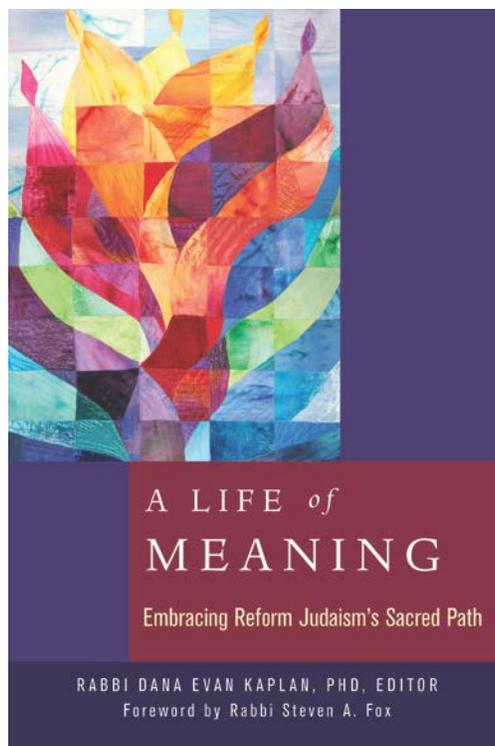


A Life of Meaning: Embracing Reform Judaism's Sacred Path



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PART I: Knowing God

Introduction: Not in the Heavens, Not Beyond the Sea, but Close to Us (Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, PhD)

1. In his overview of the purpose of this anthology, Rabbi Kaplan writes that Reform Jews “want to embrace as much of Jewish tradition as possible, *fully recognizing* that we are living in an entirely different intellectual, as well as social environment than existed centuries ago.” That we seek “a faith that is in harmony with our actual beliefs and experiences ... *those* are shaped most directly by the society to which we belong.” Does this describe your approach to Jewish life and meaning? If so, in what ways? What aspects of society play a role in shaping your Jewish identity?
2. Rabbi Kaplan suggests that “it can be nice to know something that is unchanging, permanent —to use a religious term, *eternal*. That is one appeal of fundamentalism, whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Hindu fundamentalism. But that is not something that we can offer in this book or in this movement.” What aspects of your Jewish identity, belief, and practice do you think about in this way?
3. Rabbi Kaplan calls readers to action, challenging us to accept our covenantal responsibility, as Jews, to interpret the Jewish religion “in light of who we are today.” This book is designed to help us do that. What topics in *Life of Meaning* speak to you most strongly in this regard?

Chapter 1: Critical Thoughts on a Reform Jewish Theology (Michael A. Meyer, PhD)

1. When studying Torah and considering Creation, revelation, and redemption, have you ever experienced moments of intellectual or spiritual tension? How have you worked to resolve, or be comfortable with these?
2. What personal experiences that transcend the mundane, if any, have you had that play a role in shaping your understanding of the divine?
3. How do you understand the role of awe and wonder in Jewish life?

Chapter 2: An Experiential Approach to God (Rabbi Rachel Timoner)

1. What have been, if any, your most significant experiences of God? How do you talk about them to others?
2. Rabbi Timoner advocates moving “beyond prescribed *ideas about God* toward real, lived *experiences of God*.” How do you understand the distinction between these two concepts? Which have been most profound for you? Do you agree with her assessment?
3. Have you ever found yourself in the position of defending God? What did your experience share with Rabbi Timoner’s? What did you draw upon in your defense?

Chapter 3: My Fragmented Theology as a Reform Rabbi and Daughter of a Holocaust Survivor (Rabbi Suzanne Singer)

1. What ideas about God have troubled you or held you back? How have you worked through these challenges?
2. How does Rabbi Singer’s journey present new ideas about Jewish theology?
3. When making major life changes, to what sources—both Jewish and secular —have you turned for support?

Chapter 4: Where God Meets Gender (Rabbi Elyse Goldstein)

1. Can (or should) gender determine, define, or characterize the way we practice Jewish ritual? How do we / should we use gender as a Jewish identity marker?
2. Does your understanding of gender inform your understanding of God and spirituality?
3. What language might be missing to address new understandings of gender and theology?

