinking lends itself to an environmentally conscious and healthful digestion of food.

There is another approach to *shmirat haguf*, that O’Brien brought up, which is less traditional in the sense of not harming one’s body. She also included *the mind* in her discussion of *shmirat haguf*. Specifically, she wondered if having so many food choices is not always a positive phenomenon:

We could say that on Shabbat you cannot spend money or drive, but that is not our culture. Our culture is that this is an amazing opportunity to sink into learning and community and hit another rhythm, it is this day that is celebrated and looked forward to and full of joy, and the emphasis is on what is there. Similarly, we can find that limiting our choices brings joy. If you say that I am now not going to eat food that came from certain growing conditions and raised conditions, limits can make us happy and help us manifest our values.²⁰²

By limiting the choices surrounding food and creating specific parameters, there is an air of simplicity because you are not forced to choose among so many options. There is something

¹⁹⁹ Becky O’Brien, in discussion with author, March 27, 2024.

²⁰⁰ O’Brien, discussion.

²⁰¹ O’Brien, discussion.

²⁰² O’Brien, discussion.

wonderfully simple about this approach; it heals the mind. When you couple this approach with eating healthful foods, *shmirat haguf* is epitomized. This is just one organization's approach to *shmirat haguf* amongst a wide array of viewpoints.

INDIVIDUALS

Once again, organizations are not the only ones incorporating this value into their lifestyles. Robbie Cape explains his interpretation of *shmirat haguf* saying that “when you grow animals exclusively on a corn diet, inside, which is what factory farming does, that meat that results is less healthy. It has less nutrients, less of all the things that natural meat that is grown the old natural way.”²⁰³ This is a very tangible way in which thinking about how animals are grown will affect one's body.

Chutzpah Farm's Wendy Rhein has a son who has been diagnosed with ADHD. As a mother, she felt that it was her responsibility to take care of him. She shared that she “could tell when he would eat certain foods that had a lot of chemicals in them or were highly processed, specifically like green and blue food... he couldn't control his body. He couldn't control how fast his brain was working. He would just lose it.”²⁰⁴ These reactions, along with other factors, led Rhein to move to her rural homestead. Although she has not cut animal products out of her or her son's diet, she no longer eats artificially processed foods. This is her way of embodying *sh'mirat haguf*.

Avoiding harm to one's body will look different for different individuals. Some will eat only organically grown foods; others might become vegetarian or vegan. As with all aspects of *eco-kashrut*, the Jewish value of *sh'mirat haguf* is embraced in a wide variety of ways.

²⁰³ Robbie Cape, in discussion with author, March 6, 2024.

²⁰⁴ Rhein, discussion.

Chapter 5: A Jewish Worldview

Tikkun Olam

The concept of tikkun ha-olam has come full circle. First, it was a limited rabbinic norm or legal principle with great potential, all but forgotten in the Middle Ages. Then we encounter a brief and ambiguous reference in a single prayer with eschatological overtones ascribing to God the power to bring mending to the world. Afterward, the Zohar reinterprets the idea so that it applies tikkun olam to the repair of the supernal and lower worlds and restoration of the balance of the sefirot. In its next metamorphosis, the Lurianic School stresses the role of humans, and especially of Israel, in mending the flaws in creation, healing the cracks, and redeeming the sparks of divinity scattered throughout the world. Afterward comes the Hasidic emphasis on improving human souls so as to ease their transmigration and hasten the coming of the messiah. Finally in our odyssey, we arrive at the current phase: the modern borrowing and reversion back to the Talmudic notion of tikkun ha-olam—of improving and bettering society through legislation, social action, and activism and highlighting the human component required to achieve these goals, with a dash of eschatology thrown in.²⁰⁵

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

In his article “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” Gilbert Rosenthal walks us through the progression of the concept of *tikkun olam* over time and within diverse Jewish contexts. To best comprehend this concept, it is important to understand how words and phrases are structured in Hebrew. Words have a three-letter consonant root and, by changing vowels or adding prefixes and suffixes to the root, one changes the meaning of the word. *Tikkun* (תיקון), which means amending or fixing, has the three-letter root ת.ק.נ. The most basic, infinitive form of this word, לתקן, means to fix. Therefore, when approaching the word *tikkun*, as seen in

²⁰⁵ Gilbert S. Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005), 240.

classical Jewish texts, one must look for this three-letter root. As Rosenthal observes, “the verb *t-k-n* appears only three times in the Bible, and only in the late book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes). There it means ‘to straighten, to repair, to fashion.’”²⁰⁶ This concept of “repair” directly corresponds with the root but does not necessarily point to the modern idea of social justice which tends to be ascribed to *tikkun olam*. Rosenthal notes that “the noun form of *tikkun ha-olam*...is found some thirty times in the Mishnah and Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud, eight times in the Talmud of the Land of Israel,” as well as “in the Midrash and *Tosefta*.”²⁰⁷

