

taken the opportunity to avenge their forced conversion: “For since throughout Christendom Christians have forced Jews to change their religion, it seems to be divine retribution that the Jews should strike back with the weapons that were put into their hands; to punish those who compelled them to change their faith, and as a judgment upon the new faith, the Jews break out of the circle of Christian unity, and by such actions seek to reenter the road to their faith, which they abandoned so long ago” (*Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, trans. by M.A. Cohen (1965), 193). Another Jewish chronicler, Joseph \*ha-Kohen – born in Avignon but living and writing in Italy – wholeheartedly supported the Reformation camp and described events and personalities consistently from this point of view. To him Luther was the sage among the Christians; the Council of Trent failed because the Lutherans did not come and, left to themselves, the Catholics could only do foolish things. His sympathy goes out to the Reformation fighters of southern France in particular. He describes their plight in a way that shows that he made use of their information and sources. The death of the heads of the population of a Protestant city in the province is described as true *kiddush ha-Shem*: “the leaders of the populace they [the Catholic forces] took along with them, torturing them and burning them alive... But they [the Reformation martyrs] exclaimed: “This indeed is the day we have hoped for – our souls shall return to God while our bodily clods return to dust” (*Divrei ha-Yamim* (Sabioneta, 1554), pt. 2, fol. 289v.). Joseph ha-Kohen was happy to witness and describe the sack of Rome in 1527, but when a Protestant church in Metz was destroyed by the Catholics and some of the people killed, he commented that the Catholics had “polluted the land with blood” (in H.H. Ben-Sasson, op. cit., 284). Perceiving the hope of toleration emerging from the wars of religion, he felt that the essential factor to emerge from a peace pact between reformers and Catholics in France was “that each man could worship his God according to his wish without fear. So all the people were exceedingly pleased” (*ibid.*). This is quite in the spirit of the middle-of-the-road party in France.

With sectarian existence under Catholic rule in Bohemia and Moravia, Hungary, and Poland-Lithuania, ties between Protestants and Jews became closer, for there was a growing similarity between their modes of existence. In the 1530s there were complaints in Poland that Jews exploited the Reformation disquiet for proselytizing. Much more clear are the contacts – both through disputations and through direct influence – between anti-trinitarians and Jews, as, e.g., in Poland between Isaac b. Abraham of \*Troki and Szymon \*Budny, and between Marcin Czechowic and Jacob of \*Belżyce. In the thought of Judah Loew b. \*Bezalel of Prague and his circle, there is much evidence of contacts with sectarians. Judah Loew’s plea against censorship on books – antedating \*Milton’s *Areopagitica* by about 50 years (Judah Loew’s plea was printed in 1598) – has the marks of sectarian pleading for tolerance. Yet his brother \*Ḥayyim felt constrained to warn “the Jews that... when they slacken in their regard for the Torah

and its commandments, God bestows His bounty upon the unclean cattle. So that even if Israel subsequently repents, it is difficult for God to reject that nation on their account. This is all due to the fact that we, in our manifold sinfulness, are daily drawing farther away from the truth, whereas they, on the contrary, realize day by day that they are in the grip of falsehood. A different spirit is manifesting itself to some extent in their midst, bringing them nearer to truth, since they, too, for the most part are descended from the true seed” (*Sefer ha-Ḥayyim, Sefer Ge’ullah vi-Yshuah*, ch. 7, fol. 46v.). Ḥayyim feared that the new and eager spirit of the Reformation was endangering the covenant between the Jewish people and the Torah.

In modern times some Reformation patterns of worship and behavior and modes of thought influenced not only the \*Reform trend in Judaism but also some of the \*Orthodox communities, in particular in Anglo-Saxon countries. The ideology of religious pluralism accepted in the U.S., and welcomed by Jews, is a direct result of Reformation development. On the other hand, Nazism reawakened in Europe all the scars and problems of the Reformation’s antisemitic inclination. In modern Jewish \*historiography and thought, the 19<sup>th</sup> century may be described mainly as the pro-Reformation period, while in the 20<sup>th</sup> century some pro-Catholic and anti-Reformation historiography and ideas emerged and developed.

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[Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson]

**REFORM JUDAISM**, first of the modern interpretations of Judaism to emerge in response to the changed political and cultural conditions brought about by the \*Emancipation.

The Reform movement was a bold historical response to the dramatic events of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe. The increasing political centralization of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries undermined the societal structure that perpetuated traditional Jewish life. At the same time, Enlightenment ideas began to influence not only a small group of intellectuals but also wider circles. The resulting political, economic, and social changes were profound. From a religious point of view, many Jews felt a tension between Jewish tradition and the way they were now leading their lives.

Many responded to this new situation by observing less and less of that tradition. As the insular religious society that reinforced such observance disintegrated, it was easy to fall away from vigilant observance without deliberately breaking with Judaism. Over the course of a few decades, a large percentage of the Jews of central Europe were no longer sure exactly how much of the traditional belief they subscribed to. Some tried to reconcile their religious heritage with their new social surroundings by reforming traditional Judaism to meet their new needs and to express their spiritual yearnings. Gradually these efforts became a movement with a set of religious beliefs, with practices that were considered expected as well as practices regarded as antiquated, and with an identity

as a coherent and cohesive modern Jewish religious stream or denomination.

Usually viewed in contrast with Orthodoxy, Reform Judaism was the first of the modern responses to the emancipation of the Jews, a political process that occurred over an extended period. Because of its stress on autonomy – both of the individual and of the congregation – Reform Judaism has manifested itself differently in various countries. Nevertheless, Reform communities throughout the world share certain characteristics. Reform Jews believe that religious change is legitimate and that Judaism has changed over the centuries as society has changed. While in the past this evolutionary process was subconscious and organic, in the modern world it has become deliberate. The guiding principal of the contemporary Reform movement is that it can adapt Jewish religious beliefs and practices to the needs of the Jewish people from generation to generation.

The first Reformers – long identified as “German” Jews but, in fact, Jews from many European countries – were seeking a middle course between halakhic Judaism, which they wanted to break away from, and conversion to Christianity, which they wanted to avoid. Looking for a way to remain Jewish while adapting to the prevailing social customs, they hoped that by introducing modern aesthetics and strict decorum, they could make worship services more attractive to the many central European Jews who were drifting away from traditional Judaism but had not become Christians. Most of the early reforms focused on minor cosmetic changes: They abbreviated the liturgy and added a sermon in the vernacular, a mixed male and female choir accompanied by an organ, and German along with Hebrew prayers. From the point of view of Jewish law, reading some additional prayers in German was a relatively minor divergence. But for the congregants eager to create a synagogue service that would look respectable to their neighbors and at the same time feel authentic to themselves, such a change carried great import.

By the early 1840s, a trained Reform rabbinic leadership had emerged in central Europe. Abraham Geiger, called to the Breslau Jewish community in 1839, developed into the most distinguished intellectual defender of Reform Judaism in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Reform rabbinical conferences in Brunswick in 1844, Frankfurt in 1845, and Breslau in 1846 gave rabbis an opportunity to clarify their beliefs and the practices that could follow from them. A debate over the use of Hebrew in the services led Zacharias \*Frankel to walk out of the 1845 conference, a moment many see as the beginning of the historical school, which advocated positive-historical Judaism. Frankel accepted the evolutionary character of the Jewish religion but insisted that the “positive” dimensions of Jewish tradition needed to be preserved. This perspective later evolved into Conservative Judaism. Although most of the rabbis at these conferences were much less traditional than Frankel, they taught in the established Jewish community, the *Einheitsgemeinde*, and therefore had to remain sensitive to and conversant with traditional rituals and observances.

A number of radical Reform rabbis, in particular Samuel Holdheim, made strong anti-traditional statements that shocked many of the more traditionally inclined. Geiger himself has been quoted as seeming to repudiate the circumcision rite as “a barbaric act.” Yet the practice of most German Reform rabbis remained far more traditional than their rhetoric. They worked to remain a part of Kelal Israel, the totality of the Jewish people, and did not fully accept the radical Reform groups in Berlin and Frankfurt.

### Reform Arrives in the United States

The history of Reform Judaism in the United States differs profoundly from that in Europe. Whereas in Europe the movement developed under the shadow of antisemitism and the threat of conversion to Christianity, in the United States a much freer and more pluralistic, more heterodox atmosphere prevailed. There was no established religious community and no support from the state. Over 200 years, the U.S. Reform movement has changed significantly and has seen substantial regional and even local variation among individual congregations. Nevertheless, it can point to a surprisingly high degree of continuity.

The first attempt at Reform occurred in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1824, when 47 members of Congregation Beth Elohim signed a petition requesting that their congregational leadership institute certain ritual reforms, including the introduction of prayers in English. The congregational board rejected the request, and a small group of intellectuals decided to form a new congregation, to be based on enlightened liberal values. On November 21, 1824, the Reformed Society of Israelites came into being, and the group published the first American Reform prayer book, *The Sabbath Service and Miscellaneous Prayers Adopted by the Reformed Society of Israelites*. Although the original group disbanded in 1833, due in part to the relocation and subsequent death of one of its more dynamic leaders, an interesting Sephardi intellectual named Isaac \*Harby, Mother Congregation Beth Elohim soon began to move toward Reform under the leadership of its *hazzan*, Gustavus Poznanski.

One of the most fascinating episodes in American Jewish history, the Charleston Reform attempt was an isolated phenomenon. Far more important for the development of the Reform movement in the United States was the arrival of large numbers of central European Jews beginning in the 1830s, later mistakenly referred to as “German” Jews. For the most part, they were central Europeans. The Jewish population of the United States jumped from approximately 3,000 in 1820 to 15,000 in 1840 and 150,000 in 1860. Although many scholars have assumed that these immigrants brought Reform Judaism with them from Germany, Leon Jick has argued persuasively that American Reform was not “imported” but rather developed in the United States in response to the American socioreligious environment of the antebellum period. While Jick overstates his argument, his book was a much needed corrective to the earlier historical consensus.

Jewish immigrants settled throughout the United States. As they established businesses and built homes, local Jews began to put more effort into building a community. They consecrated cemeteries and held High Holy Day services, usually in a private home or a hotel meeting room. Eventually, they erected synagogue buildings and, if the community was large enough, engaged a religious leader with training in religious matters in the old country who could read the Hebrew prayers and perform the required rituals. For the congregations in Fort Wayne, Indiana, or Lexington, Kentucky, this was sufficient. As the immigrants gradually acculturated, they wanted their synagogue practice to reflect American norms. They wanted to use English as well as Hebrew in the services and to create an atmosphere to which they could bring Christian neighbors, who would come away impressed with the propriety and nobility of the ritual. Thus they moved their congregations toward Reform, not out of an intellectually based theological commitment, but as a practical response to daily life in the United States. Most of the functionaries went along with that trend. They were not theologically motivated but rather saw the practical benefits of adapting religious practices to the American patterns of living and enabling Jews to remain Jewish.

