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Folk Judaism: Variations of Religious Practices among the Jews of Ukraine and Moldova (Research Findings, 2004–11)

Translation by Jan Surer

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This article draws on analysis of interviews with Jews of Ukraine and Moldova who lived the first part of their lives following traditional Jewish ways, while the latter part occurred during the period of strong anti-religious pressure in the Soviet Union. As a result, several variations of what we can call "folk Judaism" emerged. One form consists of a coerced non-observance of the laws of Judaism and entails the elaboration of various ways to observe Jewish traditions in the absence of the ability to follow the letter of the law. The second option involves conscious rejection of ancestral religious traditions, partial observance as "camouflage," and minimal interaction with modern Orthodox Judaism. The third option is creating one's own individual rules for observing selected religious commandments. Several key mechanisms of the formation of new Jewish "folk" religious practices can be identified. They are the transformation of the existing halakhic regulations with the help of a) ritual deception; b) changes in the status of the ritual object; and c) application of the laws of ritual purity to an object known to be unclean.

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THE present article is based upon field interviews recorded during research trips between 2004 and 2011 to Podolia (the towns of Tulchyn, Balta and Mohyliv-Podilsky), Bukovina (Chernivtsi), and Bessarabia (Chişinău [Kishinev], Soroca, Bălţi [Beltsy], Briceni [Brichany], Khotyn and Novoselytsia). The researchers chose Podolia, Bessarabia and the towns of Chernivtsi as their research site because up to the present time part of the long-term resident Jewish population, bearers of an authentic ethnocultural and linguistic tradition, remains in these regions. During the Second World War the Jews of these areas found themselves under Romanian occupation (the so-called Transnistria Governorate, 1941–44) or were deported there. Although the Romanian occupation authorities annihilated the Jews in some towns and drove the population of the remaining towns into ghettos and concentration camps, a significant part of the Jewish population survived the occupation. Consequently, after the war, southwestern Vinnytsia Oblast and northwestern Odessa Oblast in Ukraine, Chernivtsi Oblast and also Moldavia proved to be among the few regions in which ethnographically distinct Jewish communities remained. Moreover, until 1940 the Jews of Bessarabia lived in territory that was part of Romania. By conversing with informants from this area who were born in the 1920s–30s, we can document unique memories of pre-Soviet Jewish traditional culture, in which the system of traditional Jewish education had not yet been destroyed, religious precepts and customs were observed, and synagogues and cheders functioned. Before the war started our interlocutors were from ten to fifteen years old, and they were able to experience the East European Jewish tradition that their contemporaries living on the territory of the Soviet Union were only able to hear about from their older relatives. Interviews with Jews who spent part of their lives amid traditional Jewish culture and part under active state hostility to any manifestations of religious traditions represent a unique source for the study of popular religion in everyday Jewish life.

A wide array of researchers has examined the contours of popular religion in general (see, for example, Durkheim 1964; Crummey 1993; Levin 1993; Primiano 1995; Panchenko 1999). The complexities of defining official, normative, standard religion and its popular distortions or transformations lie at the root of theoretical works devoted to this multifaceted phenomenon. In accord with many scholars, I consider the basic definition of popular religion to be the sum of religious practices accepted by a particular community and existing in dynamic interaction with official religious institutions.

Joshua Trachtenberg and Dov Noy were the first to advance the concept of "popular religion" seriously with respect to the study of Jewish traditional culture (Trachtenberg 1961; Noy 1986). They emphasized primarily the local variants of religious practices of Jews in different ethnic groups, isolating the specific characteristics of rituals and customs among the Jews of Morocco, medieval Germany, contemporary Israel and others. Moreover, the clash of Judaism's religious regulations with folkloric forms of observance or even the non-observance of these norms also became the subject of much research devoted to Jewish customs (An-skii 1908; Kaspina 2010; Weissler 1987; Sperber 1999; Sperber 2008). It is well known that one of the fundamental principles of Jewish religious law is the presence of strict regulation of all spheres of human life, including the tiniest details of household activities and daily routine. Nevertheless, even at the time of the establishment and formation of Jewish religious law — *halakha* — the rabbis insisted that a person must not violate his ancestors' customs, nor the received customs in a given place (Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 4:1; Babylonian Talmud, Soferim 14:18). This means that even for the founders of Jewish religious instruction it was evident that in real life the law often comes into conflict with popular custom and the traditions accepted in those localities where Jews are living at a given moment. In principle, Jewish law makes a distinction between civil and ritual law. While in the realm of civil law custom can nullify the law, in the realm of ritual law, as a rule, this does not happen: in this sphere custom cannot permit what is prohibited by law.

