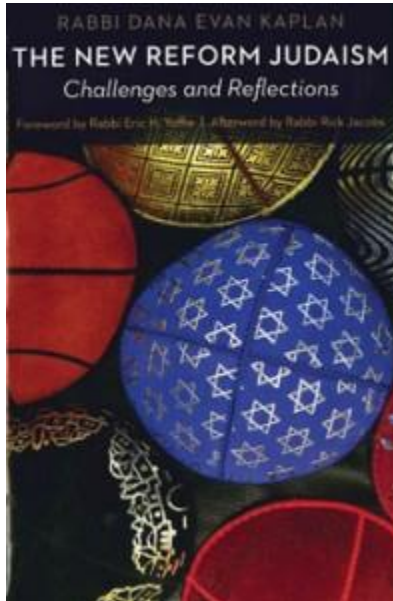


The New Reform Judaism: Challenges and Reflections

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By Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan

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By now, the changing landscape of modern American Jewry is not news, what with soaring rates of intermarriage and assimilation and, with the exception of Orthodox Jews, the dramatic reduction in synagogue attendance and affiliation. What some may not have heard is what might be done about the new reality.

Enter Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, who begins his book by presenting a brief history of Reform Judaism. Throughout, he draws on the work of innovative and influential Reform leaders such as Rabbis Maurice N. Eisendrath, Alexander M. Schindler and Eric H. Yoffie, arguing that because

Reform Judaism is flexible and always evolving, it presents many alternative ways to engage modern Jews. Yet, he points out that Reform Judaism's flexibility and elastic boundaries present challenges in determining where its limitations lie. "Most Jews feel that the most egregious violation of traditional norms is the integration of Christian elements into Jewish practice," Kaplan offers by way of example, "as in the case of Messianic Judaism."

Some of the questions Kaplan poses involve whether the sprawling campuses and huge buildings built by many congregations in past years are still necessary; whether online religious education and worship will become the norm for many Jews; and, perhaps most importantly, whether Judaism will focus less on community and more on the spiritual quest of the individual. Kaplan believes that the Reform Judaism of the future will be quite different than the Judaism of today, but that by holding onto "the values at the heart of Reform theology and building communities around a common and passionate commitment to those principals," it has a bright future.

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