But ideologically motivated reformers also existed. One group of liberal religious intellectuals in Baltimore formed a *verein* in 1842, a small religious group that met to discuss theology and conduct services based on that theology, the Har Sinai Verein. In 1845 a similar group founded Emanuel in New York City, which developed into the largest and most prestigious Reform congregation in the country. These groups, dedicated to Reform Judaism in ideological terms, differed from the vast majority of congregations in the United States, whose members were more concerned with the realities of everyday life in America than with the intricacies of Judaic theological debate.

### Isaac Mayer Wise and the Development of the American Reform Movement

As more congregations developed in the antebellum period, the need for strong rabbinic leadership grew. Not all congregations felt this need; many treasured their independence and many local lay leaders enjoyed dominating communal affairs. Despite the difficulties, rabbis carved out a leadership niche for themselves. Numerous immigrant teachers and ritual functionaries were interested in serving in the rabbinate and, in some cases, in assuming leadership roles on a regional or national level. One of the best known was Isaac \*Leeser of Philadelphia. A traditionalist minister who published an influential newspaper, *The Occident*, Leeser also promoted many other intellectual, social, and educational projects. But it was Isaac Mayer \*Wise who had the charisma and determination to develop into a national Jewish religious leader and to actively work to build American Jewish institutions and organizations.

Isaac Mayer Wise arrived from Bohemia in 1846, and although he was advised to become a peddler, Rabbi Max Lilien-

thal encouraged him to consider the pulpit rabbinate and sent Wise in his stead to dedicate a number of synagogues. This led to an opportunity for Wise to begin serving as rabbi in Albany, New York, where there was a famous confrontation between Wise and the congregation's president, the first of so many clashes between rabbis and lay leaders. When he was offered a life contract in 1854 to become the rabbi of Congregation B'ne Jeshurun in Cincinnati, Wise accepted, and the pulpit became his base for building the American Reform movement.

Wise established a newspaper, *The Israelite* – later *The \*American Israelite* – and edited a *siddur* called *Minhag Amerika: Tefillot Beney Yeshurun/Daily Prayers*. Credited with establishing or being the driving force behind the founding of all three major institutions of the Reform movement, he inspired one of his lay leaders to establish the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC, later \*Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)) and himself founded the \*Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the \*Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR).

Although Wise had hoped to build an American Judaism that included all American Israelites rather than just the more liberal elements, a moderate form of Judaism that combined some ritual reforms with traditional elements, this vision proved unworkable especially after the incident of the *Treife Banquet*, in which forbidden foods were served as the post ordination reception of the first ordination of Hebrew Union College. The Reform movement, however, was the first Jewish religious movement in the United States to organize itself on a denominational basis. Reform Judaism includes three types of organizations, each with its own territorial parameters: the congregational organization, today represented nationally by the UAHC; the four campuses of the \*Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR); and the rabbinate, represented by the CCAR. The movement pioneered this “tripartite polity” – a congregational body, a rabbinic organization and a seminary – as Lance Sussman refers to it, subsequently adopted by the other major denominations of American Judaism.

In the early 1870s, Wise, who had been trying for many years to create a national association of U.S. congregations, encouraged Moritz Loth, the president of Wise's Congregation B'ne Jeshurun, to issue a call to congregations to meet in Cincinnati for the purpose of establishing a Hebrew theological college. In July 1873, representatives from 34 congregations from 28 cities, mostly in the Midwest and the South, came together to found the organization. The following year, 21 additional temples joined. By the end of the decade, 118 congregations belonged to the UAHC, more than half of all identified synagogues in the United States.

The UAHC dealt with congregational issues and strategies for working together as an organized congregational movement. Its first goal was to create a rabbinical school. Wise had been trying to create such a school for many years and had actually opened one shortly after his arrival in Cincinnati in 1855, Zion College, which lasted for only one year. But Wise

did not give up on the idea. He was further encouraged when Henry Adler of Lawrenceburg, Indiana, offered a \$10,000 gift toward the establishment of an American rabbinical college. With the UAHC's establishment in 1873, Wise saw a new opportunity to build a successful school. That same year, the University of Cincinnati was founded, presenting the possibility for rabbinical students to attend the university simultaneously and graduate from rabbinical school with a university degree as well. At the UAHC annual meeting in July 1874, congregational representatives voted unanimously for such a college to be established, with Wise as president. In 1875 the Hebrew Union College was founded. Wise served as president until his death in 1900. A number of distinguished Reform rabbis followed him in this role: Kaufmann \*Kohler (1903–1921), Julian \*Morgenstern (1921–1947), Nelson \*Glueck (1947–1971), Alfred \*Gottschalk (1971–1996), Sheldon \*Zimmerman (1996–2000), and David \*Ellenson (2001– ). Since its founding, the college has educated the professionals who would assume leadership roles in the congregations, as well as many of the women who would marry future rabbis.

A long period of tension and conflict between the theologically oriented radical Reformers in the East and the more moderate Reformers in the Midwest had created a great deal of bitterness between the two groups as they attempted to influence the direction of American Judaism. Because of this divisiveness, Wise waited until HUC had graduated a sufficient number of rabbis and only then moved forward with the establishment of a permanent rabbinical association. David Philipson, an early HUC graduate and rabbi at Congregation Bene Israel in Cincinnati, helped Wise issue a call to rabbis planning to attend the 1889 UAHC conference to meet separately to establish their own organization. The rabbis created the Central Conference of American Rabbis, then elected Wise president by unanimous vote; he continued to serve until his death 11 years later.

By 1890 90 rabbis had affiliated with the CCAR, which dealt with rabbinical issues, including controversial religious questions. Membership was open to any rabbi who was serving or had served a synagogue as spiritual leader. After the first year, membership would be open to those from several categories, not only those with ordination from HUC, but also a wide variety of religious functionaries. As time went on, more and more members were HUC graduates. Today the CCAR has a membership of more than 1,800.

Despite his successful leadership, Wise was considered an uneducated and unworthy colleague by some of the “German” Reform rabbis who arrived in the 1850s and 1860s with doctorates from prestigious central European universities. Primary among them was David \*Einhorn, who immigrated to the United States in 1855. Einhorn wrote a number of scathing attacks on Wise for abrogating Reform theology and turning what he saw as a consistent and principled approach to modern Judaism into a jumble of incoherent beliefs. The issue debated by Wise and Einhorn has remained a relevant theme throughout the history of the Reform movement. Is it more

important to be theologically unswerving, or to respond effectively to changing societal trends? Most of the time, the movement has favored pragmatism over theological consistency.

Wise represented a pragmatic approach to American Judaism. He was primarily an institution builder who attempted to use ideology as a tool for compromise and consensus. Wise succeeded as an organizational leader in building an entire American religious movement from scratch, under very difficult circumstances.

### The Classical Reform Period

Classical Reform was the type of Reform Judaism that developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. American Jews, most of whom were of central European background, saw the tremendous influence that liberal religion had on their Protestant neighbors and wanted to develop a form of Judaism equivalent to Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and especially Unitarianism.

As presented in the 1885 *Declaration of Principles*, known as the 1885 \*Pittsburgh Platform, Classical Reform Judaism minimized Judaic ritual and emphasized ethics in a universalist context, stressing universalism while reaffirming the Reform movement's commitment to Jewish particularism through the expression of the religious idea of the mission of Israel. The document defined Reform Judaism as a rational and modern form of religion in contrast with traditional Judaism on one hand and universalist ethics on the other.

Motivated by his concern that persuasive personalities were urging American Jews to embrace these alternatives, Kohler, the platform's principal author and a son-in-law of David Einhorn, wanted to present in a formal manner what distinguished Reform Judaism from traditional Judaism as well as what was Jewish about Reform Judaism. Earlier in 1885, he had debated in a series of public forums with Alexander \*Kohut, a Hungarian rabbi recently arrived in New York who espoused the traditionalist approach. Their debates had attracted wide attention in the synagogues and the press. That the founder of the Society for Ethical Culture, Felix \*Adler, was the son of Samuel \*Adler, the rabbi of Congregation Emanu-El in New York, particularly galled Kohler. The rabbi's son, who had returned from rabbinic studies in Germany advocating a philosophical approach to ethics in a universalistic framework, was attracting to his philosophy and organization many Reform Jews who wanted both to express their conviction that ethics was important and to loosen or break their particularistic ties with Jewish ethnic identity. Adler placed himself on the extreme of the continuum between particularism and universalism, emphasizing the individual's connection with and commitment to humanity as a whole, rather than to any one ethnic or religious grouping.

Kohler chose a middle road, as this excerpt from the *Declaration* indicates:

We hold that all such mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern

Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Reform Judaism has historically emphasized what it interpreted as the central message of the prophets: the need to fight for social justice. The Reformers believed deeply in working with their Christian neighbors to help make the world a place of justice and peace, and this belief was a central part of the religious worldview. The platform emphasized the prophetic mandate to work tirelessly for the rights of the downtrodden, and the term “prophetic Judaism” described the Reform vision of following the dictates of the prophets to create a just society on earth. Coupled with the emphasis on its interpretation of prophetic Judaism, the early Reformers in particular spoke frequently about the mission of Israel, which presented the idea that the prophets of the Bible served as advocates of ethical monotheism. Ethical monotheism combined the Jewish belief in one God with rational thought and modern innovations in scientific knowledge.

The mission of Israel was to stand as an example of the highest standards of ethics and morals and to help bring the world to an awareness of and commitment to ethical monotheism.

American Jews who embraced Reform were greatly influenced by the popular belief in the sovereign self. They started with their own religious feelings and tried to place their personal understanding of what we would today call “spirituality” in a Judaic context. When Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago Sinai Congregation in 1925 entitled one of his books *My Religion*, he was making a statement about the source of his religious inspiration. Still, the Reformers understood that American Judaism could not stand solely on the basis of personal inspiration but needed a connection to Jewish history through a religious concept not “nationalistic” in orientation, but pure and holy.

They believed that the prophets stressed universalism rather than particularism, and therefore the Reformers felt justified in likewise stressing the universal over the particular. At the same time, the concept of the mission of Israel justified the continued existence of the Jewish people by arguing that their ongoing survival as a religious group was essential if the Jews were to bring their universalistic message of ethical monotheism to the world. David Einhorn used a version of this argument to oppose intermarriage with non-Jews, since “the small Jewish race [a term acceptable at that time]” needed to preserve itself as a separate entity to fulfill their religious mission on earth. Taken to its extreme, the mission of Israel concept helped Reform leaders present Judaism as the ultimate expression of ethical monotheism.