Chapter 5: Speaking Truthfully about God (Rabbi Michael Marmor, PhD)

1. Rabbi Marmor speaks of “the power of the ‘ought’ [and] the pull of the ‘should.’” What Jewish beliefs/behaviors do you feel you “ought” to or “should” do? Do you have a sense from where these impulses come?
2. Rabbi Marmor advocates a search for meaning in Jewish life that begins not with “me,” but with the “riches of my own tradition.” From what sources do you draw meaning? Do

you find yourself pulled more toward tradition, or your own experiences? How might you balance these two pulls?

3. What Jewish innovations are the most important to you? What about Judaism is fundamental for you? How do you work to integrate these together?

Chapter 6: The Persistence of Life after Life (Rabbi Paul Golomb)

1. Rabbi Golomb observes that Reform Jewish theology has dismissed notions of heaven and hell, but also believes in an immortal soul. How do you understand the place of the soul in Jewish life?
2. Where do you land on the spectrum of belief regarding what sustains our existence: divine will or human endeavor?

Chapter 7: Science and Faith (Rabbi Geoffrey A. Mitelman)

1. Rabbi Mitelman speaks of the “biggest” questions we face in life and argues that they aren’t religious or scientific, but “human,” and we need wisdom from both sources to flourish. What are some of your biggest questions, and how might you search for answers from both sources?
2. How do you distinguish between your religious “beliefs” and your religious “identity,” as Rabbi Mitelman does?
3. Rabbi Mitelman advocates the search for a “working” definition of God, rather than a “clear” definition. What parts of how you understand God might be included in your “working” definition?

Chapter 8: The God Thing (Rabbi David W. Nelson, Ph-D)

1. How do you make sense of the depictions of God that appear on “virtually every page of our ancient sacred texts”? In what ways do they speak to you? What metaphors for God are most meaningful or useful for your Jewish identity?
2. How do you respond to Rabbi Nelson’s comparison of God to the ideas of human consciousness as “emergent”? What might it mean to have an understanding of God that is changing and incomplete?
3. How has your understanding of God evolved over time?

PART II: Choosing Covenant

Chapter 9: Chosen for Torah (Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch)

1. To what degree do you agree with Rabbi Hirsch's belief that "Judaism absent the centrality of peoplehood is not Judaism"? In what ways does your sense of peoplehood and commitment to the wider Jewish people manifest itself?
2. Where have you experienced the tension between universalism and particularism in Jewish life?
3. Rabbi Hirsch argues that early Reform Judaism ripped Judaism's universal aspirations from their particularistic moorings, creating not a specifically Jewish universalism, but simply universalism, and that as a result, Reform's emphasis on prophetic values has been misleading. If this is true, in what ways might Reform Judaism advocate a particularly *Jewish* version of universalism?

Chapter 10: Refining the Covenant (Rabbi Rachel Sabbath Beit-Halachmi, PhD)

1. Which *relationships* have a compelling voice in your life— in the way that Rabbi Beit-Halachmi speaks of covenant— as though the voice is commanding?
2. Which of your Jewish *practices* comes from a sense of upholding a covenant? What is the nature of that covenant?
3. Rabbi Beit-Halachmi shares a teaching of Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, z"l: "If Jews could confront their Judaism as Jewish selves and not as autonomous persons-in-general ... they would find Jewish law and lore the single best source of guidance as to how they ought to live." What degree does autonomy play a role in your understanding of the nature of Judaism? Is that autonomy framed in well-defined Jewish terms? If not, how might it be?

Chapter 11: Is Reform Judaism Authentic Judaism? (Rabbi Kari Hofmaister Tuling, PhD)

1. To what source of authority and authenticity is liberal Judaism able to appeal in constructing liberal theological positions?
2. Rabbi Hofmaister Tuling suggests that "the language of autonomy that has dominated the Reform Movement ... has been a distraction from our core principles." What do you believe to be the core principles of Reform Judaism, and in what ways does a focus on

autonomy either support or distract from working toward those principles?

3. Rabbi Hofmaister Tuling questions what it means to be commanded in a liberal Jewish setting. How would you answer this question?

