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### The Effects of Modernization on the Jewish Society Today

Many individuals in the present day are unaware of the negative lasting effects modernization can have on a specific religious group. Due to American modernization, several groups of religious followers have become more lackadaisical in participating in their religious traditions, which in turn, causes the practice of those particular traditions decay with time. Among numerous religions, Judaism, has been deeply affected by society's modernization. The Jewish tradition has been affected by the modern American society in many ways, including diet, clothing, and gender roles. Due to this American modernization, Judaism and its traditions are becoming more loosely interpreted and followers are becoming less disciplined.

According to specific Jewish dietary laws, all Jewish individuals are obligated to follow a fixed set of dietary rules in order to be considered a follower of the Jewish sacred text, known as the Torah. The specific dietary law in which Jews are mandated to follow is known as Kashrut. According to research, "Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods we can and cannot eat and how those foods must be prepared and eaten" (Rich 1). The dietary laws of the Torah state that Jewish individuals are unable to consume unclean animals, such as pork, and mixtures of meat and milk, and are forced to slaughter mammals and birds, also known as *shechita*. According to the Torah, there are also many other dietary rules in which Jewish followers are obligated to follow, such as the inability to consume particular fats from animals, any limb of an animal, fruit during the first three years after a fruit tree was planted, and plants

grown together. Because the specificity of these dietary laws, and the effects of modernization, the Jewish society has divided into three groups when discussing the kosher diet: those who follow the Kashrut religiously, those who partially follow the Kashrut, and those who renounce the Kashrut. Due to the detrimental effects of American modernization, the Jewish society mostly consists of individuals who partially follow the Jewish dietary guidelines and individuals who do not follow the Jewish dietary guidelines at all. According to one particular source, “The significance of keeping kosher has certainly changed over the past century, but it has by no means evaporated” (Buckser 192). But, one can conclude that modernization has definitely made it more difficult for religious groups to define their individual ethnic identity. It has been said that one’s culture can be proven to be ethnically distinct through particular religious traditions such as diet and clothing. Unfortunately due to modernization, “...ethnic food traditions have begun to break down [because] Americans get most of their everyday recipes from cookbooks and magazines, not from their ancestors” (Buckser 192). Before American modernization, Jewish individuals practiced all traditions pertaining to Judaism religiously. According to research, “In the Jewish communities of pre-modern Europe, these requirements were one of the key mechanisms through which group cohesion and isolation were maintained” (Buckser 193). That being said, it is extremely hard to maintain cohesion and differentiation among a specific religious group due to the effects of American modernization. As society continues to modernize, Jewish individuals begin to interpret the Torah more loosely and become less disciplined in practicing particular Jewish traditions.

Many individuals are unaware of the essential role in which clothing plays in Judaism. In several religions, clothing is a way of expressing the identity in which those individuals identify with. According to a source, “Clothing has reflected religious identification, social status,

emotional state, and even the Jews' relation with the outside world" (Jewish Clothing 1). In general, clothing is the way an individual expresses their true identity, emotional state, and who they desire to be. According to the Torah, Jews are unable to blend both wool and linen in any type of garment, analogous to the inability to mix certain foods according to their dietary laws. The Torah also forbids women from wearing male garments, and men from wearing female garments. Lastly, according to the Torah, it is necessary that Jewish people place fringes on the corners of a four-pointed clothing item in order to identify them as a follower of Judaism. Due to modernization, Jews do not wear four-cornered clothing items anymore.

There are three garments in which Jewish people wear in the synagogue. These consist of: a *kippah*, a *tallit*, and *tefillin*. (Jewish Clothing 1-2). In English, these are more commonly referred to as a head covering, a prayer shawl, and "phylacteries" (Jewish Clothing 1-2). Not only are these specific garments worn inside the synagogue, but they are also worn when Jewish individuals are praying in silent amongst themselves. The *kippah*, or head garment, was mostly worn by men in past times because women are not obligated to wear it. Due to the modernization of the American society, many Jewish cultures do not require men to wear *kippahs* anymore. Moreover, many people are beginning to become more relaxed and lazy with certain traditions, which can ultimately result in a decay of those Jewish traditions. The *tallit*, or prayer shawl, has strings on each corner, symbolizing their duties as a Jewish follower. Lastly, the *tefillin* is made up of two black leather boxes with straps in order to hold on to the boxes. While one is worn on the bicep, the other is worn on the forehead. After tying these straps in a specific knot, there are prayers encrypted on the boxes. Several people are unaware that these Jewish garment rules exist due to the fact that many Jews do not follow these rules because of modernization. Unlike Jewish lay people, priests are obligated to wear specific outfits due to their high-level duties and access

