



Crisco Kosher Cookbook, Yiddish, 1933

100 Years of Modern Orthodoxy in America **A Special Sermon Series in Honor of The Jewish Center's Centennial**

Part III

Only in America: The Unlikely Renaissance of Mikvah and Kashrut in the 20th Century

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פרשת תולדות תשע"ח
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Over the past two weeks, we've learned about Zionism and Jewish education in America in the course of the past 100 years. This morning, I'd like to round out our series by looking together at two great success stories in the history of American Judaism: The story of Mikvah and the story of Kashrut. And I've bundled them together because they share a common, albeit unexpected, connection that we'll return to in a few moments.

A hundred years ago, America was the *treyfa medina*. How did we preserve the institution of Mikvah when all indicators pointed in the direction of its going out of style? And how did America become the Kashrut capital of the world?

As a general matter, histories of Mikvah in America are hard to come by. It's such private institution. There are very few documents. Even where we can trace the presence of a Mikvah in a particular community, the extent to which it was or wasn't used is very difficult to ascertain. The one thing about which everyone seems to agree is that Mikvaot in America 100 years ago were in a dreadful state. And this was a major deterrent to their use.

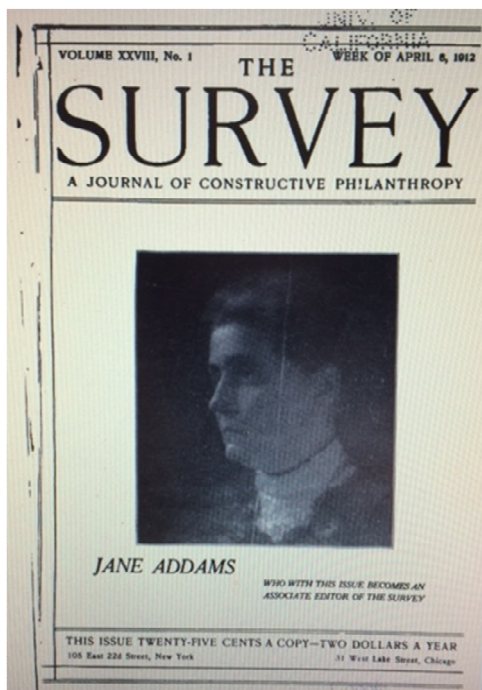
As one rabbi put it, "If it is true that Orthodoxy in America is the great unknown, *taharat hamishpacha* is the greatest unknown."

Rabbi Jung, writing in 1950 and reflecting on the early years of his rabbinate in the 1920s wrote the following:

1 Rabbi Leo Jung, *The Rhythm of Life* (1950) p. 44

Jewish fathers and husbands were so indifferent to the aesthetic sensibilities of their daughters and wives as to impose upon them visits to these Mikvaot, which would cause revulsion and associate this holy law with an atmosphere of squalor. I remember a number of such loathsome places both in the Middle West and in New York City, and I cannot criticize too sharply the carelessness, which made such conditions possible. Coupled with the inability of the rabbis to discuss this all-important subject and with a lack of informed rebellion among women (who should have refused to get married before the community established decent Mikvaot) the situation prevailed which rendered such hostility on the part of the half informed and uninformed young women more intelligible.

Rabbi Jung's critique was no subjective account. In a stunning assessment of public facilities in New York in 1912, a journal called *The Survey* reported on local Mikvaot that had been inspected by the board of health.