In the present article I examine several variants of "folk Judaism" that emerge from interviews and field observations in our chosen region. One of these is the coerced non-observance of Judaism's rules and folk ways of handling its prohibitions. The second variant is the conscious rejection of ancestral religious traditions, the observance of them "for camouflage," and minimal interaction with contemporary Orthodox Judaism. The third variant is the development of one's own individual norms for the selective observance of certain religious regulations.

Coerced Non-Observance of Religious Traditions due to Persecution

The first type of justification for violating specific prescriptions of Judaism is linked to the difficult historical and political situation in which Jews found themselves after the Second World War.

Open observance of Judaism's commandments was subjected to intense pressure from the authorities, and in order somehow to uphold tradition without attracting excessive state attention to themselves, Jews were compelled to violate some particulars of religious laws.

Thus, for example, according to the law on the doorpost of every door opening into a Jewish home there must hang a *mezuzah* — a specific text from the Pentateuch, written on parchment and enclosed in a special little box. A professional scribe produces the *mezuzah* in ink on parchment, and it is quite expensive. In the difficult conditions of the Soviet period when it was impossible to find a genuine *mezuzah*, some Jews put just paper sheets with a printed text from a siddur (prayer book) into little boxes on the doorposts, which contradicted halakhic norms:

> You see, this son didn't have a *meziza* [*sic*]; there was one Azek among us, very learned, very ... he was that sort of person. So he said, "I will give you two little pieces of paper from the sider [*sic*]; you put them there. It will be considered a *meziza* [*sic*]" (API, Interview with Pesa Shaevna Kolodenker in Tul'chyn, 2005).

The "learned" man, obviously a religious authority, found a compromise solution that went against Orthodox Judaism but kept the tradition, albeit in distorted form.

It was similar with the need to gather a *minyan* — ten adult Jews — in order to conduct collective prayer. In the Soviet period sometimes children, women and even non-Jews were counted among the ten. In one of our interviews we documented a unique example from the war years:

> A *minyan* is ten people. But when my papa was ... we were in a camp, it wasn't possible to gather nine people — they would shoot then and there — one-two. As I recall, when it was necessary, when a *minyan* was necessary, then papa always went out and counted nine trees, and he was the tenth (ATsBI, Interview with Klara Moiseevna Kats in Chernivtsi, 2008).

In connection with the prohibition against burying people according to the Jewish rite, yet another compromise version of tradition appeared: a man would be buried in a suit, as was accepted by all the surrounding peoples, but under the suit they put on the special burial clothes —

takhrihim, in which one must bury the dead according to Jewish ritual. “They just washed the deceased. They dressed him, who wanted to — in a suit, but all the same, underneath were *takhrihim*” (ATsBI, Interview with Anna Iosifovna Shvartsbroit in Chernivtsi, 2005). One of the informants told us that if they dressed the deceased in just a suit, he would not find rest in that world; he would be “bitten and tormented” (Titova 2006: 38).

In cases when observance of mourning for seven days after the funeral was impossible and one had to go to work, people modified the custom: instead of sitting shoeless at home, they put earth from the grave in their socks:

> [And did you sit in mourning?] Shivah. Seven days. Seven days they sit on the floor. I did, too. I sat and my wife did, although my wife is a Ukrainian, we too sat together. We sat for mama seven days. So there it was. (...) They need earth ... they’ll take earth in their socks. [Earth in their socks? From where?] From the grave. This also somehow explains it, that it’s as if you are going about so that each day you don’t go there, it’s as if you go alongside this ... alongside the deceased. Well, that’s what I noticed, that’s what I gathered (API, Interview with Mikhail Aronovich Koifman in Mohyliv-Podil’s’kyi 2008).

