



## V. CHOOSING PERSONAL & SYNAGOGUE PRACTICES

### RJ: Are there any Jewish practices you struggle with today?

**Barbara K. Shuman:** The one practice

I continue to refine and reshape is my observance of *kashrut*. I was raised in a home that made no distinction between kosher and *treif* foods. We ate bacon, baked ham, pork chops, and shellfish; and the day following our seder it was not unusual to find my father enjoying a ham and cheese sandwich on rye.

When my husband and I married, we began to consider how we would eat and whether Judaism would inform those choices. Initially we determined that we would not cook or eat ham or pork in our home. Then we decided that our intention was to sanctify our bodies, not just our homes, so we stopped eating ham and pork, period. Somewhere along the line we gave up shellfish too—not out of a sense of obligation, but more as a “favor” to a good friend—God.

As I became more knowledgeable and desired to be more observant, I struggled with whether or not to buy only meat and poultry products that had been certified as kosher, meaning that it had the stamp of approval by some Orthodox rabbinic authority. Rather than

do this, I decided to become a vegetarian, which would also allow me to practice the *mitzvah* of not harming animals. Still, I continued to eat fish (with fins



Lilah Mei Jacobs, 3, of Temple Israel, Tulsa, Oklahoma touches the mezuzah on the front door of her family home, March 2007.

and scales) and cooked non-kosher chicken for my children and husband. I was happy with this religious decision for over a dozen years. In recent years, however, my efforts to crystallize a personal theology changed my perspective on *kashrut*. When I finally admitted to myself that I did not believe in a personal God, my relationship to biblical and rabbinic law had to change. I have allowed myself to occasionally eat shellfish again. It no longer feels like I am breaking a Divine commandment. While I still believe I am obligated to behave in certain ways, I no longer think that refraining from eating shrimp is one of those ways.

Of course I may very well change my mind and my practice again! Reform Judaism allows me to choose the ways in which I will feel commanded, the practices which will elevate and sanctify my life. I do not take this privilege lightly.

**Ellen Morrow:** I keep trying to remember to say a brief, even if internal, prayer before eating. A friend and I have been trying to support ourselves in this effort. It’s proving elusive so far. I would also like to become vegetarian as a form of *kashrut* (I’m not interested in any other form), but I think that will have to wait until a time in my life when I am alone.

**Jennifer Wariner:** While for some Reform Jews being religiously observant is a struggle, for me some practices come naturally because they themselves contain

inherent rewards. Shabbat gives us permission to relax, study, and pay attention to our families—in other words, to spend one day a week focusing on the things that really matter: our souls, our minds, our marriages, and our children. Saying the *motzi* before we eat or *birkat hamazon* afterwards, reminds us that we have food when many others do not. Washing our hands before a meal helps prevent illness. Voicing a prayer when we see something beautiful in the world teaches us to be conscious of the splendor around us.

I also believe the consistent performance of these inherently rewarding *mitzvot* leads to a healthier outlook on life. The more frequently we are thankful for or notice beauty in the little things around us, the more likely we are to be happy. The more often we are happy in our day-to-day lives, the less likely we are to get bogged down by small mishaps. And if we are generally happy,

#### WHAT PRACTICES MATTER?

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