As the purest form of monotheistic religion, Judaism was therefore the strongest theological argument for ethical behavior. As such, it deserved to be taken seriously as a way of thought and a way of life by all individuals committed to finding a true understanding of God and God’s place in the world. This allowed Reform leaders such as Wise to declare that Juda-

ism was destined to become the faith of all humankind, or at least of all Americans who held liberal religious beliefs.

Reform leaders believed that as time passed, humankind would be better able to understand the will of God, and thus society was certain to become a better place. This belief became most pronounced in Classical Reform.

The theology of the Classical Reform rabbis is only part of the story. Yaakov Ariel has argued that historians have portrayed the Reform movement of this period in stereotypical terms taken from eastern European Jewish perceptions of the German Jewish elite. Specifically, such historians have presented the Reform movement as having divorced itself completely from the national as well as the ethnic components of Jewish identity. Ariel argues that there was an “astonishing gap” between the ideals of the Reform movement as expressed by rabbinic leaders, and the attitudes held by the vast majority of members in the congregations:

The Reform movement held a character almost diametrically opposed to its universalistic aspirations. As an ethnically oriented, parochial, and tribal group, Reform Jews were concerned with Jewish matters on local, national, and international levels, and were strongly involved with their non-Reform Jewish brethren.

Classical Reform Judaism had developed during a period of heady optimism, beginning with the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, but as early as 1881, Jews began fleeing to the United States to escape the pogroms of eastern Europe. By the time the Nazi Party rose to power in 1933, it was increasingly difficult to see the world as a place where Jew and gentile could continue to work side-by-side to make the world a better place and to bring justice and peace to all in the spirit of the prophets.

The 1930s brought signs that at least some of the Reform movement’s leaders felt the need for a return to tradition. Jews increasingly believed that the world was profoundly hostile to them. Rather than universal goals, they yearned for a Jewish homeland that could absorb the hundreds of thousands or even millions of Jews who faced prejudice, persecution, and murder. While no one imagined the enormity of the tragedy that would befall European Jewry, the possibilities were apparent. In response to the changing political environment, the Reform movement began to accept and eventually embrace a more particularistic understanding of Jewish identity, including political Zionism. The Reformers began to accept a definition of Judaism centered on Jewish peoplehood. Nevertheless, Reform rabbis continued to speak of ethical monotheism, which stressed that the Jewish belief in one God would lead to the highest ethical behavior.

### **The Changing Character of the Reform Movement**

The Reform movement changed its direction as a consequence of the increasingly brutal nature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. World War I jump-started the process of reexamining the liberal sense that had propelled Reform religious thought until that time. The movement’s optimistic view of human progress in collaboration with God underwent further change after the

rise of the Nazi movement in Germany and the subsequent murder of six million Jews. In the aftermath of that tragedy, the Reform movement veered away from its universalistic triumphalism toward a more ethnically based cultural identity. But the breakdown of this optimism did not mean the end of either Reform Judaism or the Reform movement. Congregations continued to attract new adherents as sociological patterns shifted. Many Jews found that the Reform temple met their need for a nominal religious identification, while allowing them to join the stew in the American melting pot.

From 1881 until 1920, the Reform movement grew slowly relative to the increase in the American Jewish population, with 99 congregations consisting of 9,800 members in 1900 and 200 congregations with 23,000 in 1920 while the American Jewish population increased 14-fold. The Reform movement went from being the single most important voice of the Jewish American community to being a small minority. Although the elite nature of many Reform Jews meant they retained a high profile, they were swamped by the eastern European organizations and ideologies.

The eastern European mass immigrations increased the American Jewish population from 250,000 in 1880 to 1 million by 1900 and 3.5 million by 1920. The bulk of the immigrants came from Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and other regions where there had not been full emancipation. Since most of the native population in their home countries had viewed these Jews as an alien presence, they came to America from an insular Jewish background. As a consequence, few joined the Reform movement. The immigrants did not like the Reform service, which they found lacking in traditional Jewish elements. Many Reform Jews maintained a haughty attitude toward the newcomers, preferring not to remember that their own parents or grandparents had arrived in the United States one or two generations earlier under similar circumstances. Indeed, a mythology developed that had the "German" Jews descended from aristocrats. Historically inaccurate, it reflected a widely held perception.

Nevertheless, over the course of time increasing numbers of eastern Europeans joined Reform congregations. Under their influence, the Reform movement inched back toward a more traditional approach to Jewish thought and practice, hastened by world events. By the 1920s and especially the 1930s, with the worldwide rise of antisemitism, this direction became clear. Even though the 1885 *Declaration of Principles* had argued that Jews should remain together solely as a religious group to fulfill their mission of bringing ethical monotheism to the world, the rise in antisemitism threatened Jewish physical survival, a concern that far outweighed theology or ideology. Policies that had seemed levelheaded just a few decades earlier now appeared naïve and foolhardy. As a result, the CCAR adopted the Columbus Platform in 1937, officially named *The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism*. This new platform embraced Jewish peoplehood and leaned toward support of political Zionism. The culmination of a revolutionary shift in the ideology of the American Reform movement,

it encouraged a greater diversity of opinion and a multiplicity of approaches.

By 1945 the Reform movement was well on its way to accepting Zionism and the soon-to-be-created State of Israel. The interwar period saw the rise of two strongly Zionist Reform rabbis, Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. Wise (no relation to Isaac Mayer Wise) began his rabbinic career in Portland, Oregon, then moved to New York, where he established his own congregation after Temple Emanuel refused to promise him freedom of the pulpit. In 1922, he established the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) in New York City to provide a Zionist alternative to Hebrew Union College. Wise believed in both the importance of social justice and the centrality of Jewish peoplehood. Like him, Abba Hillel Silver was a prominent leader in American and world Jewish affairs as well as a congregational rabbi. After serving as a rabbi in Wheeling, West Virginia, he became rabbi of the temple in Cleveland, Ohio. From this pulpit he worked tirelessly to build up the American Zionist movement in the hope of establishing a Jewish state. With Wise, Silver formed the American Zionist Emergency Council, which lobbied the U.S. Congress on behalf of the Zionist movement. Silver was the leader who announced to the United Nations that Israel had declared itself an independent state. Both men were Classical Reformers devoted to Jewish nationalism, a synthesis that would have been incongruous just a few decades earlier.

### Post-World War II Developments

The aftermath of World War II brought a massive suburban construction boom that within American Judaism benefited the Conservative branch most. Conservative Judaism appealed to the now Americanized Eastern European immigrants and their children, because it appeared substantially more traditional than Reform but allowed far greater flexibility than Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, Reform Judaism benefited from this suburbanization trend as well. The 265 congregations in 1940, with 59,000 members in the UAHC, grew by 1955 to 520 congregations and 255,000 members.

Many suburban Jews who joined Reform congregations saw the temple mainly as an extracurricular activity for their children. Congregations that moved most rapidly to meet the needs of these new suburbanites thrived. The temple became a social center that substituted to some degree for the loss of the old Jewish neighborhoods, such as those once clustered on the Lower East Side or Brownsville in New York and its equivalences in other major urban settings. The Reform leadership faced the challenge of conveying a religious message to congregants who had not joined their synagogues primarily to share a religious vision. Yet the leaders needed to captivate and motivate them to care and to feel that the congregation was helping them fulfill themselves as ethically concerned people.

The Reform movement grew in large part because it benefited from strong leadership. While much of this strength was more perception than reality, it nevertheless inspired many in

the rank-and-file. A tremendous amount of private infighting remained largely hidden from public view. Maurice N. \*Eisendrath, who became UAHC executive director in 1943 and president in 1946, moved the national headquarters from Cincinnati to New York – and thus geographically separate from Hebrew Union College – where he constructed an entire building for the organization on Fifth Avenue across the street from Central Park and next to Congregation Emanu-El. He called the new headquarters the “House of Living Judaism,” and it remained the operating center of the Reform movement until it was sold under the presidency of Eric H. Yoffie in 1998. Unlike the Conservative Movement, where the titular leadership of the movement is the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the president of the Union is the titular and actual head of the Reform Movement.

Nelson Glueck, a world-famous archeologist who had appeared on the cover of *Time*, became president of HUC in 1947. While many viewed him as more interested in his archaeological pursuits than in his administrative responsibilities, his fame brought a great deal of attention to the movement. He oversaw the 1950 merger of HUC with JIR, and under his leadership HUC-JIR established a third U.S. branch in Los Angeles in 1954 and a fourth campus in Jerusalem in 1963. Although this growth may have owed more to the burgeoning of the American Jewish community than to Glueck, the perception grew that the Reform movement had competent and visionary leadership.

The leaders could project this image of a strong, unified movement partly because of the number of pressing causes that could galvanize members of Reform congregations. In the 1960s many Reform Jews became involved in the U.S. civil rights struggle as well as in the movement opposing the war in Vietnam. The Six-Day War of 1967 dramatically increased American Jews’ emotional connection and commitment to the State of Israel. As they worried about its ability to survive in the face of Arab promises to destroy the country during the tense three weeks preceding the war, many came to realize how important the State of Israel had become to them. This fear resurfaced in 1973 when Israel’s physical survival was in doubt during the early stages of the Yom Kippur War. The cumulative effect was to increase dramatically the Zionist fervor of most American Jews, a sea change felt throughout the movement.

Interest in liturgical issues also increased. Many began to feel that *The Union Prayer Book*, used in Reform congregations since the 1890s, had become outdated; new prayers would better express how people felt in response to the volatile 1960s. Joseph Glaser, executive vice president of the CCAR, initiated a campaign in 1971 to write and publish new forms of liturgy. A thick blue prayer book, *The Gates of Prayer*, replaced *The Union Prayer Book* in 1975 to a mixed response – great excitement at the numerous options offered, along with horror at the drastic changes. This publication was joined in 1978 by a completely reworked High Holy Day prayer book, *The Gates of Repentance*. Both new prayer books contained a great deal

more Hebrew than their predecessors and reintroduced many traditionalist elements deleted from *The Union Prayer Book*. There were 10 different Friday night services offered, most of which presented a specific theological approach, as well as services that catered specifically to children or those preparing for bar mitzvah. Synagogues introduced new ceremonies and experimented with various types of innovations. While many congregants embraced these changes, others resisted – some who had ideological objections, some who missed the liturgy they had been using their entire lives. To this day, some congregations, such as Congregation Emanu-El in New York, continue to use *The Union Prayer Book*. Others, such as Temple Sinai in New Orleans, have a Friday-night service once a month that uses *The Union Prayer Book* instead of the more recent liturgical works. The Reform movement’s boldness in its liturgical publications matches its brave leadership in the realm of social justice, as well as its willingness to break with traditional belief and practice.