The practice of putting earth into socks or boots (not necessarily from the grave) by those who could not spend the entire seven days of mourning at home — primarily because they had to go to work — was widespread. Many interviewees mention it. Evidently, its origin derives from one of the expressions of sorrow: the mourner spends the entire seven days of mourning shoeless. By placing earth in boots or socks, it is as if the mourner continues to remain barefoot, even at work.

In this particular case, however, the little bit of earth from the grave that the mourner carries symbolizes from his perspective his continuous presence beside the burial place. Generally speaking, Jewish tradition not only does not prescribe visiting the grave of the deceased on each day of mourning, but even insistently recommends not doing this. Nevertheless, this practice of ritual substitution acquired precisely that rationale in the consciousness of our informant.

In sum, one can note that in cases of involuntary distortion of existing rules the main mechanisms of developing “popular” religious practice amount to a change in an object’s status (trees instead of people, a

printed page instead of a handwritten piece of parchment) and ritual deception (*takhrihim* hidden under a suit and such like).

Conscious Rejection of Tradition: Social Pressure and Observance as "Camouflage"

The opposite situation concerning the modification of religious traditions occurred in assimilated Jewish families, which observed the prescripts of Judaism only for show:

> [Did you keep the traditions at home?] — Strictly ... no, I'll say it to you in Yiddish, *far die Menschen* (for the people), so that, so we wouldn't be judged, and so ... and I in my own, so to speak, home. (...) Understand ... inasmuch as my father wasn't religious, so that, for example, on Yom Kipur [*sic*], the Day of Atonement, he fasted, but he smoked ... And this ... is not permitted ... Well, for example, when his father died, then he went to synagogue and said for him ... this ... commemorative prayer.
>
> (...) My parents, they changed ... the dinnerware; for every day there was a set of dishes with forget-me-nots, but for Passover, then they took the set with the little green stripes ... And then when my grandfather was still alive ... so that, well ... so as not to offend [him] ... well, it's not permitted to mix meat and milk products, so they told my grandfather that these were meat knives and these were dairy ones, but this was ... a kind of camouflage (ATsBI, Interview with Sofia Filippovna Vollerner in Chernivtsi, 2005).

This interview shows which elements of Jewish tradition were maintained, even when a large part had been lost: the Day of Atonement and the observance of customs commemorating the deceased. We repeatedly documented that people kept kosher dishes for elderly relatives, despite the fact that they were not keeping kosher in the home. This being said, remarkably even in Soviet times, religious communities endured in one form or another underground and, sometimes, especially in small towns, functioned quite openly. So in Chernivtsi, for example, the "whole town" knew that a Jewish boy had been born:

> [And did you not circumcise your children?] No, and besides, that was such a paradoxical situation. I do not know how they found out. Basically, when my oldest son was born, I had not even managed yet to come home with my son, when a man had already arrived from the synagogue to circumcise him. And as it happened, Papa opened the door. Well, now, Papa

> was an old communist. Since 1918. He says: What do you mean — he says — what circumcision? And the upshot was, he didn't allow it. And indeed, to tell you the truth, we didn't even think about it (ATsBI, Interview with Eleonora Borisovna Tsnaimer in Chernivtsi, 2010).

Jews' relationship to religion underwent very serious changes, and alongside the observance of several basic elements of Judaism, such as fasting on Yom Kippur, marking the anniversary of a relative's death (*yahrzeit*) and trying to obtain matzo for Passover (for more details see L'vov 2008: 71–73), the sharply negative concept of "fanaticism" became the defining characteristic of piety. (For more details on the usage of the term "fanaticism," see Zelenina 2012: 63.)