It is important to note that *tikkun olam*'s breadth and meaning for the early rabbis overlaps, in important ways, with how many modern-day individuals and organizations deploy this term. As Rosenthal notes, “the principle of *tikkun ha-olam* was expanded into the economic and commercial realm as well. Perhaps the most famous case deals with the sabbatical year when all debts were canceled (Deut. 15: 1-3).”²⁰⁸ And yet, “in all of these varied cases the rationale of the sages of the Talmud is the improvement of society, *tikkun ha-olam*. This legal principle, applied earlier primarily to divorce law, was now expanded into a variety of other areas. Its initial application was limited; its potential, however, was limitless.”²⁰⁹ Both of these quotes demonstrate how, when *tikkun ha-olam* was originally used, it was done so in relation to legal and economic principles that had been set by the rabbis, in keeping with a need to repair, or fix a social problem that had come to their attention. These principles of repairing connections are at the root of how *tikkun olam* is used in social justice and environmental contexts today. This meaning, in turn, relates back to *eco-kashrut* in that the nature of social justice and environmental concerns are intertwined. This combination has, in turn, allowed Jewish

²⁰⁶ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 215.

²⁰⁷ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 217.

²⁰⁸ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 218.

²⁰⁹ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 219-220.

individuals the opportunity to fix or make better their world. *Eco-kashrut* provides the blueprint for taking these steps.

In the past century, this phrase, *tikkun olam*, has taken on an even more expansive meaning. “The term has become synonymous with social activism,”²¹⁰ including, as seen in this thesis, a commitment to issues surrounding food and the environment. “Only rarely does the Talmud utilize the verb to describe the need of humans to ‘mend their souls’ or ‘repair spiritual damage’ or ‘rectify sin.’”²¹¹ Far more often, its use is consistent with contemporary understandings of how *tikkun olam* emphasizes social justice and repair in modern society, as opposed to repairing or mending individual souls. Yes, *tikkun olam* did take a meandering route throughout mysticism and spirituality, but, as Rosenthal articulates, *tikkun olam* is now applied in a way that is much more consistent with its original use.

When this term was originally introduced, “the Midrash speaks of the role of human beings in completing or putting the finishing touches on God’s work of creation, and the verb selected is *t-k-n*.”²¹² Similarly, “in purely ritual or cultic practices, *t-k-n* is the verb of choice to justify instituting new procedures in religious life.”²¹³ It is important to both acknowledge the history of this phrase while also understanding in what ways the concept has been morphed and has now come to be used. Understanding this chronology is, in turn, important to the concept of eco-kashrut in that it mirrors how the eco-kashrut movement has adapted older traditions and values in ways that speak deeply to our modern day.

In his article, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” James Jacobson-Maisels articulates the interconnection of self-repair with world-repair. He writes:

²¹⁰ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 214.

²¹¹ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 216.

²¹² Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 216.

²¹³ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” 216.

Rooted in its mishnaic meaning denoting ‘enactments undertaken for societal benefit’ but also incorporating its broader kabbalistic meaning of ‘repairing the brokenness of both God and the world,’ the phrase *tikkun olam* has taken on the contemporary meaning of ‘pursuing justice and repairing the broken world in which we live, through social and political activism.’²¹⁴

It is within this definition of *tikkun olam* that the rest of the chapter will be framed. As Jacobson-Maisels writes, “*tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, must then involve *tikkun atzmi*, the repair of the self.”²¹⁵ It is important to understand how *tikkun olam* looks and presents in different ways for different individuals, without seeking to discount any one person’s conception of *tikkun olam*. It is helpful always to keep in mind the complex and multifaceted nature of this term. “Each level of *tikkun* – the self, the family, the community, the society, the state, the world, and the Divine – are inextricably connected with each other.”²¹⁶ In short, connection is at the heart of *tikkun olam*, which helps us to understand how this impulse is one and the same with social justice. Thus, “true healing must be multi-layered, pursuing *tikkun* at multiple levels at once.”²¹⁷ As the ancient Rabbis articulated, human and economic relationships are all forms of connection. Therefore, the early rabbinic use of *tikkun olam* is consistent with the modern usage of the term.

What sets modern Jewish individuals apart from those who thought about *tikkun olam* in the time of the Rabbis is that principles of *tikkun olam* no longer apply just to Jewish individuals and communities. Jewish individuals and communities have a firmer grasp of this expanding concept as it now also encompasses interactions with non-Jews, the environment, and all life forms on the planet. This same concept has become a way of naming one’s individual practices

²¹⁴ James Jacobson-Maisels, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” *Tikkun Olam*: 353.