2 EDITORIAL GRIST

THE MENACE OF THE BATHING POOL

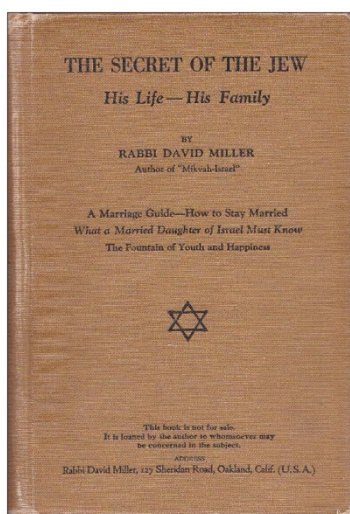
H. F. J. PORTER, *The Survey*, April 8, 1912

Still less in the kosher bathing places, on the east side, twenty of which were within the year investigated by the New York Board of Health. These latter pools are really only tanks in the basements of tenements and run from 5 by 6.4 by 5 feet up to 26 by 14.5 by 5 feet in size. They are emptied regardless of size as often as the proprietor decides, once, twice, or three times a week; crowded to their capacity, especially before the Jewish Sabbath; and without effective sanitary supervision. These are all New York has to offer the pious Jew for a ritual bathing commanded by the Mosaic Law and designed to insure personal cleanliness and health.

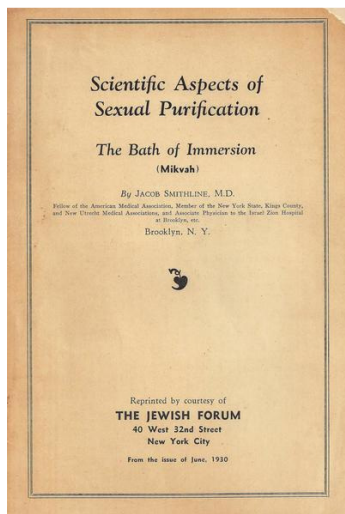
What an allegation! Even to the presumably objective outsider looking in, it was obvious that there was something terribly wrong with this picture. How could Jewish communities have allowed such an important Torah-mandated institution to descend into such a state of neglect?

And so it's no surprise to find that in the 1930s there emerged a series of publications to defend and prop up the practice of going to the Mikvah. Clearly, these guides and manuals represented a kind of communal response to the challenge of Mikvaot being underused.

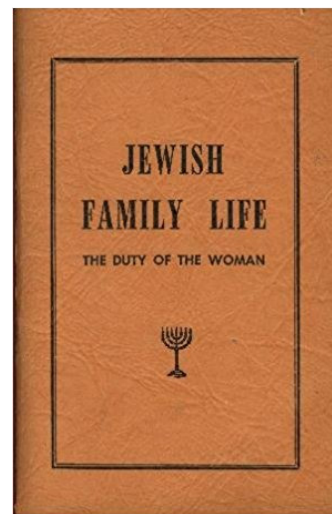
3 Guidebooks on Mikvah and Jewish Family Life



David Miller, 1930



Jacob Smithline, 1930



Moses Hoenig, 1942

And Rabbi Jung was a ready contributor.

4 The Jewish Forum, April, 1930

The Jewish Way to Married Happiness
An Address to an Invisible Audience
By RABBI LEO JUNG
The Jewish Chronicle, New York

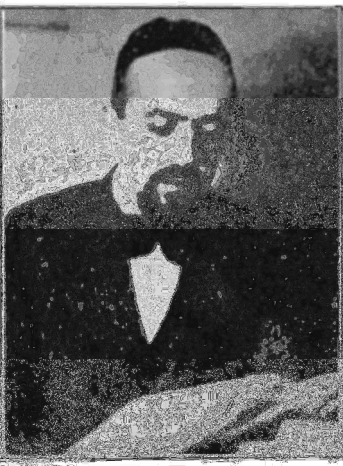
I AM going to speak to you on a subject that has long been a subject of discussion. Many of the young men and women are concerned, and I am sure that you are also. One can understand the point of the younger generation. It is a generation that is not content with the old, but is looking for a new way of life. It is a generation that is not content with the old, but is looking for a new way of life. It is a generation that is not content with the old, but is looking for a new way of life.

attitude of parents, except on the assumption of their extreme humility, based in turn, on a sense of their utter inability to make satisfactory or even intelligible statements about our subject. But it is impossible to appreciate the silence of the Rabbi. For, in their obligation to bring home Jewish Family Law they have been given a most excellent opportunity to do so. They are at once the most moral and the most honest of people. They are the most honest of people. They are the most honest of people.