Chapter 12: Jewish Religious Pluralism (Rabbi Joan S. Friedman, PhD)

1. Do you have any limits to the ways that you believe Judaism can be legitimately conceptualized and practiced?
2. What is your understanding of the values or beliefs that guide how Rabbi Friedman argues we might set boundaries? What values or beliefs guide how you determine your own boundaries?
3. How might you respond to or share a space with someone who practices Judaism differently from the way you do?

Chapter 13: Freedom within Limits (Rabbi Jan Katzew, PhD)

1. In a way slightly different from some of the other writers in this book, Rabbi Katzew argues that “contrary to popular culture, autonomy does not sanction doing whatever one wishes,” and that “Reform Jewish thinkers have yet to make this case convincing.” What is your understanding of the limits of religious autonomy?
2. Do you believe the spiritual ideas of *yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov* play a role in how you make choices in life? If so, how do you navigate those forces in making choices? If not, how do you understand the idea of them?
3. How do you understand free will and determinism in general? Specifically within a Jewish context? How is (or can) your idea of God relate to your beliefs about free will and determinism?

Chapter 14: Let Every Blade of Grass Sing a Song of Praise (Rabbi Shoshanah Conover)

1. How does your sense of Jewishness connect to your sense of responsibility to environmental sustainability?
2. Rabbi Conover describes a Jewish obligation toward the earth and the natural world as based on “the Jewish value: *kavod*, or respect.” How do you understand this value, and what claim does it place upon you?

Chapter 15: What Is Modern about Reform Judaism? (Robert M. Seltzer, PhD)

1. Robert Seltzer traces a long history of Jewish life, culminating in modern Reform Judaism. What aspects of this history do you find the most compelling?
2. What aspects of Jewish history do you find the most troubling? What is your sense of how your Jewish community responds to and makes sense of this history?
3. What experiences most strongly influence your sense of connection to that which came before you?

Chapter 16: Zionism of the Soul (Rabbi Stanley M. Davids)

1. What draws you emotionally toward Israel? What compels you with a sense of obligation toward Israel?
2. What challenges you in your relationship with Israel? How do you work to reconcile this?
3. Rabbi Davids speaks of the tension between his particular Zionist, Jewish identity, and his wider universal commitments. How do you reconcile these on your own in general, and specifically with regard to your relationship with Israel?

Chapter 17: The Role of Reform Judaism in Israel (Rabbi Gilad Kariv)

1. Do you have similarly powerful moments identified with your grandparents? What role do they play in influencing your sense of identity, both Jewish and otherwise?
2. To what degree do you agree that Reform Judaism must include a focus on the “cultural, spiritual, and intellectual fruits of Jewish sovereignty”? What is your experience of this focus being advocated in your own community?
3. In what ways do you have an awareness of *k'lal Yisrael* – Jewish peoplehood – in your daily life or in your Jewish practice? Do you have a sense from where this awareness comes?

PART III: Connecting to the Divine

Chapter 18: The Power and Pitfalls of Personal Religious Autonomy (Rabbi Ben Zeidman)

1. Rabbi Zeidman identifies a challenge within Reform Judaism: its principles rely on individuals to actually do the work to decide what Judaism looks like, but in reality, most people do not do this. How do you understand your responsibility to addressing this challenge? In what ways do you actively work to decide what Judaism looks like?
2. In particular, what does your Shabbat practice look like? How do you work to define it? Does it incorporate both the “rational” and “irrational” practices that Rabbi Zeidman writes about?
3. Rabbi Zeidman describes “a world where fundamentalism and fanaticism are the first thing people think of when they think of religion” Do you believe this to be true? Have you had any encounters with religious fundamentalism— either Jewish or otherwise? How do you understand or respond to fundamental interpretations of Judaism?

Chapter 19: The Jewish Path (Rabbi Mark Washofsky, PhD)

1. To what degree does a sense of Jewish obligation or commandedness guide or govern your Jewish practice?
2. Rabbi Washofsky writes that “there is no such thing as non-halachic Judaism,” and that Reform Judaism “would be incoherent without it.” If this is so, what, then, should our responsibility be to teach about halachah to a community that largely operates without this awareness?
3. Rabbi Washofsky warns that if we do not take part in the study of Jewish law, other voices will by default gain a monopoly over the interpretation of its texts. What compelling liberal interpretations of halachah have you learned, and how have you incorporated them into your life and practice?