²¹⁵ Jacobson-Maisels, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” 356.

²¹⁶ Jacobson-Maisels, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” 379.

²¹⁷ Jacobson-Maisels, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” 379.

and collective aspirations. *Tikkun olam* is not just a “religious” calling; for many Jewish individuals and organizations, personal religion and public politics are inextricably linked. Therefore, when it comes to *tikkun olam*, “the personal is political and the political is personal.”²¹⁸ It is with this framing that we turn to an exploration of *tikkun olam* as a foundational and guiding principle for the *eco-kashrut* movement.

For many careful observers, it is difficult to look at the world that we live in today and to not feel despair about the future of the environment. On a personal note, I often find myself questioning why it is important to care for the environment, because, writing with raw honesty, my own choice to not use a plastic straw will not make or break the future of the environment. But then I look to the past. What if people had decided to sit back and do nothing while there was widespread legal slavery or restrictions on who had the right to vote? (This is not to say that there is no more slavery in the world and that many individuals still do not have the ability to vote, but these are issues that we continue to confront head-on.). So, what makes us and our relationship with the environment any different from those of our predecessors? “In Judaism, the process of *tikkun olam*, ‘repairing the world,’ provides a theological imperative for social action.”²¹⁹ This quote gets at the root of the question. We must care about the environment because it is a theological value of Jewish individuals the world over.

In his article, “Tikkun Olam: A Jewish Theology of ‘Repairing the World,’” Mark Winer writes, “we can repair the world, drawing strength from our traditional resources of love and compassion.”²²⁰ Winer frames his discussion of *tikkun olam* and environmentalism with a simple verse from Leviticus. “Leviticus 19 begins with ‘You shall be holy as I am holy.’ The

²¹⁸ Jacobson-Maisels, “Tikkun Olam, Tikkun Atzmi: Healing the Self, Healing the World,” 378.

²¹⁹ Mark L. Winer, “Tikkun Olam: A Jewish Theology of ‘Repairing the World,’” *Theology* 111, no. 864 (2008): 433.

²²⁰ Winer, “Tikkun Olam: A Jewish theology of ‘repairing the world,’” 434.

moral behaviors that are delineated establish one's holiness in a direct link to God's holiness."²²¹ He continues, "the burden of acting in God's image and as God's partner sits heavily on the shoulders of every human being. As a copy of the divine self, we must accept God's role as the creator, and preserve life, rather than destroy it."²²² His understanding is that humans were created in the image of God; therefore, it is our job to attempt to do everything in our power to maintain the earth in its best form. This means, then, that Jewish individuals must care about the environment, because the failure to do so would be a failure to accept God, our creation in the image of God, and all that God has created.

Winer's approach is echoed by other scholars. In his article "Tikkun Olam," Gerald Blidstein turns back to Rav to articulate similar conclusions. He writes:

The Rav unambiguously asserted that the Jew was to participate fully in the civilizing efforts of humanity. 'Created in the image of God, we are charged with responsibility for the great confrontation of man with the cosmos'; we are 'involved with the rest of mankind' in that confrontation; we 'coordinate our efforts'; 'we stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind ... for the welfare of all.'²²³

This quote exemplifies ways in which Jewish individuals have the responsibility to repair the world, and to join with non-Jews in working toward social change and improvement. This principle can be, and has been applied to many social justice issues, including those related to concern for food and the environment. Although such a traditionally "religious" approach to framing the principle does not appeal to everyone, Winer finds power in the theological dimensions: "with the concept of *tikkun olam* ... religion creates a social vision with healing and

²²¹ Winer, "Tikkun Olam: A Jewish theology of 'repairing the world'," 435.

²²² Winer, "Tikkun Olam: A Jewish theology of 'repairing the world'," 436.

²²³ Gerald J. Blidstein, "Tikkun Olam," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 29, no. 2 (1995): 7.

repairing potentiality for the broken, unredeemed reality of our world.”²²⁴ It is out of this theological vision that a specifically Jewish ethic of care for the environment grows and blooms.

Lawrence Troster is another theologian who grounds Jewish environmentalism in Jewish redemption theology. In his article “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” Troster tackles the question of how *tikkun olam* applies to the environment. Like Rosenthal, he, too, sees an evolution in the definition over time: “*tikkun olam* has been reinterpreted since the 1950s to mean that humans have the responsibility for the perfection and maintenance of the world.”²²⁵ This understanding situates individuals in a way where they have not just a personal desire but also a duty to care for the environment. But here is where the issue gets complicated; what our natural world *should* look like has not been sharply delineated. Troster writes, “in the Jewish environmental movement there has been no real attempt to define our ‘perfect’ world.”²²⁶ This lack of resolution leaves room for different individuals to interpret in their own ways what this repaired world encompasses and what our duty to repair it demands of us. This flexibility, driven by personal interpretation, is consistent with the theme of *eco-kashrut*. In fact, the concept of *tikkun olam* is a major guiding principle for many of those who practice what I have called *eco-kashrut* as they grapple with environmental issues related to their own food practices.