I want to speak to you about "Halakoth Taharah" Jewish marriage law, as an example of the Jewish way of life, the absence of which has helped to make our women unbalanced and unhappy. I do not intend giving you what is popularly called and dreaded as "re-lyon." I want to talk to you about happiness. Religion gives it, prepares for it, makes it happen and happen. My topic is happiness. I take it for granted that men and women marry immediately for happiness. Children are part of it. Home and country are incidents of that happiness. It is happiness, however, and nothing else which has been the goal, hope and dream of people about as to be married.

Of what does woman's happiness consist. Two things: harmony and self-respect. Harmony means peace, beauty and color combined and interdependent. Their basis is self-respect. Happiness is not entirely the gift of God's grace. Happiness in marriage does not come about as the result of loyalty to so many "don't's," but rather as the normal fruit of goodness and common-sense in constant cooperation.

Did the Jewish woman attain such happiness in early stages? In the girl undoubtedly. The ancient words of dark Rashi looked happiness of Jewish homes. Medieval lawyers could not keep out the light of love from the habitations of Israel. The high level of Jewish married love has for many centuries, been the cause of envious admiration. What was the plan that worked such results? To what is due the unbroken happiness of countless Jewish families, even to-



Rabbi Leo Jung

Rabbi Jung eventually published *The Jewish Way to Married Happiness* as a pamphlet and later an essay extolling the virtues of maintaining Jewish family purity. But it was originally "an address to an invisible audience" because it was delivered as a radio address.

And a few decades later, Rabbi Lamm wrote what would become one of the classics of this genre, *A Hedge of Roses*.

It took a number of years, but over the course of time, rabbinic leaders began to appreciate the need to revitalize the institution of Mikvah and create more sanitary and aesthetically pleasing Mikvaot. There were, of course, always challenges – including, as you can see from the next source – from members of the Jewish community.

5 Bnai Brith Messenger, Friday, June 13, 1930

THE BNAI BRITH MESSENGER

RITUAL BATH TO BE ERECTED

CINCINNATI, (J. T. A.)—The Zoning Board of Appeals has granted permission for the erection of a “mikvah,” or ritual bathhouse, on Washington avenue, in an exclusive residential section of Cincinnati, with the provision that it is not to be used for hire in off hours.

Answers Objections

Irwin M. Krohn, president of the Park Board and the only Jewish member of the Board of Appeals, in answer to objections that were raised against the erection of the “mikvah,” said that he did not think it made any difference whether the “mikvah” was part of a synagogue or not, since it was a place of worship anyway. Comparing it to a Catholic shrine, Mr. Krohn said:

“It is not a question of whether we would like to live next door to one or not. I would not like to live next to a church where they play basket-ball in the cellar or fire-engine house. But that is not saying I oppose churches or fire stations.”

Will Promote Hygiene

Mr. Krohn explained that only those Jews who sincerely believe in it will use the “mikvah,” and that Reform Jews won’t go near it. He declared he did not know there was such a thing as a “mikvah” until this case came up. He expressed, however, the opinion that the “mikvah” will promote sanitation and hygiene.

Protests against the erection of the “mikvah” in the exclusive Avondale section of this city had been raised by several prominent Jews living in the section, who argued that it was a business and not a religious matter and should therefore be prohibited in accordance with the zoning laws. Among those who appeared against the “mikvah” were Mrs. J. Walter Freiberg, past president of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods; Samuel Ach, former county treasurer; Frank Wolpa and Mrs. Leopold Strauss Wolpa. Those who asked permission to build the “mikvah” represented an association composed of practically every orthodox synagogue in Cincinnati and headed by Hirsh Manischewitz.

Parenthetically, Mr. Manischewitz moved to New York a year later in 1931 and served from that time until his death as an officer of the family B. Manischewitz Baking Co. and helped to build it up into one of the largest manufacturers of Jewish food products in the United States.