### New Approaches to Changing Social Trends

Alexander M. \*Schindler, who became president of the UAHC in 1973, gained renown for his assertive support of the social action agenda of the Reform movement of the 1970s and 1980s, including civil rights, world peace, nuclear disarmament, a “Marshall Plan” for the poor, feminism, and gay rights, as well as his opposition to the death penalty. Although this advocacy landed Schindler frequently in the pages of the *New York Times*, he got along with traditional Jews and Israeli leaders better than had any of his predecessors. His command of Yiddish and his sense of humor and of fairness helped enormously. He played a central role as chairman of the Conference of Presidents’ of Major American Jewish Organization in smoothing the way for Likud leader Menachem Begin, with whom he disagreed ideologically but with whom he established a warm and trusting personal relationship, to be accepted by American Jewish leaders who had long thought of Israel leadership as synonymous with Labor Israel. Despite a disinterest in administrative issues, Schindler and his German accent became synonymous with Reform Judaism. His leadership inspired not only individuals, but also entire temples, to join the movement. During his presidency, the UAHC grew from 400 congregations in 1973 to about 875 in 1995. Of course, the continuing move to suburbia made much of this growth possible, but Schindler’s inspirational leadership on issues meaningful to American Jews disconnected from traditional belief or practice played an important role.

Schindler is perhaps best remembered for two issues, his outreach to intermarried couples and his advocacy of patrilineal descent. Intermarriage had long been a taboo in the Jewish community, and many parents ostracized children who “married out.” Some would even sit *shiva* for children about to intermarry, as if the child had died. Schindler, who felt strongly that this taboo was counterproductive as well as inappropriate, came to believe that a bold gesture was in order. At a meeting of the UAHC’s Board of Trustees in Houston in December

1978, he issued a public call to the Reform movement to reach out to the non-Jewish spouses in interfaith marriages. Even more surprising, he urged making the Jewish religion available to unchurched gentiles. This controversial call to proselytize those with no connections of blood or marriage to the Jewish community appeared to be a dramatic departure from two thousand years of Jewish religious policy against proselytization. His critics argued that such a move would encourage certain Christian groups to launch opposing campaigns against the Jewish community, using Schindler's call as an excuse for proselytizing unaffiliated Jews. Despite the attention that this suggestion created, little proselytizing of unchurched gentiles has occurred in the succeeding years, whereas many outreach programs to interfaith couples have been developed.

During the Schindler years the Reform movement adopted the patrilineal descent resolution, which stated that the child of one Jewish partner is "under the presumption of Jewish descent." While the document's vague wording led to some difficulties, the patrilineal descent policy insured that if one's father was Jewish and one's mother was not, one would still be regarded as Jewish, *provided that one was raised as a Jew*. This requirement of raising a child as a Jew was more stringent than *halakhah*. This would supplement rather than replace the traditional matrilineal descent policy, which established that the children of a Jewish mother would be Jewish regardless of their father's faith or even how they were raised.

Also during Schindler's presidency, the Reform movement allowed women to assume a more central role in the synagogue, a direct consequence of the feminist movement that influenced every aspect of American life. As American women in the 1960s and 1970s took on a far greater role in religious life than those of previous generations, the Reform movement responded quickly and actively to the changing sex-role expectations. Increasing numbers of congregations allowed women to assume responsibility for all aspects of religious and communal life, even the rabbinate. In 1972, Sally J. Priesand became the first woman ordained a Reform rabbi at HUC-JIR, a revolutionary breakthrough. Since 1972, hundreds of women have enrolled in HUC. As the changes in the Reform movement paralleled social changes, its character as an American religious denomination made it popular with an increasingly Americanized Jewish community.

### Contemporary Trends

Reform practice today, especially in the synagogue itself, is characterized by the partial restoration of a number of formerly abrogated rites and rituals. Ritual items eliminated by the Classical Reformers, such as the *yarmulke*, *tallit*, and even *tefillin*, have been brought back. But because of the concept of religious autonomy, individual congregations cannot and do not require congregants to wear any of these traditional prayer items. Rather, they are offered to those who find them religiously meaningful or who prefer to wear them as an expression of traditionalist nostalgia. This generates some incongruous and perhaps amusing situations. For example, it is not

uncommon to find congregations where many of the women wear *yarmulkes* and *tallitot*, while most of the men sit bare-headed and bare shouldered. This is the converse of the norm in traditional synagogues, where all men wear *yarmulkes*, *tallitot*, and on weekday mornings *tefillin*, and women rarely do. The Orthodox Jew who wanders into a Reform sanctuary by mistake would either break out laughing or withdraw in shock and horror.

Another dramatic trend has been the move away from a formal style of worship and music toward more jubilant and enthusiastic prayer. Certain particularly progressive congregations, such as the independent Congregation B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side of New York, have served as models for most congregations that have been slowly evolving toward this more informal, exuberant style. The formalized Classical Reform service, which could uncharitably be called sterile, no longer impresses many with its dignity and majesty. Younger people have grown up with a different aesthetic. New types of music incorporate simple Israeli, ḥasidic, and folk styles, a style of worship developed at the UAHC summer camps under the rubric of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) programs.

In a remarkably smooth transition of leadership, Eric H. \*Yoffie, the president of the UAHC since 1996, inherited a movement that had grown substantially in numbers yet was perceived as having fundamental problems. Yoffie moved quickly and boldly to address these challenges, taking advantage of the new enthusiasm for spirituality and launching a systematic campaign to rebuild the entire Reform movement. He initiated a Jewish literacy campaign, which encouraged every Reform Jew to read at least four books with Jewish content every year. Recognizing that the NFTY, the movement's youth organization, had dwindled in effectiveness, Yoffie proposed a system that would include the appointment of full-time youth coordinators in each of the UAHC's thirteen regions.

Yoffie has only begun the process of reorienting the movement to meet the sociological challenges that Reform Judaism faces in contemporary America. At the same time, the rabbinic leadership has proposed a number of interesting initiatives, most notably Richard Levy's new Pittsburgh Platform. This restating of Reform religious beliefs generated a firestorm of controversy in 1998 and 1999. Although the CCAR at its annual conference in Pittsburgh in May 1999 eventually passed a revised version called *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, supporters found it severely watered down, while Classical Reformers viewed it as a betrayal of the Reform legacy in America. Despite a year-and-a-half of conflict over this issue, the values that inspired people to join the Reform movement have kept them from splitting off or leaving altogether. Although many remain persuaded that Reform Jews have no strong religious beliefs, the movement has created and propagated a religious vision that remains compelling after 200 years. It owes its success to its ability and willingness to respond theologically to changing times.

REJECTION OF JEWISH LAW. Traditional Judaism had focused on the observance of the *mitzvot*, the commandments given by God and incumbent on every adult Jew. The Reformers argued that if the Sages developed specific laws as a response to historical conditions, then *halakhah* could be changed or even abrogated. The Reform movement thus viewed *halakhah*, Jewish law, as no longer obligatory.

Yet there was never complete agreement over how to relate to ritual observance. By the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a wide spectrum of opinion existed on the issue. The historical school, which developed into the Conservative movement, argued that although *halakhah* might develop over time, it nevertheless remained binding. The historical school developed innovative religious approaches as well. The main difference – a significant one – is that the historical school attempted to show that *halakhah* evolved in order to justify ritual change on the basis of contemporary needs. The Conservative movement viewed itself as faithful to the halakhic process.

But Reform thinkers understood the historical changes within Judaism as far more radical. According to a Reform understanding of the history of Judaism, the religion has evolved in a revolutionary fashion at several key points in its history. These changes were not simply adaptations of a minor nature, but dramatic developments that marked huge jumps in both belief and practice. Reform theologians believed that generations in different time periods fashioned a Judaism that suited their contemporary religious sensibilities.

But if Jewish law was not obligatory, then what was the purpose of Judaism? Many 19<sup>th</sup>-century rationalists believed that human beings possessed an autonomous sense of ethics and morals.

The rationalist philosophers argued that religion imposed an externally derived legal system on individuals that prevented them from exercising their autonomous will. Such reasoning could lead one to conclude that the essence of Judaism is ethics rather than law. That explains why so much of the early Reform literature stressed abstract ethical lessons and avoided describing ritual acts. Religious law, the Reformists believed, was inferior to ethics; Judaism's challenge was to develop along Kantian lines. Revelation became a bit tricky, because one needed autonomy to choose the ethical path. If God made all the decisions and issued all the commands, then the individual would not have autonomous choice. Therefore, Reform thinkers developed the notion of man and God as partners in an unfolding process of continuing revelation.

The rejection of *halakhah* as a legal system meant that every individual practice had to be justified on its own merits, which produced widespread inconsistencies and contradictions. For example, the *halakhah* requires all Jews to fast not only on Yom Kippur, but also on Tisha be-Av, a fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples and other catastrophic events, and four additional minor fast days. But if *halakhah* no longer bound Reform Jews, then they no longer had to abstain from eating even on the holiest fast day of the year. Most pulpit rabbis seem to have chosen to ig-

nore the glaring problem of ritual inconsistency, particularly in the private sphere. While Reform synagogues developed a standard liturgy and a formalized ritual, no corresponding code detailed how Reform Jews should live their lives outside the synagogue; each person had to decide what rituals, if any, remained meaningful. Perhaps the rabbis preferred not to interfere with the private habits of their congregants. Some theologians, however tried to provide an ethical justification for specific observance. In recent years, many Reform Jews have come to a new appreciation of the importance of ritual in religious life, which some Orthodox observers misinterpret as a return to halakhic observance. Rather, these Reformists find that specific traditional practices provide spiritual meaning for the individual. And that is, at heart, what the Reform movement stands for.

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN BIBLICAL AND TALMUDIC LAWS. From the beginning, lay leaders who wanted specific practical changes implemented pushed Reform forward. Innovation developed in response to local needs and took into account no overarching theological system or broad religious blueprint. Nevertheless, Reform thinkers had to develop a system for interpreting the tradition. One of their most important concepts was to differentiate between biblical and talmudic laws.

In traditional Judaism, the Sages differentiated laws that were *de-oraita*, from the Torah, from laws that were *de-rabbanan*, from the rabbis. But both types of laws were obligatory to the same degree, and one could not justify nonobservance by pointing out that a given law was “only” *de-rabbanan* rather than *de-oraita*. What was important to the Reformers was to develop a religious system that synchronized Jewish belief with contemporary trends yet retained enough particularistic elements to distinguish their religion as a form of Judaism. To this end, they wanted to eliminate laws and practices that would prevent or restrict their social and economic integration into the host society.

Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, American Jewish sociologist Marshall Sklare argued that the Jewish rituals most likely to endure were those capable of being redefined in modern, universal terms. A ritual would command widespread observance only if it did not bring with it social isolation or the adoption of a unique lifestyle. The message of the ritual had both to accord with the religious culture of the larger community and to provide a Jewish alternative to it. These usually focused on children and were performed infrequently so as not to be overly burdensome. Passover and Hanukkah, two holidays that met people's needs well, were therefore widely observed.

Reform Jews were quick to abandon practices such as *kashrut* that did not meet Sklare's criteria. Although it could be redefined in modern terms, for instance, keeping kosher would still demand a relatively high degree of social isolation as well as the adoption of a unique lifestyle. Nevertheless, some Reform Jews remained observant of the kosher laws, at least to some degree.

Reformers emphasized the prophetic ideals of justice and righteousness, arguing that these universalistic values formed the essence of Judaism. The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which differentiated moral and ritual laws and became the “principle of faith” for Classical Reform Judaism, stressed that most of the ancient laws were not to be observed.

Classical Reform was not only a system of beliefs, but also an aesthetic approach to religious practice. Although as immigrant Jews Americanized, they wanted their synagogues to reflect American norms, even in Europe many had seen the Orthodox way of worship as disruptive and undignified.

Many of the central European Jews not only believed that houses of worship should be places of propriety but also wanted their synagogue worship to reflect American norms and standards; they borrowed structural and stylistic features from local Protestant churches, copying their architecture, seating arrangements, musical styles, and so forth. Reform Jews also made a number of ritual changes solely on the basis of what they considered the most dignified approach. A Classical Reform aesthetic slowly developed into a compulsory system of ritual that replaced the halakhic system.

**THE CHALLENGE OF UNRESTRICTED AUTONOMY.** While Reform Judaism stood for the autonomy of the individual and against the belief that *halakhah* was binding in its entirety, in the post-World War II period, Reformers took a variety of positions on religious authority and how it can be reconciled with individual autonomy. While some argued against all boundaries, others tried to develop a post-halakhic justification for some form of Jewish legal authority. Reform thinkers understood that the freedom of action they advocated could result in unintended consequences. If individuals could make their own decisions over what to observe, then what would stop those individuals from observing nothing at all? Indeed, there were those who used the Reform movement to justify apathy and even apostasy. But no obvious solution presented itself.

In 1965, W. Gunther Plaut recommended to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) that a Sabbath manual be written as a beginning toward a comprehensive guide for the Reform Jew. Plaut edited the result, *A Shabbat Manual*, published by the CCAR Press in 1972. The manual went much further than any previous CCAR publication in urging Reform Jews to perform certain *mitzvot* – to light Shabbat candles, to recite or chant the *\*kiddush*, and to avoid working or performing housework on the Sabbath. This watershed publication led to additional efforts to “return to tradition.”

Yet a return to tradition should not be misunderstood as an acceptance of *halakhah* as a binding system. Most Reform Jews believe that religion in general, and Judaism specifically, is very much a human institution. They believe that it is impossible to know with absolute certitude what God wants from us. Certainly, behaving ethically is necessary for people of all faiths. But we cannot know what ritual behavior God expects from us. Eugene B. Borowitz, HUC-JIR theologian, has suggested that “when it comes to ritual, they [Reform thinkers]

admit we are dealing largely with what people have wanted to do for God... ceremonial [behavior] discloses more of human need and imagination than it does of God's commands.” The traditional belief that the *mitzvot* are binding because they are God-given is reinterpreted to acknowledge God's indirect inspiration in what is essentially a process of human spiritual expression.

**THE QUESTION OF THEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES.** The question of whether the movement has theological boundaries was tested in the early 1990s when Congregation Beth Adam of Cincinnati applied to join the URJ. Its founder, Robert Barr, had graduated from HUC-JIR; many if not most of its congregants came from Reform backgrounds, including three current or former members of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. An adherent of Sherwin T. Wine's Humanistic Judaism, Barr had founded Beth Adam in 1981. Arguing that it was possible to follow Judaism without believing in God and certainly without a traditional conception of God, Wine had established the small movement in 1963, along with the first Humanistic Jewish congregation, the Birmingham Temple, in Michigan. Beth Adam had grown unhappy with the organization, in particular, as Barr explained, because the group had begun ordaining its own leaders. After about 10 years of belonging to no national organization Barr and the congregation felt the need to be in closer touch “with the issues and concerns of the wider Jewish community.” The board of Beth Adam decided to apply to join the URJ.

URJ president Alexander Schindler encouraged Beth Adam's application but took no public stand on what the Union should do, stating at the 1991 URJ biennial only that the controversy would “generate a boon to our community” by opening a debate on what a Reform congregation must accept, if anything. The debate centered on the congregation's exclusion of God from its liturgy. Neither the *Shema* nor the *kaddish* was recited, the group's literature explained, because prayers “which presume a God who intervenes or manipulates the affairs of this world” would be inconsistent with its religious message.

While some supported Beth Adam's application, the response was largely negative and even hostile, and in 1990 a majority of the CCAR Responsa Committee voted against accepting the group. Chairperson W. Gunther Plaut wrote that its “elision of God” means the congregation “does not admit of Covenant or commandments”; while the Reform movement can accept individuals who may be agnostic or even atheist, it cannot accept congregations whose declared principals contradict the religious beliefs of Reform Judaism. Three rabbis on the Responsa Committee disagreed with the majority view, arguing that to accept Beth Adam into the URJ would not necessarily imply that the Reform movement accepts its theological views. The debate continued through the early 1990s.

In June the URJ Board of Trustees spent an entire day deliberating the matter in Washington, DC. At the end of its deliberations, the board voted 115 to 13 with four abstentions to reject the application.

The Beth Adam decision meant that while congregations still had the right to adopt the prayer book of their choice or write one of their own, there were theological limits on what could legitimately be regarded as Reform liturgy. The vote also reaffirmed that the drive for inclusion did not obligate the Reform movement to accept every group from every background espousing every ideology.

**THE MOVE TOWARDS RETRADITIONALIZATION.** Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, a Reform rabbi and the president of the URJ, is leading the restructuring and revitalization of the Reform movement. When Yoffie took office the Reform movement had to either make dramatic changes or watch its fortunes fade rapidly. Large numbers in the movement have been receptive to his proposals. New approaches to study, worship, and ritual practice are being implemented.

Yoffie then outlined a plan to reform Reform. "I propose, therefore, that at this biennial assembly we proclaim a new Reform revolution. Like the original Reform revolution, it will be rooted in the conviction that Judaism is a tradition of rebellion, revival, and redefinition; and like the original too, this new initiative will make synagogue worship our Movement's foremost concern." Yoffie urged that this "worship revolution" be built on a partnership among rabbis, cantors, and lay people.

The URJ leadership has prepared a series of initiatives that taken together constitute "a Reform revolution." Many insiders are very hopeful that the coming years will see radical changes that excite Reform Jews and get them involved in concrete religious activities. To bring the synagogue back as a central Jewish institution, Reformers are developing programs that appeal to a much broader range of individuals and client groups.

Much of the success of this effort relies upon how deeply it can touch people's emotions. In his Orlando address Yoffie asked, "What will be the single most important key to the success or failure of our revolution?" And then he answered his own question: "Music." "Ritual music is a deeply sensual experience that touches people in a way that words cannot. Music converts the ordinary into the miraculous, and individuals into a community of prayer. And music enables overly-intellectual Jews to rest their minds and open their hearts."

The new programming has occurred not only within the movement itself, but also in related efforts such as the Synagogue 2000 transformation project led by Rabbis Ron Wolfson and Lawrence Hoffman. As Wolfson put it, "What defines great, spiritual davening experiences is music, music, music." Some cutting-edge congregations like B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan and Temple Sinai in Los Angeles have become nationally known for implementing vibrant music programs that draw hundreds to their Friday night and Saturday morning services. That neither congregation is affiliated with the Reform movement may not be a coincidence. A vibrant musical experience requires the congregants to actively participate, to sing the songs with passion as well as confidence, and most Reform Jews do not know the words well enough to sing along.

Their Hebrew may be poor, and not enough congregants have so far expressed the willingness to put in the time and effort necessary to acquire more advanced Hebraic skills.

The URJ has inaugurated a number of programs specifically to address this issue, among them a Hebrew literacy campaign called "Aleph Isn't Tough: An Introduction to Hebrew for Adults" launched to "open the gates of prayer" to the average Jew. The URJ's new Hebrew primers will focus not only on phonetic reading but also on the comprehension of basic prayers and text. The hope is that more and more synagogues will use these or other texts to offer a variety of adult Hebrew classes. The more Hebrew that Reform Jews know, the more accessible is the textual tradition.

Yoffie argues that in the current religious climate, concrete programming designed to get people doing *mitzvot* must precede theological formulations.

**YOUTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS.** Temple youth groups are the entry points for many young people into congregational life, and over the last several years, the Reform movement has set out aggressively to nurture the development of teen leaders not only for youth groups but also for congregations as a whole.

Once a dynamic and successful organization, NFTY failed to keep up as society changed in the 1980s and the 1990s. As a consequence, more and more youth found NFTY no longer as nifty as it had once been, and they voted with their feet, particularly after their bar and bat mitzvahs. Other youth organizations that had experienced similar problems had taken steps to remake their images and reformat their activity offerings, including the Girl Scouts, as Fox News reported in November 2000. "We're no longer about baking cookies and toasting marshmallows around the fire," one Girl Scout leader told a news crew. "We now offer young women the chance to get advanced computer training, learn marketing skills, and network widely."

Yoffie himself called the teen dropout rate in the Reform movement "appalling high." While many Reform teenagers appear to be uninterested in Reform Judaism and drop out for that reason, others claim that they would love to continue to be involved but are simply not the youth-group type. In response, Yoffie suggested revamping NFTY. To build a structure that could more effectively keep youth involved throughout their high school years, he announced that each URJ region would hire a full-time professional to organize and develop youth programming in that region. The hope was that this decentralization would allow the URJ regional directors to have more impact on youth programming, a far more effective approach than trying to run everything out of New York. Yoffie has further committed the entire movement to developing a range of new programs for teenagers who want alternatives to the standard youth group activities. His ideas include a summer travel program focusing on social action projects and a summer study program that combines SAT preparation and college visits with Judaica.