Let us dive into the ways in which *eco-kashrut* has grown organically out of *tikkun olam*. According to Troster, embracing *tikkun olam* “requires us to give up the idea that we always know what is best for the natural world.”²²⁷ In keeping with this idea, it is also imperative to

²²⁴ Winer, “Tikkun Olam: A Jewish theology of ‘repairing the world,’” 440.

²²⁵ Lawrence Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” *Jewish Education News* (2008): 1.

²²⁶ Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” 2.

²²⁷ Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” 5.

know where to situate ourselves in the environment. Troster writes, “interests of both people *and* ecosystems are both deeply understood and appreciated”²²⁸ in conversation with attempting to understand the most productive way to go about restoration. It is important, especially when thinking about how this pertains to the *eco-kashrut* movement, that we understand the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, both with regard to our intake of food and with how we use land and resources. Like *tikkun olam*, of which it is a part, “ecological restoration must be a process, not an end product.”²²⁹ So often in life, we are searching for the end goal; however, for an elusive concept such as *tikkun olam*, we need to be content with taking any and all positive steps forward, as we see fit. Troster concludes:

Tikkun olam ... becomes a vision of restoration, of partnership with the rest of life, and a kind of harmony that is not a static, changeless world, but more a ‘discordant harmony,’ a grand symphony of theme and variation which celebrates the beauty and the tragedy in the diversity of Creation.²³⁰

It is with this understanding of *tikkun olam* that we turn to see how Jewish organizations, farms, and individuals, implement *tikkun olam* in their *eco-kashrut* practices.

ORGANIZATIONS

Eden Village Camp is at the forefront of *tikkun olam*’s use in creating the foundation for the *eco-kashrut* movement. Although *eco-kashrut* is not a term that they employ, their values are that of the movement. Among Eden Village Camp’s values are “nature connection and earth stewardship,”²³¹ and “values that don’t bend to convenience,”²³² to name a couple. Aliza

²²⁸ Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” 4.

²²⁹ Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” 4.

²³⁰ Troster, “Tikkun Olam and Environmental Restoration: A Jewish Eco-Theology of Redemption,” 5.

²³¹ Eden Village Camp, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://edenvillagecamp.org/>.

²³² Eden Village Camp, <https://edenvillagecamp.org/>.

Heeren, one of the assistant directors of the camp, shared with me that the camp is “centered around social justice and environmental values, and doing all of that through a Jewish lens.”²³³ In short, they epitomize *tikkun olam* as seen in the *eco-kashrut* movement. Through Jewish educational experiences about the environment, Eden Village strives to create change-makers for the future. Heeren observed that “like in all Jewish spaces, especially when working with kids, we’re always talking about what our piece of the puzzle is.”²³⁴ It is important for Eden Village to introduce children to these Jewish values – such as *tikkun olam* – so that they can understand how to introduce them into their own relationship and interactions with the environment and food. Heeren affirmed that *tikkun olam* is “a heavy hitter, like in all Jewish spaces.”²³⁵ For Heeren, *tikkun olam*, social justice, and what I’ve labeled *eco-kashrut* are all inextricably linked. This embodies how *eco-kashrut* has grown organically out of values such as *tikkun olam*.

Coastal Roots Farm also grounds their community farm in *tikkun olam*. On their website, under values, they list *tikkun olam* (repair) as a core priority. This website explains that the farm draws on inspiration from this value by sharing its harvest with those most in need including through our Pay-What-You-Can Farm Stand and uplifting underrepresented populations including our Tribal partners who are the original stewards of our land.²³⁶ This core value is a foundational way in which the Farm thinks about their duty to both repair the world and partake in social justice issues through environmental steps, which is, as I have demonstrated, a fundamental aspect of *eco-kashrut*. Rebecca Fletcher, the Director of Jewish Life at Coastal Roots Farm, shared that three important aspects to *tikkun olam* are taught on the farm. First,

²³³ Eden Village Camp, Accessed February 12, 2024, <https://edenvillagecamp.org/>.

²³⁴ Aliza Heeren, in discussion with the author, February 26, 2024.

²³⁵ Heeren, discussion.

²³⁶ Coastal Roots Farm, Accessed February 14, 2024, <https://coastalrootsfarm.org/>.