Chapter 20: Mitzvah/Mitzvot (Rabbi Carole B. Balin, PhD)

1. Rabbi Balin argues that “at the end of the day, for most liberal Jews in the twenty-first century, the observance of mitzvot quite literally stands opposed to (human) reason.” Where do you stand in relationship to this assertion?

2. In what ways is God an abstraction for you? In what ways do God and mitzvot have real, theological implications?
3. What role, if any, do you feel God demands of you?

Chapter 21: Eating Our Values (Rabbi Mary L. Zamore)

1. What is your Jewish relationship with food and its production? How might you bring, as Rabbi Zamore advocates, a more expansive understanding of kashrut to your dietary choices?
2. What is sacred about the food you eat?

Chapter 22: Shabbat as a Spiritual Practice (Rabbi Lisa. L. Goldstein)

1. Rabbi Goldstein provides a list of eight elements of her Shabbat observance: Light, Prayer, Gratitude, Food, Community, Torah, Rest, and Yearning. Which of these do you find to be the most compelling, and why?
2. What speaks to you about the teaching that on Shabbat, “we have the opportunity to fully welcome the soul we have to fully show herself, because Shabbat is the time we have the space and the inclination to listen”?
3. Do you currently “give up” or “put down” anything for Shabbat? If so, what and why? If not, what tasks in your life might present an opportunity to be put down for Shabbat, as Rabbi Goldstein suggests, in order to investigate: “What are we surviving for?”

Chapter 23: Take Back Your Time (Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro)

1. Rabbi Shapiro lists the most important elements of his Shabbat observance. Which are the most compelling to you, and why?
2. Which ones are already a part of your Shabbat practice, and which ones would you consider incorporating into your personal practice moving forward?

Chapter 24: Ceremony versus Ritual (Rabbi Stephanie M. Alexander)

1. Rabbi Alexander teaches us about the ongoing Jewish debate between fixed ritual and spontaneity through the story of Rabbis Elimelech and Zusya. Which sage is closest to you in their philosophy?

2. Does the tension between the two positions, which is ongoing even today, look familiar?
3. What responsibility or inspiration do you derive from the balance that we seek between *keva* and *kavanah*?

Chapter 25: Seeking a Wild Heart in the Wilderness (Rabbi Mike Comins)

1. Rabbi Comins writes about his understanding of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's approach to finding God through direct experience of the world. When have you been able to do this? What has challenged you? Where have you turned when challenged?
2. Rabbi Comins reframes an understanding of *Emunah* (faith) as being about loyalty, trust, and relationships, and not about blind dogma. What is the place of loyalty, trust, and relationship in your Jewish practice and belief?
3. When has your Judaism been about "curiosity," which Rabbi Comins describes as a searching for answers? When has it been about "wonder," which he describes as being about amazement and gratitude?

Chapter 26: Toward a Reform Jewish Mysticism (Rabbi Ted Falcon, PhD)

1. Rabbi Falcon presents a mystical model for self-discovery using the traditional "PaRDeS" hermeneutic for text study. In what ways do you work to uncover different parts of your identity?
2. Rabbi Falcon writes that "spirituality can be measured as the degree to which our awareness is inclusive rather than exclusive." How do you understand this balance, and in what ways do you try to reach an inclusive awareness?
3. How do you think the search for greater self-awareness can be an explicitly Jewish endeavour?

PART IV: Living the Texts

Chapter 27: Four Exiles and Four Spiritual Revolutions (Joel M. Hoffman, PhD)

1. Have you ever felt a personal sense of exile (or abandonment/loss), that led to a new spiritual connection? How did you navigate these moments?

2. Do you feel a sense of exile Jewishly today? Do you believe Judaism requires exilic moments for spiritual renewal?
3. Where do you find source of spiritual renewal today?

Chapter 28: Our Tree of Life (Rabbi Amy Scheinerman)

1. How do you work to discern what is “true” and “real” in your religious belief? Do you have a sense of whether it is more important for something to be “true” or “real” to you?
2. How does Torah study play a role in discerning this?
3. Have you experienced the second naiveté (and other stages) that Ricoeur speaks of? What new insight have you gained through this process, and how has it influenced your understanding of Torah and Judaism?