NFTY's own summer programs in Israel have proved remarkably popular, although registration dropped off precipitously as a consequence of the renewed tensions between Palestinians and Israelis. Eric Yoffie set off a controversy when he cancelled Reform youth trips to Israel at the height of the violence, arguing that it was not fair to use other people's children to make political points. In any case, the movement quickly reestablished its Zionist credentials. New trips were publicized, but it remains difficult to recruit teenagers willing to go or parents willing to allow their children to go. At its height, the summer program sent more than a dozen groups for six-week trips that incorporated touring, educational programs, and leadership training. The Israel trips were inspirational because they immersed the participant not only in the NFTY experience 24 hours a day, but also in the Israeli context. Most participants came back transformed, although it remains unclear how much of that "transformation" endured. But rabbis and educators feel convinced that a trip to Israel is one of the most significant experiences a family can give teenagers. An entirely different style of informal education is available at the Reform movement's summer camps, where generations of youngsters have had some of their most positive Jewish experiences. These regional camps provide "a joyous, invigorating and uplifting few weeks of total immersion in Judaism, with memories powerful enough to last the entire year."

The camps combine a rich Jewish atmosphere, positive development experiences, and a natural setting. As Lee Bycel explained in a temple bulletin: "No matter how much we do here at Fairmount Temple, it is hard to convey the depth and feeling of Judaism in just a few hours each week. At a Jewish summer camp, our young people are immersed in a total Jewish environment. Shabbat is a natural part of the week, which emerges from all they have learned and experienced during camp. For many years, I have spent time in our movement's summer camps. I love watching the faces on our young people as they gather for Shabbat – eager, joyful, immersed in the moment, understanding of the beauty of Shabbat, truly a sight to be seen."

Further, "Jewish summer camps can play an important role in building self-esteem. It is important for our young people to be in a healthy and safe environment, away from parents, where they can learn more about themselves and their own abilities and skills. They gain a lot by having to be responsible for themselves – and it is amazing what they can manage to do without our help." Finally, "hiking, sleeping out under the stars, having the time to see the beauty around them without a car or movies, or video games – teaches some of the most important lessons in life."

The first URJ camp in North America, was Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI) in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. When OSRUI began, the music consisted largely of folk songs and, later, of civil rights movement chants "considered to have religious significance in that they embodied Reform principles." The folk music was slowly supplemented by traditional

Jewish music and a new American Jewish folk music. OSRUI hired Debbie Friedman as a song leader in 1970 as "a new genre of music was coming to the fore. It was a Reform Jewish genre of music, songs that were mainly liturgical, written by [camp] song leaders. She brought her tunes and her compositions to the camp and helped to empower a whole generation in this region." This music continues to inspire many Reform Jews.

Friedman began song leading for her synagogue youth group in 1968, then attended a song leader workshop at the Kutz Camp Institute in Warwick, New York, and soon began writing her own music. "I taught it to a group of kids who were doing a creative service with James Taylor, Joan Baez, and Judy Collins music. Not only did they sing the *Ve-Ahavta*, they stood arm in arm. They were moved; they were crying. Here was something in a genre to which they could relate." In 1972 she recorded *Sing unto God*, an album of Sabbath songs that featured a high school choir. "I had planned [only] to make a demo tape, but when I found out it would cost only \$500 more to make 1,000 LPs, I thought, why not? They sold like hot cakes at camp. That's how it started. It was a fluke." Friedman moved to Chicago, where she began leading services and continued her youth work. Later she took a position as a cantorial soloist in California, began performing more frequently, and recorded additional albums. Soon people began using her melodies in their synagogue services.

Perhaps her most famous creation is "*Mi-she-Berakh*," composed for a *simchat hokhmah*, a celebration of wisdom, to honor a friend on her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The prayer offers the hope of healing for those suffering. "My friend was having a very difficult time in her life and a number of her friends were also struggling. Yet she had arrived at this age and was determined to embrace it." Introduced at the URJ biennial in San Francisco in 1993, the tune has become the most popular adopted liturgical melody in recent decades.

**A NEW COMMITMENT TO ADULT EDUCATION.** Because study is not solely a youth concern, the URJ leadership has committed itself to creating a "synagogue of the future" that will provide a place of serious learning for all ages. In traditional Jewish thought, God spoke to individuals through their study of sacred texts. But few in the Reform movement could read Hebrew well enough to study the texts in the original, and most of the few English translations were not suitable for adult education programs.

One indication of the URJ's commitment is a resolution on Torah study adopted at the 1997 biennial conference in Dallas:

We recognize that North American Jews face a Jewish literacy crisis. While we are the best-educated generation of Jews that has ever lived, we are often woefully ignorant of our own Jewish heritage. At the same time, we are witnessing a renewed enthusiasm for Jewish learning throughout the Reform movement. Those of us who have had the opportunity to study and taste the richness of Torah have discovered that learning is a source of inspiration and great adventure.

Adults throughout the Jewish community are finding their way back to serious textual study. Kenneth Cohen, a founding executive of the software giant Oracle, became involved in Lehrhaus, a Berkeley, California, adult education program named after Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus (Free Jewish study center), the pioneer program developed by Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and a number of other German Jewish intellectuals in Frankfurt during the interwar period. Featured in 1998 in a widely distributed report from the Jewish telegraphic agency, Cohen spoke of his motivation for studying: "It's just inevitable that you say to yourself, 'What do I want to pass on to this kid [his child] other than my stock certificates?' I had to have a higher goal." He found that "doing and receiving Jewish education is a remarkable, rewarding thing. It's passing on not the latest hot computer chip, which will be obsolete next year, but taking the accumulated knowledge of humankind and perpetuating that, passing it on to new generations and pass it on [further]."

In almost every major city today, nondenominational independent institutions offer intensive Jewish adult education. The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School Program offers a two-year, 120-hour course of study to several groups of students at a time in 34 cities. Most students in all of these programs are middle-aged baby boomers searching for meaning. "It's an awakening," says Paul Flexner of the Jewish Education Services of North America. Many had stopped their Jewish education immediately after their bar or bat mitzvah two, three, or four decades earlier. They now feel an acute awareness of how much they have missed and how much they don't know. Many feel their textual illiteracy prevents them from passing on to their children a meaningful Judaism that goes beyond superficial ethnic foods and accents.

Along with the URJ, individual synagogues are developing new approaches to attract the many congregants who do not attend Jewish study sessions. When Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, California, hired Josh Zweiback in 1998 as adult educator, he took the first full-time position in a Reform congregation in the United States intended to "develop new frontiers of education in synagogue life," according to Richard Block, the congregation's senior rabbi. Funded by the Koret Foundation of San Francisco, Zweiback interpreted his mandate as spanning a very broad spectrum, from Torah study to "all sorts of experiences including praying and giving Tzedakah." He pointed out that "distinctions between mind and body were not made in classical times: living Torah and learning Torah went hand in hand." Zweiback has tried a number of interesting ideas. On the congregation's Tikkun Olam Day, he distributed a tape about the role of social action in Judaism that included mock interviews with famous Jews throughout history, a number of Hebrew concepts relating to the subject, and the senior rabbi teaching a blessing that should be recited before performing a mitzvah.

Among new paradigms being explored are family education, where the entire family – adults and children – study and experience Judaism together, and an intensive immersion

program. Peter Knobel of Beth Emet, the Free Synagogue of Evanston, Illinois, takes about 50 members of his congregation to Jerusalem for one week every other year. "They stay in the dormitory of Hebrew Union College, and I get some of the best Jewish scholars in the world to teach them. They have been required to read a serious book on Judaism by a major scholar – they all have read it and have come prepared – and for a week they study with the scholars. We do no touring; when they are not in class they are free in Jerusalem. The success of this program indicates to me that many Jews really want to learn about the faith in a serious way." Unlike a special interest program for people from all over the country, Knobel's group comes from one temple in a Chicago suburb. The study trip's congregational nature accounts for its success, allowing the intense experience to include both extensive preparation and substantial follow-up.

### **New Definitions of Jewish Identity**

The patrilineal descent resolution was thus less a significant departure from previous Reform policy than a public declaration of inclusivity, a logical step in the open society of the United States. To move in the direction of exclusion would severely limit the pool of potential recruits, just when the Reform movement was looking for new members. The acceptance of patrilineal descent sent a clear message that the children of intermarried couples – even those who were not halakhically Jewish – were welcome in the synagogue.

**FEMINISM AND THE REFORM MOVEMENT.** Despite the Reform movement's never having opposed equal rights for women, the male hierarchical structure remained in place until the 1960s. The push for egalitarianism was not a high priority for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers, who were far more concerned with reforming the liturgy and adapting Judaism's religious beliefs to the surrounding cultural environment.

Yet until the 1960s, most Reform congregations were run by men, and their dominance was accepted without question. Fitting in was important, and congregational social mores reflected the society's. Whether immigrant or native born, American Jews adjusted to American values and wanted to see those values reflected in their congregational structure and activities. This meant that women in the typical Reform congregation were relegated to the traditional woman's role, a situation accepted by almost all parties without dissent. Sisterhoods served central functions in temple life; without them, many if not most activities would have been impossible. Whether they were baking cakes for fundraising purposes, preparing the confirmation dinner, or simply attending services, women constituted the backbone of Reform religious and social life.

But in the 1960s, the feminist movement began to challenge the traditional roles assigned to women. Through the 1970s and 1980s, its impact on the synagogue was immense. As women began to move into roles of responsibility traditionally assigned to men, there was a great deal of dissonance. Rachel Adler, an early Jewish feminist and then a lecturer at

HUC-JIR in Los Angeles, in 1983 summarized the feeling of many women: "Being a Jewish woman is very much like being Alice at the Hatter's tea party. We did not participate in making the rules, nor were we there at the beginning of the party. At best, a jumble of crockery is being shoved aside to clear a place for us. At worst, we are only tantalized with the tea and bread-and-butter, while being confused, shamed and reproached for our ignorance." Women in the Reform movement studied for the rabbinate, the cantorate, and other professional positions, while others became synagogue presidents rather than sisterhood presidents. What had been seen as an oddity became an accepted phenomenon, then so commonplace as to be unworthy of note.

Many of the leading feminists were Jewish, and some of them took an interest in Jewish affairs. Other women admired the feminist leaders and specifically wanted to apply their perspective in a Jewish context. The Reform movement provided an ideal setting for this synthesis because of its non-halakhic nature, allowing a much greater flexibility than could have developed in Orthodox or even Conservative Judaism. Women wanted to be treated on an equal basis with men, both in the synagogue power structure and in their portrayal in the myths of the tradition.

#### **The Struggle for the Ordination of Women as Rabbis**

While the issue of women's ordination is only one aspect of the struggle for gender equality in the Reform synagogue, it is important not only for its symbolic value, but also for opening the way for women to increase in their influence dramatically. The ordination of Sally Priesand in 1972 was an extraordinary event, because HUC-JIR was the first major rabbinical program in the history of Judaism to ordain a woman rabbi.