“human beings have the capacity to repair the world, which is not taken for granted.”²³⁷ Second, that “the world *can* be repaired,”²³⁸ and that “humans have the capacity but also the world itself is repairable. Which, I think in this era of climate emergency, what that means, we need to be redefining all the time.”²³⁹ When talking about human’s capacity to repair the world, she shared the words of the great Rebbe Nacham: “If you believe that you can destroy, believe that you can repair.”²⁴⁰ The last aspect, for Fletcher, is that “this is the only work we get.”²⁴¹ She furthered this last point by emphasizing how after Noah descended from the ark, God said that “this is your world,”²⁴² and, as Judaism says, “there is only one world.”²⁴³

Why is it important to care about the environment? Why is it important to think about *tikkun olam*? Fletcher asked the question, “why are we investing in a seventeen-acre regenerative farm when all around us there are big businesses that are destroying the soil?”²⁴⁴ This question gets at the heart of many questions of the *eco-kashrut* movement. Why is it so important to care about this? Fletcher shared Coastal Roots Farm’s thinking: “we are doing it because we believe that a small place can shine a big light.”²⁴⁵ This answer is consistent with what so many other individuals have also shared. It only takes one person at a time to get the ball rolling towards a better future. She shared that “we do what we do because we believe the world is repairable, we believe we as human beings have the capacity to repair, and because we know this is it, you don’t get to go to plan b.”²⁴⁶ At the heart of Coastal Root Farm’s relationship

²³⁷ Rebecca Fletcher, in discussion with the author, February 27, 2024.

²³⁸ Fletcher, discussion.

²³⁹ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴⁰ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴¹ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴² Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴³ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴⁴ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴⁵ Fletcher, discussion.

²⁴⁶ Fletcher, discussion.

with *tikkun olam* is the need to do everything within one’s capacity to take steps towards a better future. This notion is very much in keeping with all aspects of the *eco-kashrut* movement.

Other Jewish organizations with whom I spoke described *tikkun olam* as the culminating process and goal of all their work. Every decision that is made, regarding the environment and how the land is treated, how one’s own body is treated, and how the workers are treated, is grounded in the collective striving for a better world. *Eco-kashrut* draws on many different Jewish values, but the pinnacle is *tikkun olam*.

INDIVIDUALS

I opened our conversation by asking Robbie Cape about the intersection of his environmentalism and Judaism, and if one of these fuels the other. His response was as follows: “I think my focus on the environment, on doing something to repair the environment, absolutely stems from my Jewish values... You know, it’s all about *tikkun olam* for me.”²⁴⁷ Right off the bat, with no prompting, Cape centers his commitment to ethical sourcing of food in his Judaism, especially through *tikkun olam*. He then shared more details from his path:

In 2014, I decided that I wanted to dedicate the rest of my professional career to building companies that check two boxes, not just one. Most people focus on building companies that make their investors a lot of money. My perspective that I came to was I wanted to build companies that yes, they check that box, they make a lot of money, but they also check the box that they repair the world in a meaningful way... I am a big believer that when you combine capitalism together with repairing the world, that you can make magic happen.²⁴⁸

This line of thinking is a bit out of step with other individuals with whom I have spoken – likely since many of the others are in the nonprofit sector. Yet, this emphasis on “repairing the world”

²⁴⁷ Robbie Cape, in discussion with the author, March 6, 2024.

²⁴⁸ Cape, discussion.

through food-related actions embodies *eco-kashrut*. Cape has taken his understanding of *tikkun olam*, a Jewish value, and this commitment has led to his life's work in caring for the environment and making food more sustainable. Although the term *eco-kashrut* is not one that he uses in his daily vernacular, he had no aversion to this term. As seen throughout the course of this thesis, *eco-kashrut* encompasses the way Cape thinks about food and the environment. At the same time, he has made the choice not to publicly frame his company as, in any way, "Jewish," because of concerns about limiting his market and target audience: "there are probably some markets, unfortunately, especially in the days that we live in today, where it would actually be negative, as sad a statement as that is,"²⁴⁹ to label his food as *eco-kosher*. Cape's path shows the ways in which both his commitment to the environment and food processes are informed by his Judaism, thus exemplifying how his *eco-kashrut* practices grow organically out of his Jewish values. Cape is but one individual, but he is an embodiment of looking at the ways in which the *eco-kashrut* movement is the culmination of different Jewish values.

Other Jewish individuals echoed what Robbie Cape shared. Recall the farmer, Wendy Rhein, since she too embodies all the crucial elements of *eco-kashrut*. When asked about how the concept *tikkun olam* plays out on her farm, she shared that this value encompasses and informs how she thinks about food and the environment; from her perspective, she is "repairing the world every day."²⁵⁰ This value is one that grounds both her Judaism and her intentionality about the land. She shared that "*tikkun olam* is a day-to-day decision. *Tikkun olam* is something we choose every day."²⁵¹ This connection to the land and bettering the environment are

²⁴⁹ Cape, discussion.

²⁵⁰ Wendy Rhein, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2024.