There was perhaps no one more animated and zealous about improving the situation than Rabbi Jung. And I want to share with you a stunning account of a story that took place in Cleveland in 1921 and retold by Rabbi Jung in his autobiography (Rabbi Leo Jung, *Path of a Pioneer* pg. 49).

Rabbi Jung had been asked to officiate at a wedding. The bride was reluctant to go to the Mikvah, but Rabbi Jung insisted that it was the right thing to do. Knowing the poor condition of the Mikvah, Rabbi Jung called its owner in the presence of the young bride.

I called the owner of the *Mikveh*: 'I am sending a young woman to you. She will pay you five dollars. Do you remember our conversation? I want your promise that you will scrub the place so that it will be *kosher* aesthetically, hygienically, and therefore legally. Please don't disappoint me.' Five dollars at that time was a good fee and he gave me his solemn word.

I was a young man then with a large margin of time and so I gave a daily two hours' evening course in the *Talmud*. A few days later, my class and I were in the midst of a difficult passage when the door of my apartment was violently torn open. The young woman, her face livid, called out to me: 'Dr Jung, I thought you were a gentleman. I don't ever want to see you again!' and slammed the door. I suspected what had happened, ordered a cab, and took my class to the *Mikveh* which was in an abominable state of filth. I said to the owner, ignoring his efforts at apology: 'I've given you fair warning. My friends and I will raise one thousand dollars now to start a fund for building a new *Mikveh*.' During the next few months I literally went from organization to organization. We bought a piece of property in Morrison Avenue, in the East 105th Street district and eventually built a place with six perfect individual *Mikva'oth* for the women and six others for men on the other side. I obtained the money from my own congregation, from my conservative friend, from a number of sisterhoods and from a few reformed brethren who had attended my lecture at the City Club. In 1922, the building was completed and I came from New York to dedicate it. At that time, very few Rabbis had sufficient courage or had an adequate method for discussing *Taharath hamishpachah* in public. As a result of my work in Cleveland, I was invited to a number of congregations to whom I volunteered my services. I remember among many others: Johnstown, Pennsylvania; St. Louis, Missouri; and Edgemere, Long Island.



After having earned a reputation as the man who could help build Mikvaot, he then he travelled all over the country to support projects wherever he could. By the time he was done, Rabbi Jung had built 15 Mikvaot dotting the American landscape.

And over time, the institution of Mikvah underwent a kind of renaissance.

6 NY Times August 16, 1976

Illustration by J. J. ...

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Old Mikvah'ot in the cities are being renovated, new ones in the suburbs have been built or are on the drawing boards.... Rabbis and Jewish scholars attribute the trend to a variety of factors. But mainly they agree that it is indivisible from the general intensification of Judaism in this country, also evident in increasing numbers of day schools and yeshivas and the strengthening of Jewish education for young girls. In addition, it stems from increased pride in the heritage and from the search by a disillusioned young generation for new moral standards.

“The Mikvah is symbolic of what is happening today in Judaism: The periphery is fading away and the core is intensifying,” said Rabbi Norman Lamm of the Jewish Center on West 86th

Street, who last week was named president of Yeshiva University. “The Mikvah is a good index because it is the most difficult discipline of all. Those who are becoming intense are going to the Mikvah because it is the ultimate commitment.” Rabbi Lamm is the author of a book on family purity and marriage, “A Hedge of Roses” that was published seven years ago and is now in its sixth printing.

Thanks in no small measure to the efforts of Rabbi Jung and Rabbi Lamm, in the last 50 years, the number of Mikvaot has doubled. Today there are 400 Mikvaot in America – each one more beautiful and more inviting than the next.

So what about Kashrut in America? These days, kosher establishments and kosher products are virtually ubiquitous. How did this happen?

There’s a story about a rabbi who approaches the proprietor of a local restaurant and says, “Why not become kosher? It would be a great way to expand your customer base.”

The owner says, “It’s a nice idea, but I could never afford the supervision.”

“Well,” says the rabbi, “I’ll make you a deal. I’ll agree to be the mashgiach free of charge and if business picks up, we can work out a fee.”