Chapter 29: Reform Approaches to Our Sacred Texts (Rabbi Geoffrey W. Dennis)

1. How do you understand the nature of Torah and *Tanach*? To where do you turn for insight?
2. What has been the most compelling interpretation of text for you?
3. The author asks: “How can contemporary Jews study and apply our sacred texts in a way that is both modern and authentic? One that values Torah to instruct us without us having to compromise the integrity of our modern and critical beliefs?” How have you dealt with challenging texts that are difficult to reconcile with other contemporary values?

Chapter 30: Hebrew in the Reform Movement (Rabbi Hillel Gamoran)

1. Do you agree with the author’s assertion on the need for knowledge of Hebrew language?
2. When has an understanding of Hebrew been helpful to you?
3. When has Hebrew been challenging to you?

Chapter 31: Why Reform Jews Should Study Talmud (Rabbi Dvora E. Weisberg, PhD)

1. Rabbi Weisberg advocates the study of Talmud, as it models “what it means to be a liberal Jew, a Jew who engages in study not to find a particular ‘right’ answer, but to think deeply about the enterprise of constructing a Judaism that speaks to us.” In what ways does searching for the “right” answer play a role in your Jewish life? Are there examples of important beliefs or practices for which you would like to have “correct” answers?
2. To what degree do debate and discussion play a role in determining your Jewish practices?
3. What textual sources do you turn to for guidance in thinking about your Jewish beliefs and practices?

Chapter 32: Reflections on Prayer (Rabbi Peter S. Knobel, PhD)

1. Have you ever been surprised by an act of prayer? Reflecting on it, what contributed to that sense of surprise? What did you do with this surprise?
2. Do you find prayer to be efficacious? That is—do you pray expecting results? Why or why not?
3. What components of prayer are the most significant for you?

Chapter 33: Worship and the Prayer Book (Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, PhD)

1. “Each individual Jew becomes energized to live out Jewish values in daily life” through the siddur. What values of the siddur impact your life on a day-to-day basis?
2. Rabbi Sarason writes about Reform innovations to make the siddur more accessible. Do you agree with him and find these changes accessible? What might still be inaccessible? Are you aware of any removals from the Reform siddur that you would like to learn more about?
3. Rabbi Sarason describes Sigmund Freud’s assertion that there are deeply irrational (or non-rational) and emotive wellsprings to the human personality that must be given their due as much as rationality. What sense do you have of this balance when it comes to prayer? Are there non-rational/irrational aspects to your prayer practice that you are comfortable with?

Chapter 34: Reform Liturgy: Then and Now (Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD)

1. Rabbi Marx outlines various spectra that new siddurim have to balance: Faith and poetry vs. revelation of theology and ideology; abridging vs. expanding prayer; use of vernacular languages vs. expanded Hebrew; inclusive yet individual; spirituality and corporeality. Can you identify examples of these instances in the siddur that you use?
2. Where do you land in your preferences?
3. Rabbi Marx argues that the dominant mood in Reform Judaism today is one that is “highly open to facing contemporary challenges, yet reluctant to decisively deal with theological matters,” and “overly influenced by a desire for comfort and feeling good.” Do you agree with this characterization?

Chapter 35: Music and Worship (Cantor Rosalie Boxt)

1. Cantor Boxt argues that “the spoken word can lock us into a commitment of belief, whereas music is more nuanced in the way it expresses the way we may or may not be feeling.” How has music helped your prayer experience be more nuanced?
2. Likewise, Cantor Boxt writes that “when we sing or experience music set to prayers or texts that are challenging, the ideas become more palatable, more relatable.” How has music helped you understand prayers and helped your prayer experiences become more relatable?
3. What values do you think are communicated by music in the *t’filah* you attend?

PART V: Building Community

Chapter 36: Community: The Vehicle for Fulfilling the Jewish Dream (Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff)

1. Rabbi Kroloff writes that “without community, the Torah could not have emerged as the blueprint for our Jewish lives.” What is the relationship between your community and Torah?
2. Like Rabbi Kroloff’s example of Sylvia, when have you had to “stretch” a bit to fit into a community?
3. Have you encountered a sense of fear at your religious autonomy being circumscribed by “instructions from on high”?