²⁵¹ Rhein, discussion.

foundational practices for eco-kashrut. Rhein shared her thought process regarding how she relates to improving her world.

I do believe it is a responsibility to try to make the world a better place in large and small ways. I think that raising your own food for people in your community, getting to build a community of people that are both like-minded and very different from us because we are the only Jews in the area. That's part of healing the world: living with people and living among people whose lives are very different than your own.²⁵²

Rhein's view of *tikkun olam* relates back to the environment and to her integrated human community, as well. The *eco-kashrut* movement, as I have shown, is based on people making efforts to Jewishly sanctify their food choices to the extent that they can do so. Rhein shares that this does not need to happen on a large scale. For her, even creating that sense of community without being surrounded by other Jewish individuals is a step in the right direction. Debra Alberts, who shared that her Judaism and social justice commitments were inextricably linked, echoes Rhein's point. Alberts's commitment to bettering the world through her food intake, like Rhein's commitment to ethical food production, exemplifies two crucial aspects of the *eco-kashrut* movement.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that *tikkun olam*, as it pertains to the environment, does not speak to every individual. Zachary Goldberg is currently completing his Ph.D. in Geography at Pennsylvania State University. He followed an interesting path to where he is today. According to a biography of him posted on the Penn State site, his background combines both Judaism and environmentalism.

Before embarking on his Geography journey at Penn State, Zach completed a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and Food Production at McGill University and managed the orchard and perennial gardens for three years at Eden Village Camp, in Putnam Valley NY. In addition, he has worked in numerous other farming projects

²⁵² Rhein, discussion.

including starting a CSA (community supported agriculture) program at Macdonald Student Ecological Garden in Montreal, being a member of a Jewish goat co-op Beit Izim_(House of Goats) in Boulder, Colorado, and researching dairy goat diets at Greenland Livestock Research Center in Barbados. Zach grew up in South Philadelphia, in the same neighborhood where his great-grandfather had a kosher dairy restaurant, which is now the site of an independent vegetarian grocer.²⁵³

His history in the field adds a smart perspective to his ideology. Goldberg views the modern definition of *tikkun olam* to be “too wishy washy.”²⁵⁴ Goldberg shared that “the icon has some really beautiful origins in kabbalah, like everyone has this fractured vessel,”²⁵⁵ but the sense of needing to fix the world did not resonate with him. His interpretation of *tikkun olam* is more in keeping with the mystics’ uses of this phrase. Shamu Sadeh is the co-founder of Adamah, and he has worked within the organization since 2004. Like Goldberg, he has a rich history. According to the Tivnu website, a Jewish social justice program, his bio reads:

Before coming to Adamah, Shamu was a professor of environmental studies, writer, Jewish educator and wilderness guide. He directed the Teva Learning Center in its early years and completed a doctorate in Educational Leadership. He is drawn to the integration of soul and soil. He works for the creation of a fruitful ecological landscape while building confidence, mindfulness and community among participants. Shamu has the *yichus* – ancestral connections – for Adamah from his great-grandparents and father, Jewish farmers and gardeners who practiced the mystical arts of composting and soil conservation.²⁵⁶

Returning to *tikkun olam*, Sadeh echoed the same feeling which Goldberg shared. Sadeh said that *tikkun olam* did not resonate with him, nor with his organization. He shared, “I like the word *tikkun*, for sure, but it is overused in all circles.”²⁵⁷ When I asked him to share specific

²⁵³ “Zach Goldberg,” Penn State Department of Geology, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.geog.psu.edu/directory/zach-goldberg>.

²⁵⁴ Zachary Goldberg, in discussion with the author, March 1, 2024.

²⁵⁵ Goldberg, discussion.

²⁵⁶ “Shamu Fenyvesi Sadeh, Ph.D.,” TIVNU: Building Justice, Accessed February 16, 2024, <https://tivnu.org/our-people/shamu-fenyvesi-sadeh-ph-d/>.

²⁵⁷ Shamu Sadeh in discussion with the author, March 1, 2024.

circles, he pointed to liberal, Jewish, American circles, especially non-Orthodox circles. Sadeh and Goldberg both reiterated the attitude that the reform and liberal Jewish movement has adopted *tikkun olam* in ways that they felt were not in keeping with the original meaning, thus detracting from the importance of this value. Yet, other Jewish values still inform the intersection of Goldberg's eating habits and environmental mindedness. It is important for me to include Goldberg in this discussion, however, because he represents aspects of the larger *eco-kashrut* movement. There is not one accepted definition of *eco-kashrut* but, instead, it is up to different practitioners to embrace Jewish values that shape their own traditions as they see fit.