The owner agrees and sure enough, business does start to pick and the rabbi suggests a modest fee of \$100 a month – which the owner thinks is quite reasonable.

Business picks up a little more, and the rabbi suggests \$500 a month would be fair. And the owner accepts.

Before long the restaurant becomes the hottest ticket in town and the rabbi says to the owner, “Look – business is booming. None of this would have happened if not for the fact that you became kosher. I think at this point my services are worth \$5,000 a month.”

“\$5000 a month?!” the owner says. “For that kind of money I could serve kosher meat!”

In the 21st century, a scandalous story like this one is the exception rather than the rule. But this wasn’t always the case.

I just want to give you a flavor for how far we’ve come in these past 100 years and touch on The Jewish Center’s contributions along the way.

To put it plainly, Kashrut in America in the early years of the 20th century was predominantly a source of embarrassment and חילול ה' for the Jewish community.

- Fraud and corruption were rampant.
- Organized crime ran roughshod over attempts at reform.
- There were price-fixing schemes and distribution rackets.
- Consumers could regularly expect to face misrepresentation.
- And oversight was in short supply.

Kashrut was an unmitigated disaster.

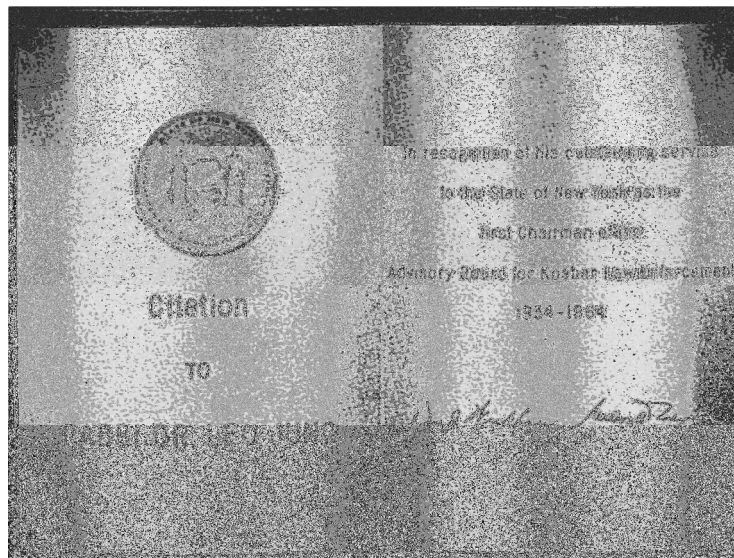
There were two major developments that ultimately translated into progress for the kosher consumer. The first was governmental; the second institutional.

In 1915, the New York State Legislature enacted the nation's first Kosher Food Law, which served as a model for all subsequent kosher food legislation. The law made it a misdemeanor to falsely represent meat for sale as kosher with an intent to defraud. The passage of this law pushed the story forward and the law was gradually improved upon, but there simply wasn't enough enforcement.

Corruption and fraud continued to carry the day. In 1925, the New York City Department of Markets estimated that 40% of the meat sold in the city as kosher was actually *treif*. Other sources estimated even higher numbers.

In 1934, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed The Jewish Center's Otto Rosalsky to mediate disputes within the kosher poultry industry.

In the same year, the New York State Assembly passed a law to establish a Kosher Law Enforcement bureau which relied heavily on a rabbinic advisory committee, of which Rabbi Jung was of course the first chairman.



Citation signed by Governor Nelson Rockefeller



For 30 years, Rabbi Jung was a champion of this cause.

And in 1936, Louis Gribetz, father of our member Grace Glasser, obtained a decision in a landmark case in the state supreme court vindicating the authority of the Orthodox Rabbinate of New York to regulate Kashrut.

Progress was incremental, but gradually it seems that the laws and their enforcement began to make an impact and fraud in the kosher food industry began to decline.

Concurrently – outside the world of kosher meat – the idea of kosher certification began to emerge.

