



Weekly Clergy Message

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My Kosher Story
Shemini
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My grandparents reluctantly moved out of a bad neighborhood in NYC and retired to Boyton Beach, Florida when I was in my late teens. That is significant for the following reason. When I began to visit them independently, my grandmother, who had recently discovered “eating out” as a way of life for Florida seniors, bemoaned the fact that my self-imposed dietary restrictions, made doing so far more complicated during my visits.

My great-grandmother, for who I am named, was born in the “old country” (in her case Hungary). My grandmother was not. My great-grandmother kept a strictly kosher home. My grandmother, who got married in the 1920’s wanted to be “thoroughly modern” and would, when her mother wasn’t looking, “cheat.” She never could understand the necessity for keeping kosher. From her perspective, living in a world that was increasingly more “hygienic” and in a place where the meat industry was controlled by strict regulations, she saw *kashrut* as outdated.

While it’s true that my mother had made the decision to maintain a kosher home, what we did “on the outside” was another matter. Growing up in the world of Conservative Judaism, Camp Ramah and USY influenced me to question my own standard of practice as I began to mature. In what I amusingly think of as a kind of role-reversal, it was my grandmother who forced me to defend my choices. My keeping kosher had nothing to do with health reasons and the Torah provides no such rationale. For me, it was about my identity and my consciousness about being a Jew. That was never clearer to me than when, as a freshman in college, I was forced to think about my Jewish commitments every time I stood on line in the cafeteria. These were concepts that, at the time, I found difficult to articulate to my grandmother. I’d like to think I’d do a much better job today.

To stimulate your own reflections on *kashrut* in the modern world, I offer you these two articles on *kashrut*:

1. Why Do People Really Keep Kosher, Anyway? <https://www.thespruce.com/why-keep-kosher-2121847>.
2. Why Keep Kosher? <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kashrut-after-refrigerators/>.