Concluding Thoughts

If someone were to ask me how I was raised, I would answer, without missing a beat, that Jewish values shaped my upbringing. I am not always able to put a specific Hebrew word to the value, but I can see the trends in other Jewish households and the parallels between how I was raised and how other Jewish individuals were raised. This is important to note because part of my argument has been that many Jewish people are practicing *eco-kashrut* without even realizing that this is what they are doing or without choosing to name it as such. Take Robbie Cape, for example. When I asked about how *kavod habriot* played out in his work, Cape responded that the overlap was uncanny between the subject matter I was exploring and what the mission of his job is. I found this to be particularly interesting because I feel that this response embodies so much of the *eco-kashrut* movement. The whole mission of his restaurant business could be used as an outline and template for how to create a business that embodies *eco-kashrut*. Yet, before we spoke, Cape had only heard the term *eco-kashrut* maybe once, in a passing conversation. When asked if he would start using the term *eco-kashrut*, he said that, at the end of the day, it came down to marketing and who his desired audience is. So, what do we make of this? To me, this is the heart of my thesis: the *eco-kashrut* movement, while not necessarily the largest Jewish movement, is deeply ingrained into Jewish society, and grew organically out of Jewish values and traditions. Many Jewish practitioners, whether intentionally or unintentionally, make conscious choices to live a life steeped in practices that are encompassed by the *eco-kashrut* movement.

As Wendy Rhein shared, she felt that this ongoing tradition represented a return to a more ancestral version of Judaism. She said: “a long time ago, when our people were living in *shtetls* and other places, they had to create Jewishness in their own homes long before they could in the

synagogue.”²⁵⁸ To many, incorporating Jewish ideology into their eating habits makes a not-necessarily Jewish task feel inherently Jewish. This phenomenon is at the heart of *eco-kashrut*; *eco-kashrut* gives Jewish practitioners guidelines to live a traditional Jewish life while also being concerned about the impact that their eating habits will have on the environment. Rhein shared that, although her farm had pigs, which are not traditionally *kosher*, the process by which they were raised and slaughtered is in compliance with many Jewish principles. On a farm outside of Asheville, North Carolina, it is up to Rhein to make this space as Jewish as possible. She shared that “this is very much a Jewish farm, being so far from a synagogue and from a Jewish community, because there just isn’t that here, I create being Jewish, and I live being Jewish.”²⁵⁹

In modern society, Jewish individuals are turning back to past ways of engaging with their Judaism, by relying on Jewish values to shape the way they look at their life. And, as Aaron Gross notes, this is an ongoing conversation that is open to everyone. He writes, “we [Jewish individuals] listen to and tell stories of all kinds, and we invite others to join.”²⁶⁰ Jewish individuals’ food practices have been and will continue to be a central part of the religion, whether it be how someone makes a kugel or what they fill their hamantashen with. At the end of the day, *eco-kashrut* is just one example of the many ways in which Judaism shapes the way that individuals look at life; most importantly, *eco-kashrut* comes back to the way that modern Jewish individuals rely on Jewish values to create new movements, movements that are totally and completely Jewish.

²⁵⁸ Rhein, discussion.

²⁵⁹ Rhein, discussion.

²⁶⁰ Aaron Gross, “The Ethics of Eating Animals,” in *Feasting and Fasting: The History and Ethics of Jewish Food*. (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 348.

AFTERWORD

I had the wonderful opportunity to interview a delightful group of individuals, ranging from farmers, business owners, camp administrators, non-profit staff, professors, and more. At the end of every interview, I asked the same question: Is there anything else that you would like to share that I haven't asked about yet? I got a wide range of answers. Some individuals went into greater depth on a topic we had touched on earlier while others said no that they had shared everything that they had wanted to, and that I was perfect (those comments made me feel particularly accomplished). There was one individual, however, who caught me a bit off guard. Jonathan Crane, a professor at Emory University, turned the question back on me. He asked me, "what is the story that you want to say?"²⁶¹ I proceeded to fumble over my answer for a while before he finally interjected. "I think that the question that really animates you is one of authenticity."²⁶² Crane followed this up by asking, "why does that animate you? Why does that intrigue you?"²⁶³ Yet again, I fumbled over my answer. I was embarrassed; here I was, in one of my final interviews, seven months into writing my thesis, and I could not put words to why I was writing my thesis on what I was. So here is my attempt to articulate my answer to this question.

I grew up in a Reform Jewish household. Being Jewish was never a question. We grew up going to *shul* for *Shabbat* and Sunday School. On Friday nights we would light candles and say prayers. We kept *Pesach*, fasted on *Yom Kippur*, and had more Jewish books in the bookshelf than I could count. I could go on for pages about how my upbringing was Jewish, but that is not the point. As I have grown up, my Jewish identity has continued to shape who I am and how I look at the world, but this relationship has continued to become more complex as the

²⁶¹ Jonathan Crane, in discussion with author, March 5, 2024.