By the time Sally Priesand had finished her studies at HUC-JIR, the impact of feminism had transformed the Reform movement to a degree unimaginable just a few decades earlier. Nelson Glueck supported her petition – there was little basis upon which to deny her the certificate of ordination. Unfortunately, Glueck died before he could actually ordain Priesand, and new HUC-JIR president Alfred Gottschalk conducted the ordination ceremony. After a stint as an assistant rabbi and then as a chaplain, Priesand joined Monmouth Reform Temple in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, where she continued as the rabbi.

THE IMPACT OF FEMINISM ON REFORM LITURGY. Many modern American women found the language of the traditional prayer book restrictive and even sexist. Based on biblical models that portrayed God solely in masculine terms, the prayers assume that public worship is an obligation primarily for men. For example, the prayer that began "Praise be our God, God of our Fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob" now seemed exclusionary. Where were the matriarchs? In 1972, a task force on equality, arguing that such language misleads worshippers about the true nature of both human beings and God, recommended altering masculine references in prayer. In the resulting effort to rewrite the

prayers to reflect the growing egalitarian nature of American Jewish thinking, the names of the matriarchs were added in a series of gender-sensitive prayer books published in the early 1990s. The same prayer now reads, "Praised be our God, the God of our Fathers and our Mothers: God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob; God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God of Leah, and God of Rachel."

Dealing with the names of God framed in the masculine form was more difficult. In English, Reform prayer books had referred to God as "He" and "Him" and called God "the Lord." These references could be changed, but the practical problem of replacing prayer books in use for only a short time was daunting. Some congregations developed a list of gender-sensitive words that could be substituted for masculine references to God. Thus, the word "God" might be used to replace "the Lord" each time that phrase appeared in the prayer book. But this could confuse congregants, who had to be exceptionally alert to make all the correct substitutions in the right places and at the right times. In the mid-1990s a series of soft-cover experimental gender-sensitive prayer books, then a hard-cover gender-sensitive version intended to be semi-permanent, gradually supplanted the original Sabbath prayer book *Gates of Prayer*. A new gender-sensitive edition is under way.

Congregations did not want to replace the new edition of the High Holy Day prayer book, *Gates of Repentance*, so soon. The solution was a gender-sensitive version that matched the original, page for page. Unfortunately, many found the mix of the two High Holy Day prayer books in the same service confusing, as their neighbors seemed to be reading from a different text than they were. But the production of new prayer books would eventually resolve such issues. Most Reform Jews adjusted to the new liturgy and accepted the gender-sensitive wording without a murmur. Many women found it empowering and exhilarating.

Priesand's ordination opened the door for many other women interested in careers to which rabbinical ordination could provide them access. Large numbers applied to cantorial as well as rabbinical programs at HUC-JIR. The Rabbi Sally J. Priesand Visiting Professorship was launched in the fall of 1999 at HUC-JIR in New York. By May 2001, 373 women were ordained. At HUC-JIR in Los Angeles, the very first group of female ordainees in May of 2002 includes five women out of eight rabbinical graduates. Six women have been ordained in the Israeli program on the Jerusalem campus.

The increasingly active role that women are playing in the Reform congregation has fueled concerns that an increasing number of men may walk away from active leadership involvement. This phenomenon is not new; many-19<sup>th</sup> century Reform rabbis complained that their congregations on Shabbat morning were composed primarily of women, children, and the elderly. But if the new trends increase the alienation of Jewish men from the temple, the yoke of Jewish communal leadership may fall more and more on female shoulders. Others worry that Jewish professional work is starting to be seen as more suitable for women than men. There is a persistent

rumor that HUC-JIR deliberately admits fewer women than men to avoid the “feminization” of the rabbinate. Some older male rabbis have grumbled that the rabbinate is becoming a “woman’s profession” and, like grammar-school teaching and nursing, will decline in professional status and in salary range. They cite studies suggesting that when women enter certain professions in large numbers, those fields undergo profound and – from their perspective – negative changes.

Many women rabbis complain that their career path has been blocked. In Sylvia Barack Fishman’s terminology, they had to break through “Jewish ceilings.” Only a handful have been appointed as senior rabbis of large congregations in recent years. Paula Reimers, a rabbi in Arizona, said in 1992: “It’s the same old story. Everyone is in favor of women rabbis – until it comes time to hire one. A congregation would rather take an incompetent man than a woman. Women are picked last.” Such complaints, frequent in the early years, seem to have diminished, if not disappeared. Although a shortage of rabbis may explain the change in part, an increasing willingness to accept women in the rabbinate is apparent. Many congregations have had positive experiences with women rabbis; many boards may have found that female rabbis are more likely to deliver the type of service their congregation needs. In the face of this pragmatic reality, any residual resistance quickly melts away. Women cantors in the Reform movement have had an easier path in the years since Barbara Ostfield Horowitz was invested in 1975 as the first female cantor. An almost continuous shortage of ordained Reform cantors has guaranteed enough pulpits for all graduates of the School of Sacred Music at HUC-JIR in New York. Furthermore, it is easier for many of the old-fashioned congregants to accept a woman cantor than a woman rabbi, perhaps because cantors are perceived as subordinate to the rabbi. The fine voices of many of the women may also have dissipated potential opposition, as congregants discovered the new cantor’s leading of the service to be a pleasant experience.

An increasing number of congregations simply take the equality of men and women for granted.

Laura Geller, the senior rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills since 1994, believes that she exemplifies a feminine approach to the rabbinate. “My style is one of shared leadership – I would argue that’s a feminine model of leadership. Our congregation is not a hierarchy, but a series of concentric circles. One of my very clear goals is to empower lay people to mentor young people, lead services, teach, and really take responsibility for their own Jewish life.” Credited with shattering the “stained-glass ceiling” by becoming the first female senior rabbi at a major metropolitan synagogue, Geller has been followed by senior rabbis Marcia Zimmerman at Temple Israel in Minneapolis and Amy Schwartzman at Temple Rodeph Sholom in Falls Church, Virginia. Geller wonders: “Are there so few of us in senior rabbi positions because we’re not choosing them, or because we’re not given a shot at it? The answer is a bit of both.”

“I have come to discover, through my involvement over

the years, that when women’s voices are heard, a tradition changes,” Geller says. “What happens when women become engaged in creating and reforming Jewish experience [is that] our experience becomes central and not marginal, and deserving of blessing and ceremony.”

**THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY.** The issue of \*homosexuality cuts to the heart of how the Reform movement deals with the conflicting demands of tradition and modernity. Here is a case where the tradition could not be clearer – homosexuality was prohibited in the strongest terms. Yet liberal American Jews felt they had to find a way to reconcile this condemnation with their contemporary values. How the Reform rabbinate handled this sensitive question is worth a close look.

The CCAR first dealt with the issue of homosexuality in the mid-1970s and soon after was supporting human rights as well as civil liberties for gays and lesbians. Most Reform rabbis took liberal positions across the board and so were quick to embrace what many saw as another liberal social cause. One issue that concerned still closeted gay and lesbian rabbis was the impact on their career trajectory should they declare themselves publicly. HUC-JIR did not officially admit openly gay students, and the CCAR did not guarantee to support gay rabbis looking for congregational employment. In 1986, Margaret Moers Wenig and Margaret Holub proposed a CCAR resolution that recommended a nondiscriminatory admissions policy for HUC-JIR and a nondiscriminatory placement policy for the Rabbinical Placement Commission (RPC). The motion was not voted on but referred to the newly created Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate chaired by Selig Salkowitz.

The 17-member committee – eight congregational rabbis and representatives of HUC-JIR, UAHC, and the RPC – met regularly for study and deliberation for more than four years. They talked often with leaders of other Jewish denominations as well as with the Progressive movement in Israel. Consulting with Reform leaders in Israel was particularly important because any American resolution favoring gay rights would be used as a political weapon by the Orthodox in Israel, who opposed religious pluralism in the Jewish State. Israeli Reform rabbis told the Americans that any such resolution would make their already difficult position even more so, but this information had little impact.

In the belief that gays and lesbians were entitled to equal religious as well as civil rights, many Reform rabbis felt it was important to push ahead. Whereas the Orthodox saw homosexuals as violating an explicit commandment of the Torah, most Reformers saw them as people who needed and wanted the same spiritual sustenance available to heterosexuals. Alexander Schindler, well known for confronting controversial issues head-on, gave a public address in November 1989 adding his voice to those already supporting gay rights. “If those who have studied these matters are correct, one half million of our fellow Jews, no less than one hundred thousand Reform Jews, are gay. They are our fellow congregants, our friends

and committee members and, yes, our leaders both professional and lay.”

In June of that year at a CCAR meeting in Seattle, there was a debate on a widely publicized report issued by the CCAR's Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate. As a part of the educational process, the committee invited four Reform rabbis to prepare and submit papers on the topic of “Homosexuality, the Rabbinate, and Liberal Judaism.” Despite the appearance of an active debate, it was clear that the movement as a whole would support greater rights for gays and lesbians. It was less clear exactly what the CCAR would decide concerning some of the technical questions.

In 1990 the committee issued a report noting that the Bible uses the harshest terms to condemn male homosexual behavior, referring to it repeatedly as a *to'evah*, an abomination. The Talmud and Codes reinforce the position that any male or female homosexual activity was strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, the committee rejected this position as untenable and stated that “all Jews are religiously equal, regardless of their sexual orientation.” While the committee recognized that, in the Jewish tradition, heterosexual monogamous procreative marriage is the ideal, “there are other human relationships which possess ethical and spiritual value, and... there are some people for whom heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage is not a viable option or possibility.” Thus the committee took the position that a homosexual relationship could possess spiritual value for those who could not form a heterosexual union.

One of the most pressing questions was how HUC-JIR should deal with gay and lesbian applicants to the rabbinical program, for although the two are separate organizations, it was expected that all rabbinic graduates of HUC-JIR would become Reform rabbis and join the CCAR. Gary Zola, HUC-JIR's national dean of admissions, showed the committee a written policy statement issued by HUC-JIR president Alfred Gottschalk on February 8, 1990. Gottschalk wrote, “The College will consider any qualified candidate in terms of an applicant's overall suitability for the rabbinate, his/her qualifications to serve the Jewish community effectively, and to find personal fulfillment within the rabbinate.” The HUC-JIR Dean's Council felt that sexual orientation should not be a consideration in a candidate's decision to apply for admission; “I underline, however, that this does not commit us to the acceptance or rejection of any single student. Each applicant is judged as an individual on the basis of his total profile.”

**THE CONTEMPORARY REALITY.** In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Reform Judaism is a pluralistic American religious denomination. No one could possibly argue that one must accept a specific set of theological principles in order to be a Reform Jew in good standing. Yet the movement is thriving. New congregations are joining the URJ and existing ones are increasing their membership. This popularity has little to do with Reform's specific theological formulations. Rather, the flexibility that has emerged from its theological pluralism has allowed

the movement to draw strength from new types of adherents while creating new enthusiasm among substantial numbers of longtime members.