The typical shift in Soviet Jews' religious consciousness appears in this small fragment from an interview:

> We had one grandfather, from the *kohens* (descendants of the priests of the Temple at Jerusalem); he was buried in a shroud (*savan*), but the other grandfather said: "Dress me like a human being, in a suit" (ATsBI, interview with Khana Fishelevna Glutnik in Chişinău [Kishinev], 2010).

People were ashamed of elderly Orthodox Jews, yet justified them to some extent:

> All the same, I was raised in a long-standing Jewish family with traditions like that. My grandfather was one of these very pious types; I remember they even came to us and they even prayed. He was very religious. My grandmother was illiterate, no, she was somehow more indifferent. He said there that she should pray, and she did it, but she wasn't *fanatically* religious like him, my grandmother, whereas my grandpa, yes, he went to synagogue, every week, on Saturday, well, he went, yes, yes (ATsBI, Interview with Musa Abramovna Kluzman [Sigal] in Chernivtsi, 2007).
>
> Papa went to synagogue, to the one that was open; he didn't always go but only when he thought it was necessary. There was no *fanaticism*. He went for *yahrzeit*, for *Yizkor* [prayer in memory of the deceased — Translator], twice a year he read prayers when his parents died so that it would be well with them in the Garden of Eden (ATsBI, Interview with Ita Zigrfridovna Shteinberg [Vainzaft] in Chernivtsi, 2008).
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> I know that we were born in a religious family, I know everything about Jewish law, so far as that is concerned, but that I was a *fanatic* — no. I'm not a fanatic. I don't go to synagogue and I never went to syna-

> gogue, only Yon Kiper [*sic*]. When it was the Day of Atonement, we gathered to hear the shofar, when they still blew on the shofar. But, so, no, I wasn't especially (...) my family was religious — all of us. But not such *fanatics* that we wore beards, that we were like that, that we went around in black coats (ATsBI, Interview with Dvora Khaimovna Gol'dgaimer in Chernivtsi, 2009).

Even outright violation of centuries-old traditions by parents is perceived as something of an act of valor:

> Papa had [tries to recall its name] a *tales*, *toles* — a white cloak with black and the little boxes. This was called a *tales mit tviln* [*sic;* usually, *tallis* and *tefillin* (prayer shawl and phylacteries — Translator.)]. [And what does that mean?] Something spiritual. They prayed. Papa wasn't religious. He was a bit of a rogue. On Saturday riding and smoking weren't permitted. He got on his bicycle and defiantly rode around town with a cigarette (ATsBI, Interview with Faina Lipovna Vol'per in Chernivtsi, 2009).

Typically, people whose behavior was strange and provocative (they went to synagogue every week), who stood out from most people even outwardly, were called fanatics. And generally, even when our informants speak of the piety of their parents, in which they are now beginning to take pride, they nonetheless emphasize their moderation and lack of fanaticism:

> My father was truly a religious person, but, as they say, to a degree, not a fanatic. He went to the front and took with him his tolos [sic] and tvyln [sic]. And his prayer book. So — that means something. He did not always go to synagogue in his later years, because it was difficult for him, but when he went, they always designated a place of honor for him there, and he always read prayers at home on Saturday, and we knew this. All the holidays were always observed strictly before; we children all felt this, and the grandchildren (ATsBI, Interview with Anna Petrovna Miller in Chernivtsi, 2009).

Conscious Rejection of Tradition: The Repudiation and Ridicule of Classical Judaism

Our informants often apply their censure of religious fanaticism to contemporary young Orthodox Jews whom they have encountered

in recent decades in various organizations. Traditional religious prohibitions seem to them strange and bizarre. For example, an elderly Jewish woman said of her neighbors — a family of young rabbis: "They have wild eccentricities: you can do this, you can't do that ... They bought a frying pan for themselves, they don't let you wash their cups" (ATsBI, Interview with Salla Borisovna Uzvalovaia in Chernivtsi, 2007). Bessarabian Jews call the custom of placing stones on graves instead of flowers, a custom accepted throughout the whole Jewish world, including Israel, "foolishness" (ATsBI, Interview with Chizar Iosifovich Roitburg in Chişinău [Kishinev], 2010). Reading a short collection of Jewish laws (the *Abridged Shul'khan Arukh*) sent to a synagogue in Khotyn, our informants openly laughed as they came across certain regulations:

> Here's something so absurd that nobody could follow it [reads from the book]: "It is prohibited for two Jews who know each other, even if they are not friends, to sit at the same table if one is eating meat and the other dairy." They're not permitted to sit at the same table ... [laughs]. "You cannot wipe away spit on the floor with your foot — spit — but you may step on it with your foot but not wipe it away" [all laugh] (ATsBI, Interview with Iakov Aronovich Postel'nik, Khaim Mednik, Srul' Vaisman and others, Chernivtsi, 2006).

When a new religious authority appears in a community that went without a rabbi for many years, his behavior often provokes sharp resentment among those who preserved tradition in a form somewhat modified from that accepted in Orthodox Judaism. For example, one of our informants recounted the burial of one of her acquaintances according to the Jewish rite. They invited many non-Jews, coworkers of the deceased, to the funeral, as well as a rabbi recently arrived in the town:

> They invited this man, the rabbi, to read the prayer and that's it. (...) All the employees, everyone from her office, her manager, and everyone. And it was quite awkward: her face was covered, and everything. And I said: "Well, let them uncover her face, so they can see her." They were with her, they worked with her, they respected her a lot, it was like that. And I said something. As soon as he heard me, he got so angry! I wanted to run away! I said: "Well, what? I can read that prayer you're reading myself." Well, they barely managed to hold him back, and no, he didn't uncover her face. They so wanted to bring flowers, and everyone wanted

> so much, well, to see her, but they didn't see her. Actually she had been ill recently, and then they covered her whole face — he didn't allow it; with us it is not permitted. Yes, he held to that. Well, perhaps that was not as it should be but it was according to the law. When there's already a synagogue, then according to the law (ATsBI, Interview with Tsila Moiseevna Koifman, Chernivtsi, 2009).

The ritual behavior before burial practiced in non-Jewish circles came into sharp conflict with religious law, in that according to the Jewish burial rite the face of the deceased must remain covered. In this interview fragment, we observe an inner conflict, one that is very significant to the interviewee. On the one hand, she considers herself an adequate authority on religious matters, bristles at the strict rabbi, and is ready to read the commemorative prayer in Hebrew herself; but, on the other hand, "with us it is not permitted," and "according to the law" is not "as it should be," that is, the way that intuitively seems right to her.

Attitudes toward Israel and Contemporary Jewish Traditions: Ours and Theirs

An especially strained situation of conflict between one's own, familiar tradition, and the alien but "correct" Jewish tradition arises upon our informants' encounters with Israeli religious practices. It is precisely here that for the first time ever many of our interviewees encounter in person those they consider religious fanatics: "When you go around in the religious quarters in Israel, you think, this is exactly how they lived 100 years ago" (ATsBI, Interview with Itsik Berkovich Kleiman, Chernivtsi, 2008). Moreover, the negative attitude toward any open manifestations of even their own Jewish religiosity also persists in this case:

> [In Israel] all the time there were Jews there, Jews, but there were Jews there. Well they weren't shy about anything; they go around with side-locks. These are the kind of Jews who don't do anything; they only pray and pray and pray. But when Jews already started leaving here, then they began to build everything. And there was nothing there; it was just awful. Those Jews do nothing for entire days except pray. And they go about in such long skirts, and even a husband and wife aren't allowed to sleep together in one b– bed (ATsBI, Interview with Berta Adol'fovna Zherebetskaia, Chernivtsi, 2007).

In sum, all the successes of Israeli life are ascribed to the efforts of Jews from the diaspora. In a similar manner, religious customs that

differ markedly in Israel from those familiar in Eastern Europe elicit the same hostility. This occurs especially often with regard to burial rituals, which differ significantly and which our informants, sadly, encounter most frequently:

> And there are no worms there, nothing. And no coffins. You see, they took him, I was crying so hard, they took him by the feet and shoulders and put him in this grave and put these stones on top. That was it. You see, that's how it is with them, but we have earth, that's why. Well, I know, they buried my grandma, I remember, papa was still alive, they buried my grandma in a coffin, and everyone — papa and mama, too. In a coffin. Here, I guess, we have such a custom. But there — no. There they don't need coffins (ATsBI, Interview with Klara Moiseevna Kats, Chernivtsi, 2008).