²⁶² Crane, discussion.

²⁶³ Crane, discussion.

years go on. At times, I cannot make sense of my own choices. I do not eat pork and I never have. At the same time, before services and fasting begins on *Yom Kippur*, when the entire family comes together to eat a large feast, I pile cheese on top of my meat chili. How do I rationalize this?

There are so many values that are important to me, but three that stick out are the environment, my Judaism, and food. For the longest time, the latter two of these were inextricably linked. I think back to a story of my great-grandmother, Miriam – for whom I was named – and how she would buy a brisket in Chicago and pack it in her luggage to take on the train north to Minneapolis, because there was simply no access to quality brisket in Minneapolis. Her recipe has been passed down for four generations and will continue as more generations come forth. But I digress.

Throughout the course of writing this thesis, I have come to understand how my values are deeply interwoven. I find myself returning to Jonathan Crane's question; why does this topic animate me? There is something special about your values and issues that you care about being organically linked; in this vein, *eco-kashrut* was the culmination of three of my greatest passions. I was sitting in the Bates College dining hall with two friends this past March, and one friend shared how a professor of hers commented that our undergraduate theses are, in some ways, always a kind of autobiography. The other friend, with whom we were sitting, guffawed at this statement – to be fair, he is a neuroscience major – but this assertion deeply resonated with me. My thesis, and my attempt to understand how *eco-kashrut* grew organically out of Jewish values, was, in reality, my way of attempting to grapple with my own relationship with Judaism, the environment, and food, and how these three passions are inextricably linked for me, as for others.

Do I have the answer now? Of course not. Do I have questions to ask myself? Do I have more sophisticated ways to think about these issues in a comprehensive way? I can only hope so. So where does that leave me? What is my main takeaway? Why does this topic make me so animated and excited? I understand that this thesis will only be able to brush the surface, and that I will spend the rest of my life trying to understand the nuances of this query and may still not have a definitive answer. But here goes... Judaism is constantly changing and evolving. When the Tanakh was written, there was no way that the authors could have imagined the world we are in today, with factory farming, the shipping of food across oceans, massive, automated slaughterhouses, to name a few; the way that we look at and think about food has changed drastically. Likewise, our relationship and connection with the land and environment has changed and is continuing to change. Therefore, it is up to us to use the older traditions to continue to help us shape our modern life. Schachter-Shalomi puts this notion perfectly: “the traditional prayer book, he said, was like a cookbook: a guide to eating, but not the food itself.”²⁶⁴ It is with this ideology that I understand *eco-kashrut* and, more broadly, Judaism. Will we get it perfectly? No. But it has never been perfect. It is up to us to do our utmost and put in the work to strive to be the best that we can be.

²⁶⁴ Waskow, “Down to Earth Judaism,” 118.

Appendix

Terms

Bal Tashchit

Thou shall not destroy

Chutzpah

Extreme self confidence

Gemera

The collection of rabbinical analyses and commentaries on the Mishnah

Kashrut/Kosher

Dietary laws for Jewish individuals

Kavod Habriot

Respect for all living beings

Mishnah

The first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions

Mitzvah/Mitzvot

A good deed, a commandment

Pe'ah

The corner of the field which Jewish individuals are expected to leave for poor individuals to take from

Sefirot

Speculations in Jewish mysticism by which God was said to be manifested

Shmirat Haguf

Protection of one's own body

Shmitah

The sabbatical year after six years

Shtetl

Small towns or villages in Eastern Europe that were comprised of Jewish individuals

Shomer Shabbat

Refers to a person who observes all of the *mitzvot* on Shabbat

Shul

Yiddish word for synagogue

Talmud

The central text in Rabbinic Judaism

Tikkun Olam

Repairing the world

Tosefia

The compilation of Jewish Oral Law

Treyfe

Food that is not *kosher*

Tzedakah

The Hebrew word for charity

Tanakh

The Hebrew Bible

Tzar'ar ba'alei chai'im

Respect for animals

Yovel

The fiftieth year after seven cycles of *shmitah*

Interviews

Debra Alberts, January 24, 2024

Lisa Apfelberg (Jewish Veg), March 1, 2024

Robbie Cape, March 6, 2024

Geoffrey Claussen, January 18, 2024

Jonathan Crane, March 5, 2024

Rebecca Fletcher (Coastal Roots Farm), February 27, 2024

Zach Goldberg, March 1, 2024

Aliza Heeren (Eden Village), February 26, 2024

Adrienne Krone, February 7, 2024

Becky O'Brien (Adamah), February 27, 2024

Elliot Ratzman, February 27, 2024

Wendy Rhein, February 8, 2024

Shamu Sadeh (Adamah), March 1, 2024

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