In 1911 Procter & Gamble became the first company to advertise one of their products as kosher. There wasn't a kosher symbol per se, but Crisco was actually the first product to be labeled as kosher in America. You can see on the cover of your source sheet a Yiddish Crisco cookbook. I guess there's something ironic about this. Kosher food is supposed to support the health of our souls; we're pretty sure these days that Crisco wasn't supporting the health of our bodies....

A chemist by the name of Abraham Goldstein was instrumental in encouraging food distributors to think about the kosher consumer.

In the early 1920s, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis – which had been established in 1892 – decided to enter the field of kashrut. Abraham Goldstein was appointed as its first director. The OU, as it eventually became known, created a Kashrut Commission. Whereas Kashrut had always been the precinct of the individual rabbi, the idea was to create communal standards and remove kashrut from the province of the individual. The goal was to institutionalize and professionalize the industry.

In 1923, Heinz *Vegetarian Beans* became the first product to be kosher certified by the OU.



American Jewish Outlook, December 9, 1955



The Jewish Criterion, April 16, 1954

And it's obviously been a growth industry since. Today, of over 200,000 packaged food products on U.S. supermarket shelves, the OU symbol is found on close to 70% of all products combined.

And as a footnote, I'll just mention that Rabbi Jung crusaded to raise communal norms more generally: This letter was addressed to Judge Joseph Proskauer, who in 1934 was the President of Federation. He had invited Rabbi Jung to attend the Federation's annual dinner.

7 Correspondence between Rabbi Leo Jung and Judge Joseph Proskauer

To Judge Proskauer, Federation of Jewish Charities

Dear Judge Proskauer:

New York, 20 September 1934

Thank you for your letter of September 18th. I should be more than
delighted to accept your invitation if you would make it possible for me
to come.

The principles which I know you understand, I steadfastly adhere to
and any dinner or other gathering from no matter what source it is proposed
must be subject to the Jewish community's approval.

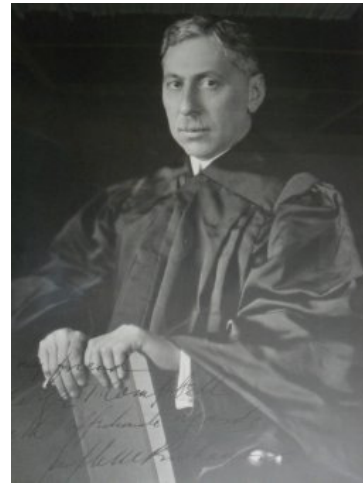
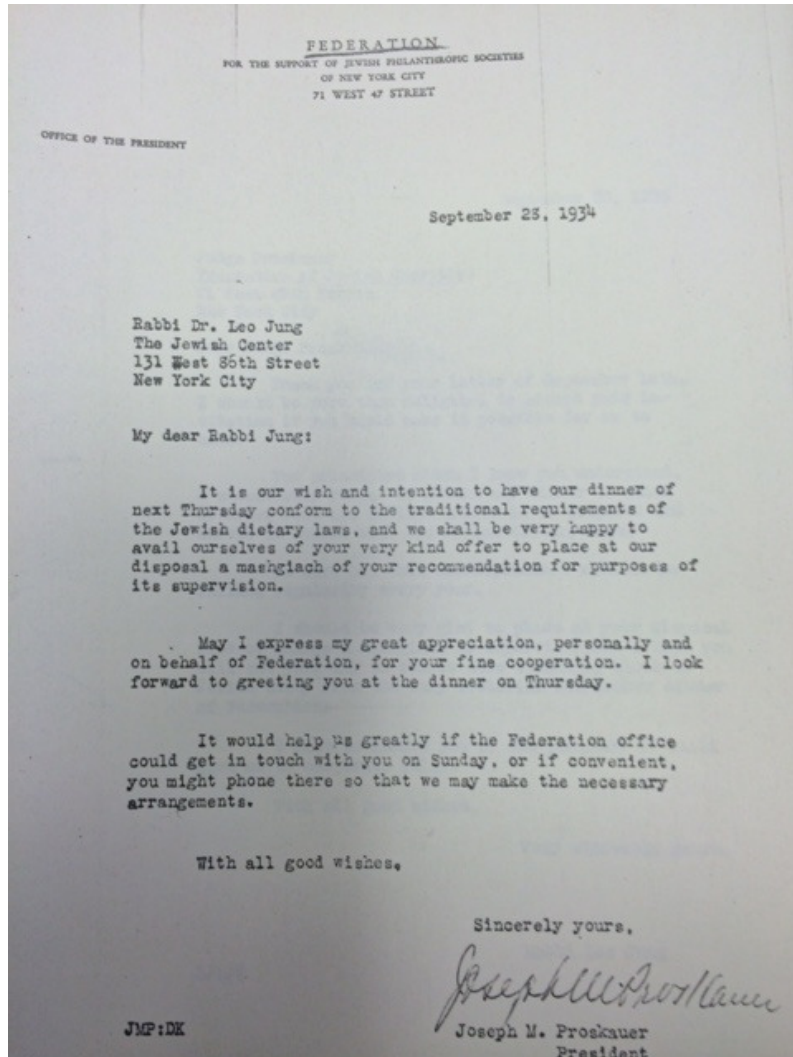
~~I am sure that the Jewish community will be willing to accept any~~
~~such.~~