Israeli customs are perceived as "foreign" ("with them") and unpleasant ("I was crying so hard"), but at the same time interviewees find logical justifications for them. Moreover, in descriptions of funerals, generally stereotypical markers of an "Other" sometimes slip through — for example, the well-known false representation that in another tradition they bury people not as one usually does, but in a sitting position: "In Israel they don't bury people as we do — there they bury them in a sitting position" (API, Interview with Lev Shaevich Kolodenker, Tul'chyn, 2005). Curiously, this is exactly how Slavic neighbors describe the traditional Jewish burials without coffins that they witnessed as bystanders in early childhood (For more details see Belova 2005: 184–204).

An ambivalent attitude toward Israel reveals itself especially vividly in representations of the Wailing Wall: on the one hand, it is the holiest Jewish site in the world; on the other, here diaspora Jews encounter unfamiliar rules of "Jewish" conduct. See particularly how one of the female interviewees, a native of Chernivtsi, relates her visit to Jerusalem:

> The Wailing Wall is there, they go, people come there from all over the world. And you know, I was there five years ago. I went there and they put some little notes in little holes. Well, and they pray. And when you go there, there are security guards there — girls, boys, they can't go there with bare arms or bare legs or without a headscarf. So ... you have to dress properly. If you don't, then she gives [one to you]. And you go in, and you pray there. When you leave there, she herself ... I go up to her and return this item of clothing. And she said to me, You will never weep anymore in life.

> And you know, that's true. I swear to you that it's true [weeps]. You will never weep anymore. Never. Because they go there, so you weep, you ask God, so that ... And I had had such misfortunes — my daughter died, she died. My husband, my husband died. My children — my two sons left; I remained alone. And, you see, these griefs — I went to this Wailing Wall and I wept for them. And you know, that very year God gave me a man. He is very decent and good and we live together very well (ATsBI, Interview with Riva Fridrikhovna Gimmel'brandt, Chernivtsi, 2006).

However, the majority of our informants profess a different folk etymology for the name of this object: the weeping wall; the wall that weeps:

> This temple. There is the Wailing Wall, the Wailing Wall. So people go there, and light candles and pray. And some of our people go there, too. People bring photographs. And only one wall remains there. The Wailing Wall, and it drips from there, and drips and drips. They say that ... it's like a spring (ATsBI, Interview with Roza Ovshievna Shternberg, Chernivtsi, 2005; similarly, ATsBI, Interview with Anshl Gershevich Pevzner, Bălţi [Bel'tsy], 2012; API, Interview with Lev Shaevich Kolodenker, Tul'chyn, 2005).

This notion arose from attempts to explain the foreign name, which entered the Russian language through Christian culture. In Orthodox Judaism this place is called simply the "Western Wall." The etymology noted above is on the whole somewhat reminiscent of the Christian veneration of myrrh-streaming icons and other sacred objects that of themselves effuse oil or dew. In addition, among assimilated Jews one sometimes encounters quite unexpected explanations of the origin of this place of worship:

> Yes, it weeps and many go there and also pray to it (...) Yes, yes, yes, the wall drips. It weeps and they go there and ask God that everything would be well. (...) Jesus Christ once went there or passed by apparently or Jesus Christ once lived there it seems. They pray a lot there. From every country, from all over the world they go there. There's a men's side — the men pray and everyone prays in Hebrew (...) I went there with my sister. And there my sister gave her daughter in marriage (API, Interview with Liza L'vovna Mil'chenko, Balta, 2006).

