

NOTES FROM THE CANTOR

I love food. I love to cook, I love to feed others and I love to eat. When going out to eat with friends and family, we often share bites of each other's dinners to get a taste of the restaurant's various offerings. For me and my family, eating together is a shared experience and a way to connect with those around us.

Before I met my husband, Ben, I ate whatever I wanted: lobster, shrimp, pork chops, bacon cheeseburgers, but Ben had kept kosher all his life. When he and I were first dating, we went out to eat often. (Although he keeps kosher, Ben will eat at non-kosher restaurants and order a vegetarian or fish dish.) But whenever I would order something treif (not kosher), we could not share our meals. Ben never asked me to keep kosher for him, but I felt a disconnect because our eating habits were so different.

Because I was falling in love and wanted to feel close to this new and amazing person in my life, I began to make some changes in the way I ate. I didn't openly commit to keeping kosher, but I decided, privately, to give it a try. First, I stopped eating shellfish. Realizing I didn't actually miss it much, I then stopped eating dairy and meat together. Finally, I made the commitment to eat only kosher meat. Once I started keeping kosher, I discovered that when we went out to eat at a restaurant, not only could Ben and I now share and enjoy the same food together, I appreciated not having as many choices to make. I could look at the menu and immediately eliminate more than half the options. For some, this might seem restrictive, but for me, someone who's overwhelmed by too many options, it made choosing my meal so much easier.

Now, more than twenty years later, keeping kosher has transformed how I approach food and eating. I still love to eat, cook and feed others and honestly, I don't really miss the things I used to eat that aren't kosher. Eating is still a way to bring friends and family together to share an experience that is enjoyable and satisfying. And I still love to share bites of other's food (as long as it's kosher and they're offering!). This elegance of limits, this setting of boundaries around my diet, actually simplifies eating and sets me free to enjoy my food that much more.

Since I started keeping kosher, and especially now that we have children, eating has also become a sacred ritual. As a family, we say a blessing before every meal we share together, making sure to appreciate the food we have and the opportunity to share it together. In eating with thought and intention, meals have become a mindfulness practice and a holy act.

I'm not sharing this with you because I think you should start keeping kosher, too. As a proud Reform Jew, I believe that kashrut is a very personal choice, not one that's commanded by God. However, at this secular season of New Year's resolutions, I wonder if there's something in your life that would benefit from the elegance of limits. If you created a framework for yourself around some aspect of your life, might it enhance the experience and imbue it with a sense of holiness? What in your life might benefit from a bit more mindfulness and intention? In this coming year of 2020, I'd love to hear how your elegance of limits brings the Divine into your life.

B'Shira, in song,
Cantor Micah Morgovsky