I should be very glad to place at your disposal free of charge a manager
or supervisor, and I hope you will see your way to remove this stumbling
block to Jewish unity from the only sectarian non-hostel dinner of
Federation.

I want to assure you of the pleasure it would give me to co-operate
with you.

~~Very truly yours,~~

8 Correspondence between Judge Joseph Proskauer and Rabbi Leo Jung



Judge Joseph Proskauer (1877-1971)

On this correspondence I would offer four observations:

- First, how brilliant it was of Rabbi Jung to argue that the failure to provide kosher food served as an impediment to Jewish unity.
- Second, it was typical in the 1930s and for many more years for Federation dinners to serve non-kosher food.
- Third, Judge Proskauer was totally receptive to Rabbi Jung's offer.
- Fourth, Rabbi Jung implicitly reminds us that there's no need to simply accept the status quo. Rabbi Jung wasn't satisfied being accommodated personally. He insisted the whole dinner be kosher! And so it was.

We have certainly come a long way. To the best of my knowledge, today, every UJA-Federation of NY event is strictly kosher.

According to a report in *The Atlantic* in 2016, between one-third and one-half of all packaged food in American supermarkets has a kosher label on it. If a shopper walked into a supermarket and randomly selected products off the shelf, half of them would be kosher.

According to the OU, today, over 12 million American consumers choose kosher food products. There are only five million Jews in America!

Today the OU certifies over 800,000 products produced in more than 8,500 plants located in 100 countries around the world.

And so I've bundled the stories of Mikvah and Kashrut together because they follow parallel trajectories. A hundred years ago, both institutions were in a sorry state. Today, both are celebrating a renaissance.

And while the factors that contributed to the vitality of each were surely different, I want to conclude with one observation.

Conclusions

A number of years ago, someone mentioned to Yogi Berra that the city of Dublin, Ireland, had elected a Jewish mayor. He said, "Only in America!"

And in a way, this is really the common denominator and the theme of my talk this morning.

There was a uniquely American discourse 100 years ago about aesthetics and hygiene. There was – forgive the pun – something in the water about a desire to make public facilities beautiful and dignified. Think about the history of our own institution. Against a backdrop of musty and poorly maintained shtiebels, there was a desire to create something that would be attractive and aesthetically pleasing. And so forward thinking leaders in the Jewish community imported the best of that cultural discourse and transposed it onto the institution of Mikvah. Sometimes they would even refer to the Mikvah as a *ritualarium* or *women's clubs* to subliminally signal the gap between the dank and grimy Mikvah of the past and the pristine, inviting institution of the present.

But the story of Mikvah was an "only-in-America" story for another reason, too.