In sum, among Soviet Jews removed from religion, an ambivalent attitude toward Orthodox Judaism has taken shape. There was the antag-

onism toward "fanaticism" ("the kind of Jews who don't do anything; they only pray and pray and pray") and the repudiation of the provocative garb and behavior, sharply different from the usual and linked to fulfilling the commandments. Not only Israelis but local rabbis, too, are perceived as "foreign" and "strange." But at the same time respect for the religion of their parents and for long-standing folk customs evokes heightened interest among our informants in different ways of observing Judaic customs and often led to the formation of a new, individual piety unthinkable in traditional society.

The Formation of Individual Piety

The most striking example of the appearance of a new version of Jewish observance is the justification of knowingly eating banned pork. Kosher pork — this is a profound oxymoron of Soviet Jewry. (For more detail on this, see Shternshis 2006.) But, as became clear in the course of our research, some have found fully "halakhic" ways to differentiate between the kosher and non-kosher in the home:

> You weren't allowed to eat pork, for example. But … we lived … in a shtetl, I told you, the shtetl Kapreshty. And there were these little wooden hawkers' stands, little booths, and this was connected with this Kapreshty, this … Prodanesht. And there were these special butchers there who butchered pigs. And they sold ham there; when I would go by these stalls, such an aroma. Well, we youngsters, we all wanted some. Mama let us buy some, but we had to eat it on the windowsill! And we couldn't cut it with a knife, you know, if we bought it there … Well, not all the time, but, you know, they sold it smoked, just as it is now; it's delicious … She [mama] allowed us to spread newspaper there or something on the windowsill, and then, you know, look, wash your hands, rinse out your mouth, so you don't go to drink water. And my late mama, she kept the law, I told you, a towel was for meat, for … You see if you needed to eat dairy, it meant she absolutely had to rinse her mouth, to begin to eat dairy. She did not mix one with the other (ATsBI, Interview with Tamara Izrailevna Mundriian, Bălţi [Bel'tsy], 2011).

Just as Jews traditionally rinse their mouths after eating meat, before dairy products, and use specially separate dishes and the like, in this case, too, the mother of our informant introduced a similar rule for eating ham and even set apart a special place in the home — the windowsill, covered with newspaper.

We recorded yet another distinctive example of the existence of rules for eating pork in Chernivtsi:

> [And do Jews eat pork?] Ooh, some do. You know, if I tell you honestly whether they do, it's still no big deal. You don't commit murder, you don't curse, you want to try it — well, what of it?! It's delicious, and I myself always take a little piece of pork. But you have to know — which piece! You can take a little piece of the front part. [The front part. And the back?] No. No. [But why can't you take from the back?] Because — that's where she gives birth! (ATsBI, Interview with Riva Fridrikhovna Gimmel'brandt, Chernivtsi, 2007).

On the one hand, such a justification has no basis in tradition — pork is a non-kosher product and may not be used in any way for food. On the other, it's clear that assimilated Jews, living apart from strict religious tradition, eat pork; and a need arises for them to work out a justification. That being said, it is interesting to note that the justification is completely traditional — the hindquarters of any carcass, even of a kosher animal, of a cow or sheep, are considered non-kosher, because there is one nerve [often translated as "tendon" — Translator] there that must be removed in a special way. One encounters the prohibition against using this tendon for food as far back as the Torah, when Jacob wrestles with the angel and the angel injures his hip: "Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle ["tendon" or "sinew" in some translations — Translator] that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle" (Genesis 32:32 [NRSV]; in the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 32:33). There is even a special Jewish profession, the *menaker* — a person who knows how to remove this nerve. But in Eastern European communities for economic reasons they preferred simply to sell the entire hindquarters of the carcass to non-Jews. Apparently this is how, in our informant's consciousness, this type of refraction of existing tradition was applied to another, non-existent tradition. Only the rationale changed — from it is forbidden to eat the hindquarters of a pig because it is ritually unclean to because births pass through that part.