Chapter 37: Finding Meaning in Our Connectedness across the Generations (Joshua Holo, PhD)

1. Dr. Holo argues that in Reform Judaism, the “Reform” part is about *making* meaning, while the “Judaism” part is about *discovering* meaning. How do you see these two ideas interacting? Are they really two separate concepts? Can they unite?
2. In what ways do you *make* meaning? In what ways do you *discover* meaning?
3. Thinking about Dr. Holo’s depictions of acculturation (the ability to be fluent in a second culture) and assimilation (the abandonment of one’s culture for the sake of that second culture), what forces or ideas help you acculturate, and what helps prevent assimilation?

Chapter 38: Tradition! Transition! (Rabbi Lisa Edwards, PhD)

1. What events in your life have drawn you to a change of heart or newfound interest in aspects of Jewish tradition?
2. How have life cycle (or in the words of the author, life “spiral”) events impacted your connection to Judaism and Jewish rituals?
3. What periods of transition in your life have been marked by Jewish ritual? What meaning has this provided? What kind of rituals does your community offer to mark such events? What might be missing?

Chapter 39: Family (Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, PhD)

1. In what ways does your family play a role in your Jewish observance?
2. What aspects of your own childhood continue to play a role in your Jewish life?
3. What challenges has your family faced, Jewishly, and how have you navigated them?

Chapter 40: Contemporary Jewish Sex Ethics (Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD)

1. What can a uniquely Jewish values-based approach add to thinking about sex and sexuality?

2. Rabbi Teutsch lists thirteen values which he argues are the most important to developing a liberal Jewish sex ethic: *Ahavah*/Love; *B'rit*/Covenant, *B'riut*/Health; *B'tzelem Elohim*/Created in the Image of God; *Emet*/Truth; *Kavod*/Human Dignity; *K'dushah*/Holiness; *K'hilah*/Community; *Mishpachah*/Family; *Sh'lom Bayit*/Peaceful Home; *Simchah*/Joy; *Tzedek*/Fairness; and *Tz'niut*/Modesty. Which of Teutsch's values speak most loudly to you and impacts your life? Which do you want to devote more time to discovering? What values might you add to Teutsch's list?
3. In what ways do you practically actualize Teutsch's or your own values relating to sex ethics?

Chapter 41: Converting to Judaism (Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, PhD)

1. How do you understand the author's distinction between such terms as "Jew by choice," "Jew by birth," and "convert"? Do you agree, as he does, that differentiating "Jews by choice" and "Jews by birth" is uncomfortable?
2. Rabbi Kaplan argues that "Reform Judaism provides no single set of standards that all must adhere to concerning conversion," but also identifies sincerity and enthusiasm as the most important requirements. What is your sense of the most important elements of Judaism, for converts or for those who have been Jewish their entire lives?
3. Rabbi Kaplan writes that "conversion is important from an ideological standpoint, because it provides a litmus test for a whole series of issues. It is a chance to clarify what truly matters to us about Judaism." What is on your litmus test? What truly matters to you?

Chapter 42: A Personal Comment by a Reform Rabbi on Conversion (Rabbi David Ellenson, PhD)

1. Rabbi Ellenson draws upon classical sources to argue in favor of a more broad and lenient definition of the boundaries of the Jewish community. What is your sense of the difficulties related to defining Jewishness?
2. How do you understand the boundaries of Jewish identity? Ethnically, ideologically, socially, etc.?
3. What values would be important for you to highlight relating to conversion and defining Jewishness?

Chapter 43: Interfaith Families (Rabbi Rachel Gurevitz, PhD)

1. Rabbi Gurevitz asserts that Reform Judaism has been influenced by a Christian idea of religious identity that “requires a degree of dogmatic certainty and an intensity of practice” that is, in reality, “seldom a standard in Reform communities.” In what ways might your Jewish community present an idea of Jewish identity that demands dogmatic certainty?
2. Rabbi Gurevitz advocates a shift from talking about interfaith families in terms of “Jewish continuity” toward “Judaism as a ‘public good.’” What are some ways you have seen Judaism presented in a way that is accessible, meaningful, useable or impactful to more people?
3. What challenges might arise in presenting Judaism in the way Rabbi Gurevitz advocates?