to particular sacred areas. According to the Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism, “While they are clothed in the priestly garments, they are clothed in the priesthood; but when they are not wearing the garments, the priesthood is not upon them” (BT Zevachim 17:B). Therefore, if priests conduct ceremonies or services in which they are not properly clothed, they will be labeled as individuals who are unfit for ceremonies in the temple. While Jewish lay people can get away with partially following the rules, it is necessary that priests fully follow and honor all of the laws mentioned throughout the Torah. Although many Jewish individuals continue to become less disciplined due to American modernization, higher-ranking individuals such as Jewish priests, are unable to become less disciplined.

A major change in Judaism as a result of the modernization of the American society is gender roles. According to an online source, “The rights of women in traditional Judaism are much greater than they were in the rest of Western civilization..(Rich 1). In traditional Judaism, women were not seen as less important to men. Although men and women were created differently, differently does not necessarily mean unequal. (Rachel 18). During those times, several women viewed their own duties to be more significant than men’s duties. In traditional Judaism, it was said that women were blessed with a greater sense of comprehension and intelligence than men. Many of the sacred texts such as the Talmud and the Torah discuss the essential role in which certain women played in daily life. During the times of traditional Judaism, “the position of women in halakhah (Jewish Law) that dates back to the biblical period is in many ways better than the position of women under American civil law as recently as a century ago” (Rich 1). One major example of this was women’s consent to sexual intercourse within the boundaries of marriage. In the past, when a woman was raped, she was generally presumed not to have given consent to the sexual encounter. This is completely different than the

modern American society where victims of rape have to overcome individuals' suspicions that they "asked for sexual intercourse". In past times, traditional Judaism actually recognized "that forced sexual relations within the context of marriage are rape and are not permitted; in many states in America today, rape within marriage is still not a crime" (Rich 1). That is one particular example in which American modernization has negatively affected gender roles within the Jewish community. Many people today have several misconceptions about the roles of men and women in traditional Judaism. According to a member of the Jewish Lubavitcher Chassidic movement, "In the sacred Jewish literature, the woman is called the foundation of the home" (Rachel 18). Due to the lasting effects of modernization, today, women are continually viewed as to be as of a lower ranking than men. In present time, women are constantly fighting for equal treatment within the American society. It is truly unfortunate that gender roles and stereotypes pertaining to men and women continue to exist today. In ancient times, individuals solely viewed themselves as humans. No race defined them. No ethnicity defined them. No gender defined them. No sexual orientation defined them. Today, individuals take into account everyone's race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. People come up with preconceived opinions before meeting others, instead of taking a chance to get to know the individual. That being said, American modernization has had a huge effect on how people view the roles of men and women in the typical everyday life scenario. Due to this change in thinking patterns, many issues have arisen throughout the United States.

The modernization of the American society has played a major role in negatively impacting particular Jewish traditions, such as diet, clothing, and gender roles, resulting in a loose interpretation of the Torah and a less disciplined Jewish community. Due to this idea of American modernization, the Jewish community has decreased their efforts in maintaining the

practice of particular traditions pertaining to diet and clothing. Because of the development of many new types of foods and restaurants, individuals do not consistently follow the kosher diet and deviate from that particular religious path. Also, due to many new brands of clothing and peoples' laziness, many Jewish people have discontinued the wearing of particular garments, such as the *kippah* and the *tallit*. Lastly, over the years, one can see the shift in gender roles due to our society becoming more modern. Today, women are still continuing to fight for the same treatment as men. In ancient and biblical times, the issue of equality among men and women did not exist. While women assumed certain roles, men took the responsibility for other roles. As a result of the modernization of the American society, Jewish men and women have begun to interpret traditions with less thought and participation. Those individuals who deviate from the religious path in their lives should always remember the word of their God. According to the Jewish sacred text, Yahweh said, "Therefore, keep these words of Mine in your heart and in your soul. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand; they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deuteronomy 11: 18). In order to not digress down the wrong path, Jews should always remind themselves of Yahweh's statements within the Torah due to the effect modernization has had on other Jewish individuals within the community.

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