The following example also demonstrates the kind of unusual transformation halakha sometimes undergoes in a folk context. According to an established Jewish religious custom, one must throw a small piece of dough into the fire when baking Sabbath bread to symbolize the setting aside of part of the bread — the challah — for the priests during the time of the temple in Jerusalem. (See the Mishnah,

tractate Challah.) But in popular practice the idea of an offering, inherent in this custom from the beginning, received a completely contradictory explanation:

> [It happened that way, that they split off a piece of Sabbath bread and threw it into the oven?] Well, it happens, this was simply ... it wasn't the law. People just, a little piece ... they throw it. For the *domovoi* (house spirit). There's a house spirit in each apartment. And indeed everywhere. Not just among Jews, everywhere. It's called the master of the house. Well, we don't see him. And it happened that old people would say: "Well, this is for the *domovoi*! Well, it's for the *domovoi*." They throw it this little piece of khola [sic; challah]. [And how do you say "domovoi" in Yiddish?] Domovoi! (ATsBI, Interview with Zlata Usherovna Mednik, Khotyn, 2005).

This evidence apparently shows the transformation of an original halakhic regulation about setting aside the challah as a temple offering and its replacement in the consciousness of this bearer of tradition with a custom of ritually sharing with an unclean spirit living in the home. Evidently this act is not perceived as regulated by the Jewish religious authorities; it is just a custom. It is typical in such a case that the informant could not give the Yiddish name for this kind of unclean spirit and that she called it by the Russian word "*domovoi*," emphasizing that there is one in every home, not just among the Jews.

We have often documented conscious violations of Jewish customs that were justified by the necessity of building relationships with the surrounding non-Jewish population. Thus, for example, one of the informants explained to us why he buried his Russian wife in a Jewish cemetery:

> Well, my wife was Russian, a Ukrainian. I put her in a Jewish cemetery. I didn't even think, I didn't think that that being the case, then we'll put her in a Ukrainian cemetery. And she has sisters. And before her death my wife says: "I won't be coming to visit you. There's no need for you to come to visit me — you must put me where you'll be." I say: "I won't be buried in a Russian cemetery." — "So that means, bury me there, too." Her sisters took offense, but what of it! I just made a distinction. Let's say, our parents — a covered grave according to Jewish [laws] has to have a slab, but she asked that there be flowers. I left it uncovered and I plant flowers all the time and look after them. And that's all, and it's not a big deal at all. They won't come to blows over it and won't fight. (ATsBI, Interview with Efim Khunovich Trakhtenberg, Khotyn, 2006).

Finding himself in an unusual situation, this man was compelled to independently develop religious practices that will straddle the line between standard observance (the covered grave) and innovation.

On the whole, funeral rites, as we have already noted several times, occasion glaring contrast between law and custom. So as not to offend non-Jewish neighbors and friends, people are prepared to violate normative rituals: to uncover the face of the deceased, to organize funeral repasts, to put flowers on a grave. Sometimes even the informants themselves admit that they ended up doing as everyone else did, because they had become accustomed to that:

> With us flowers are not acceptable. Of course it was done. But I know that it isn't proper. It's proper to place small stones and that's all. (...). But you understand — well, you live in the kind of environment where people bring them. Not just Jews come to our funerals... Well, people bring flowers — what of it — would you throw them away? This would be offensive ... and to what end? This offends people, who ... And then we ourselves got used to it, that you should bring flowers. I myself bring them (ATsBI, Interview with Riva Efimovna Bogdanskaia, Chernivtsi, 2011).

Conclusion

One can conclude that Orthodox Judaism for the majority of our informants proved "foreign" in many respects, unfamiliar and extremely isolating from everyday life, even for those who encountered the functioning of traditional Jewish culture in natural conditions not distorted by Soviet atheistic propaganda. But at the same time a heightened interest in varied forms of observance of Jewish customs has endured among our informants, especially concerning everything connected with funerals and the commemoration of deceased relatives. This kind of interest in combination with hostility toward Orthodox Judaism or the impossibility of fulfilling its regulations often leads to the formation of a new, individual piety, inconceivable in traditional society. This article lays out several principal mechanisms of the development of Jewish "folk" religious practices: these include the transformation of existing halakhic prescriptions with the aid of ritual deception; alteration in the status of an object; and the application of traditional laws of ritual purity to an object known to be unclean.

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