Chapter 44: Millennials: Building the Future of Reform Judaism (Evan Traylor)

1. Traylor writes about the need for Reform Judaism to adapt to demographic realities, by changing liturgy, marketing language, and programming to ensure that it is fully reflective of the people (both Jewish and non-Jewish) in our environment. He argues that “anything less stands to alienate an enormous segment of the Jewish millennial population.” How might Traylor, or you, balance this ideal with a commitment likewise to various Jewish traditions and practices? How do you navigate this tension and determine what is open to adaptation and what is eternally relevant?
2. Traylor argues for the necessity of a “holistic lens” that allows for many interpretations of the tenets of Judaism, and that many traditional Jewish organizations, practices, and concepts are failing to meet this need. To what degree have you seen failures and successes in this regard?
3. Using Traylor’s language of a “holistic lens,” what aspects of Judaism do you believe are in need of this paradigm?

Chapter 45: Creating a Life of Meaning by Caring for Others (Rabbi Neal Gold)

1. Quoting Maimonides, Rabbi Gold writes about one who is an *ayin raah*—stingy, or unable to see the desperate needs of others. What might you not be seeing that needs addressing? If you aren’t aware, how can you attune yourself to examples of *ayin raah* in your life and in your communities?
2. How might the distinction made between the definitions of *tzedakah* and *hesed* enable greater attention to the needs of others?

Chapter 46: Sacred Aging (Rabbi Richard F. Address, DMin)

When and where have you searched for your own answers to the questions Rabbi Address poses:

1. Why was I born? Why must I die?
2. For what purpose am I alive?
3. What are you seeking? How do you “choose life”?

PART VI: Dignity of the Other

Chapter 47: Sacred Relationships (William Berkson, PhD)

1. Writing about prayer and ritual, Dr. Berkson argues that “Reform Jewish piety is both more intellectually robust than the views of its traditionalist critics and more profound and life-enhancing than the shallow scientism of its atheist critics.” Dr. Berkson also acknowledges that skeptics might say this is just about love. What is your experience? Is Reform Jewish piety as robust as he suggests? What critiques might we be brave enough to face?
2. Dr. Berkson sets up a spectrum ranging from “atheist” to “more traditional” in his critique. Are there other spectra by which we might consider and evaluate Reform Jewish belief and practice?
3. Dr. Berkson quotes Albert Einstein, writing that “the most beautiful experience we can have is the feeling of the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed.” What is mysterious in your life and your experiences in the world? How does Judaism provide a paradigm for experiencing the mysterious?

Chapter 48: Mussar and the Development of Spiritual Practices (Alan Morinis, DPhil and Rabbi Barry Block)

1. The authors note that the Reform Movement has a foundational emphasis on the individual. In what ways has this benefited or challenged you?
2. The authors argue that there has been a general neglect of the inner life as a Jewish concern in Reform Judaism, with its emphasis on rationality and social justice. What

is your own experience in this regard, and in what ways do you believe a greater focus on the inner life can benefit Reform Judaism specifically, and Judaism generally?

3. To what degree do you believe the individual to be the ultimate arbiter in matters of Jewish practice?

Chapter 49: The Centrality of Social Justice in Reform Judaism (Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner and Rabbi David N. Saperstein)

1. Rabbis Pesner and Saperstein argue that “far more than ritual or worship, far more than support for Israel, commitment to or involvement in social justice is either one of or the most common way Jews express their Jewish identity.” How do you understand the distinction between ritual, worship, Israel, and social justice that the authors write about? Do you have a different sense of the relationship between them than that which is advocated by the authors?
2. Rabbis Pesner and Saperstein write about the connection between social justice and the biblical prophets. How have you heard this connection evoked, and what do you understand to be its powerful draw?
3. What sources of inspiration do you draw upon from Jewish texts that influence how you act in the world?