In 1933, Rabbi Jung got a call from a Jewish community in East New York. They were in need of a Mikvah and turned to Rabbi Jung to help them. He had just returned from Palestine and had taken 500 feet of film on his trip. He said to his friends in East New York, "We'll hold an event. I'll screen the footage of my trip and explain it, provided you charge an entrance fee and use the funds toward the establishment of the Mikvah."

Here was an amazing application of American entrepreneurship. It would be hard to imagine anywhere else in the world in 1933 where such a thing could have happened.

And the same is true when it comes to the history of Kashrut in this country. The move more generally toward professionalization – the notion of individuals in a particular field creating

norms, standards, qualifications and best practices – dates back to the 19th century. But the idea of applying those notions to a Jewish institution like Kashrut was clearly a function of the America psyche and the American system – as evidenced by virtue of the fact that before the establishment of a Jewish state – this had never happened anywhere else. And the idea that Kashrut would be something not only supported by the government, but enforced by the government, would surely be almost unthinkable at any other time or place.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov was an אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֶלִים – he was a whole man who dwelled in tents.

And of course the question is: in just whose tents did he dwell?

One possibility is that he studied in the tents of Shem and Ever.

But the Radak offers a different suggestion.

אֹהֶלִים רַבִּים – כִּי הָיָה לוֹמֵד עִם כָּל חָכָם שֶׁהָיָה מוֹצֵא – עִם זֶה וְעִם זֶה.

Perhaps the Torah means to tell us that Yaakov dwelled in many tents – he learned from anyone who would teach him.

America is not the Promised Land, but it is the land of opportunity.

And part of what I've tried to argue over these three weeks is this: Our Modern Orthodox community here in America over these past 100 years was and remains uniquely situated to seize upon the extraordinary opportunities afforded to us by this great land. (Those to our left were less invested in the narrative of Tradition. And those to our right were less able to integrate the best of what America has had to offer.)

- Despite arguments of dual loyalty, America was open-minded enough to give us the space to support the building of a Jewish State, promote Aliyah and vigorously advocate on Israel's behalf.
- The establishment clause of the constitution gave us license to build a Jewish day school movement so that we could educate each succeeding generation of Jews in our community.
- America's culture of assigning value to the aesthetic supported the resurgence of the Mikvah.
- And the idea that a particular industry – regardless of its being sectarian – could benefit from the process of professionalization – helped Kashrut blossom.

There's a trope in all these histories – a sentiment that emerges in every story: From Zionism to Day Schools; from Mikvah to Kashrut; and it goes something like this: *If you would have told us 50 or 100 years ago that this institution or movement would not only survive but would be thriving two or three generations from now, no one would have believed you.*

What we've accomplished in these past 100 years is simply extraordinary – and maybe unprecedented.

Living in a liberal democracy is not without its challenges. That the Jewish population in America over the past 50 years has been stagnant at best and declining at worst – has to give us pause. We are losing Jews at the margins at an alarming rate.

But the opportunities are virtually endless. Rabbi Jung used capitalism to build a Mikvah. Rabbi Lamm used freedom of speech to rail against those who equated Zionism with racism.

As we venture off into the new frontiers of the next 100 years, we should be thinking consciously about what it is we want to accomplish for the Jewish people:

- We can use advances in engineering to better accommodate individuals with disabilities;
- We can – as we heard about on Wednesday evening – use our legal system to bankrupt terrorists;
- We can use new communication platforms to better disseminate Torah;
- We can use technology to help singles find each other;
- We can use social media to combat loneliness among those who are isolated or alone;
- We can embrace America's ethic of tolerance to promote inclusion and make sure that children and adults with learning differences play vital roles in our community.

Thanksgiving should be meaningful to every American. But it should be particularly meaningful to Modern Orthodox American Jews. It's staggering to think about what America has given us; and it's staggering to think how far we've come.

Like Yaakov and Esav, we're all in search of blessing.

When we put Hashem and His people first; when we see the world through the lens of opportunity; and we when think creatively about how to solve our most pressing Jewish problems, there's no *ברכה* that will be out of reach.