Chapter 50: Integrating Our Stories: LGBTQ Folks in the Jewish Community (Rabbi Nikki Lyn DeBlosi, PhD)

1. What do the words “inclusive” and “welcoming” signal to you? What do you think they are intended to mean? What responsibilities do they entail?
2. What ways do you find your Jewish distinctiveness to be important and valuable?
3. Do you know any other examples in your own Jewish experiences of the distinction between something that is *l’chat’chilah* (something prohibited before-the-fact) and *b’diavad* (not ideal, but acceptable after-the-fact)? Do you have an awareness of how this might send a message either of openness and flexibility, or of being less than ideal?

Chapter 51: Jews and Race (Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva, PhD)

1. In what practical ways does Jewish history catalyze empathy within you for marginalized individuals and communities?

2. How do we balance between a diversity of differences and a belief in the ultimate sameness in the eyes of God?
3. In what ways can the organized Jewish community take more responsibility for erasure of Jews of Color?

Chapter 52: A Reform Jewish Response to Poverty (Rabbi Amy Schwartzman)

1. Rabbi Schwartzman writes about how the economic status of a person can influence their spiritual and mental health. How does this perspective influence your sense of responsibility toward alleviating poverty?
2. In what ways is your Jewish community uniquely equipped to address poverty-related concerns?
3. What challenges do you face— personally and communally— in this work?

Chapter 53: Tending to the Sick (Rabbi Shira Stern, DMin, BCC)

1. Rabbi Stern teaches the importance in healing of “walking with the patient in their suffering,” helping them “to articulate their truth,” and helping them “to articulate their prayer.” Have you ever been on the giving or receiving end of these acts? If so, what was the experience like? Did it contribute to a greater sense of healing?
2. Rabbi Stern writes about the tendency to experience feelings of inadequacy when responding to physical, emotional, and spiritual pain in others. Have you ever experienced this? To where did you look for support? In what ways could Jewish communities work to alleviate this challenge both in times of sickness, and in times of greater health?
3. Have you ever experienced the fear that Rabbi Stern writes about, of questioning whether prayers for loved ones are empty supplications? She believes that on some level we cannot fathom, God hears our voices. When have you experienced similar moments of doubt and certainty? How have you worked through these moments?

Chapter 54: Reform Judaism’s Healing Tent (Rabbi Pearl Barlev, MAHL, BCC)

1. Rabbi Barlev writes of the healing power of hope, and that “hope is fundamental to Judaism.” When have you found hope to have healing powers? When has hope been difficult for you? What do you draw upon as sources of hope?

2. Are you familiar with the experiences Rabbi Barlev writes about of being angry at God? If so, where did you search for support during such a moment?
3. When have you held the hands of another, or had your hand held as a sign of support, in a way that transcended simple bodily contact? What contributed to the sense of support in this moment?

Chapter 55: The Mission of Israel among Humanity (Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, PhD)

1. What forces pull you in either direction of the universalism-particularism divide?
2. What, if any, do you find to be the most compelling articulations of Judaism's "mission"?
3. Rabbi Sussman argues that "the redemptive purpose of Reform Judaism for the whole world" has been challenged "by mixed marriage, assimilation, and diminished Jewish identity." Do you agree with his assessment? If so, what are some ways that this redemptive purpose might be recaptured, considering the challenges he identifies? If not, what ways do you see the redemptive purpose of Reform Judaism enacted in the world?

Chapter 56: The Importance of Reform Judaism (Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie)

1. Rabbi Yoffie writes that many Reform leaders and thinkers argue that "theology is not essential," and that "it is far more important to unite around shared practices than shared beliefs." Do you agree with his assessment? How do you determine what is more important, between theological beliefs and shared practices? Are these mutually exclusive in your community?
2. Rabbi Yoffie identifies the synagogue as "the building block of Reform Judaism," but also acknowledges demographic and cultural shifts which have meant that "the structure of the synagogue is in a state of upheaval." What has been your own experience of this upheaval? To what degree does your synagogue, if any, play a role as a building block?
3. Rabbi Yoffie advocates "Promoting a consistent pattern of Reform observance." To what degree do you agree? What challenges would Reform Jewish communities face in promoting such a pattern of observance? To what sources can communities turn for guidance in determining shared observance?