The Reform movement has come a long way from the theological uniformity of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform. By the 1970s, there was such full acceptance of a wide range of traditions, customs, and practices that it would have been ridiculous to suggest that one official standard was uniformly accepted and required for a Reform service of any type. Behind this diversity of ritual expression lay the acceptance of the idea that there was no one Reform theology, that Reform Judaism represented many different ways of thinking about God and the relationship between God and the Jewish people.

Eugene Borowitz acknowledges this pluralism explicitly in his book *Liberal Judaism*, published by the URJ in 1984. He asks, “Who is a good Jew?” And he answers, “I consider nothing more fundamental to being a good Jew than belief in God.” But he goes on to suggest that there are many different ways of looking at God, and that many of them can be religiously authentic for a believing Jew. “With our religious and communal authority largely replaced by the insistence of modern Jews on thinking for themselves, no one can easily claim the authority to overrule competing views.” In discussing how Jews may legitimately view God, Borowitz admits: “With our new appreciation of pluralism, we have also gained greater appreciation of the extraordinary openness with which Judaism has allowed people to talk of God. ‘My’ good Jew believes in God but not necessarily in my view of God. We have numerous differing interpretations of what God might mean for a contemporary Jew... I am saying that we Jews have been and remain fundamentally a religion, not that we are very dogmatic about it.” From a theological point of view, the acceptance of such a broad spectrum of beliefs makes it impossible to present a clear and compelling religious vision that could motivate followers to sacrifice for the sake of God. There are simply too many images of God for the group to agree on any one. On the other hand, this theological diversity allows the Reform movement to reach out to a broad spectrum of people who differ not only in their lifestyles, but also in their religious convictions.

The pluralistic nature of American religion has mushroomed over the past 25 years. “Spiritual individualism” has become an important force as congregants became less willing to sit quietly listening to the choir sing and the rabbi sermonize. They expect to participate actively in a common spiritual quest. More and more Americans seek inspiration from their personal life experiences rather than from a doctrine handed down through creedal statements or religious hierarchies. “Spirituality” is becoming more and more detached from traditional religion. In an increasingly therapeutic age, religion will be viewed as just another means of solving or at least coping with emotional and even medical problems.

Despite these trends, the Reform movement would again urge Reform Jews to embrace traditional rituals and to this end would debate and pass yet another theological statement,

the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform. But in spite of arguments over its substance among the Classical Reformers and the neo-Reformers, the movement has continued to grow, further proof that Reform thrives because of, not despite, its pluralism.

### **Problems Facing the Reform Movement in Israel**

With such a diverse population expressing such a multiplicity of views and practicing religion in so many different ways, one might expect the Reform movement to find a ready niche in Israeli religious life. This has not proven to be the case. Since Israel's rabbinate controls all issues of personal status, non-Orthodox rabbis in that country are not able to perform legally binding marriage ceremonies, divorces, or even most burials. Reform and Conservative conversions are accepted by the Jewish Agency, thus allowing such individuals to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return. Such converts, however, will not be recognized as Jews by the chief rabbinate and may therefore have problems once they settle in the country.

Complex and multifaceted problems face the Reform movement in Israel. The early Jewish settlers came from countries that lacked the pluralistic religious environment that would have allowed alternative forms of religious expression to develop. The settlers arrived in a Palestine ruled by the Turks, who likewise did not encourage Western liberal cultural or intellectual developments. The early Zionist pioneers included few Western immigrants, and most of those who did settle in Israel adapted themselves to the prevailing social and religious norms. While Maurice Eisendrath had argued in favor of the creation of an Israeli Reform movement as early as 1953, not until the late 1960s did the World Union for Progressive Judaism develop an Israeli movement, and not until 1968 did the group hold a biennial conference in that country.

Over the past three decades, the World Union has devoted much effort to building up the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), which was incorporated under Israeli law in 1971. The Israeli leaders chose to refer to themselves as the movement for *Yahadut Mitkademet*, Progressive Judaism, avoiding the use of the term "reform." By doing so they hoped to minimize the negative associations that many Israelis have of the American Reform movement. Particularly damaging was a video replayed on Israeli TV a number of years ago of an American Reform rabbi and a priest co-officiating at a wedding ceremony, a sight many Israelis, including many secularists, found shocking and offensive. The 2000 Greensboro, North Carolina, CCAR resolution sanctioning same-sex unions has attracted a great deal of attention and criticism. Israeli Orthodox leaders, including politicians, argue that the Reform movement has encouraged assimilation and has proven itself a destructive force. Periodically, well-known Israeli Orthodox rabbis have attacked Reform Judaism and its adherents, sometimes in the vilest of terms. Nevertheless, Israeli-born Reform leaders such as Uri Regev, founder of the Israel Religious Action Center and now executive director of the WUPJ, have become well-known personalities interviewed frequently by TV news crews. Regev has made a great deal of

progress in pushing for greater rights through the court system. Each time he has petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court, news media interviewed him on the importance of his petition and his understanding of why it was necessary to change the religious status quo, further positive publicity for the Progressive movement.

Many non-Orthodox Israelis have been positively impressed. A few years ago, a number of leading Israeli writers and intellectuals called on the Israeli public to join the Reform movement to protest the Orthodox monopoly on life-cycle ceremonies. The Orthodox in turn renewed their attacks on the Reform movement. Orthodox spokesmen continued to lambaste Reform Judaism, and unknown individuals suspected to be from the ultra-Orthodox community vandalized buildings associated with Reform institutions.

But Orthodox hostility, only one facet of the problem, could work in the Progressive movement's favor, since many secular Israelis harbor resentment toward what they see as the religious coercion of the Orthodox. But the coalition agreements between the Labor and Likud Parties and one or more Orthodox parties have insured that the status quo is maintained in religious matters. As a consequence, an Orthodox rabbi must certify weddings between Jews, for example, although a few sympathetic Orthodox rabbis have signed for a Reform or Conservative rabbi who is the actual officiant. But the Orthodox rabbinate has worked vigorously to clamp down on those who helped circumvent the system. Most Jews who marry in a Reform ceremony in Israel then go to Cyprus to receive a civil marriage license, as the Israeli Ministry of Interior will accept any marriage certificate issued by an official government. Thus, the Israeli government recognizes a marriage certificate signed by a Cypriot judge but not one signed by an Israeli Reform rabbi.

There have been some encouraging developments. As part of a series of public relations campaigns, the IMPJ launched a \$350,000 media blitz right before the High Holy Days of 1999, to encourage Israelis to attend a Progressive or Masorti (Conservative) synagogue. Billboards, posters on buses, and newspaper supplements featured the slogan, "There is more than one way to be Jewish." The accompanying radio campaign became immersed in controversy after the government-owned Israeli state radio tried to cancel the advertisements, claiming the wording would offend Orthodox Jews. The Supreme Court issued a show-cause order, and the campaign was allowed to proceed after IMPJ and Masorti leaders agreed to change the slogan on the radio to, "This is our way – you just have to choose." The IMPJ reported that an estimated 20,000 Israelis filled 27 synagogues and additional facilities rented for the High Holy Days. Many congregations doubled the number of attendees from just a year earlier. The IMPJ received many phone inquiries about membership and even a few requests for information on how to form congregations.

In March 2000, the IMPJ worked together with Israel's Masorti movement to promote non-Orthodox marriage ceremonies. The campaign ran full-page advertisements in the

weekend editions of the major Israeli newspapers and four hundred radio ads featuring couples who had been married in either Progressive or Masorti ceremonies. The ads emphasized the egalitarian nature of the non-Orthodox wedding ceremony, as well as the lack of the intrusive questions Orthodox rabbis usually ask. The campaign also stated clearly that under current Israeli law, the couple would need to marry a second time in a civil ceremony abroad for their marriage to be recognized by the Interior Ministry.

The IMPJ is also continuing efforts to reach Russian-speaking immigrants. In February 2000, Michael Brodsky and a number of other Russian speakers published their first edition of the revised *Rodnik* (The source). Originally geared toward Jews in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the magazine had shifted its focus to the emerging local movements. Now the editors refocused it on issues of interest to Israeli immigrants from the FSU. Brodsky, previously spokesperson for the Yisrael ba-Aliyah political party, now serves as the IMPJ's liaison with Russian-language media outlets. The IMPJ is also working with a number of Russian-language groups in Haifa, Nahariyyah, Netanyah, and Ra'anannah. In August 2000, a congregation for immigrants from the FSU was founded in Ashdod. The group began meeting for *havdalah* services on Saturday nights and expanded to Friday night services led by HUC rabbinical students from the Jerusalem campus. The IMPJ hired a paraprofessional community organizer for the group and has hired similar community workers for the other Russian-language groups in Israel.

The IMPJ has recently formed a number of new congregations. Yozma in Modi'in, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, already has established four kindergarten classes as well as a first grade. Sulam Ya'akov was established in Zichron Ya'akov, between Tel Aviv and Haifa. Gusti Yehoshua-Braverman, the director of community development for the Israeli Progressive movement, states: "We must establish new congregations. However, we must also rejuvenate those that already exist but are struggling because they lack a rabbi or are in the periphery." Some long-standing congregations have expanded their programming, including Ahvat Yisrael in Rishon le-Zion near Tel Aviv, which has also recently hired a community coordinator. The congregation has a growing Jewish study group that regularly brings in well-known guest lecturers and was recently given a city-owned building for its exclusive use. The structure is a former kindergarten in a quiet leafy neighborhood in the city. According to congregational chairperson Shai Eitan, it will need to be extensively renovated but offers "tremendous potential." In Nahariyyah, Emet Ve'shalom offers a lecture and field trip program for about 150 new immigrants. The IMPJ also caters to those with special needs. The movement offers special Shabbat activities for the residents of Kishor, a community of about 70 people with learning, functioning, and adaptive disabilities – a candle-lighting ceremony, *kiddush*, *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and other religious programming three times a month. Joint activities with the IMPJ-affiliated Harhalutz and the IMPJ's Young Adult Leadership Forum are also undertaken.

The Reform movement has built an impressive complex on King David Street in Jerusalem; it includes the Israeli campus of Hebrew Union College and Mercaz Shimshon, the WUPJ's cultural center, which opened in October 2000. Designed by world-famous architect Moshe Safdie, the \$15 million facility was built adjacent to Beit Shmuel, WUPJ headquarters. Both centers offer panoramic views of Jaffa Gate, David's Citadel, and the walls of the Old City.

While the movement faced a great deal of resistance, land has been designated for Progressive congregational building projects in a number of municipalities. Affluent families in the area are enthusiastic about holding their sons' bar mitzvah ceremonies in the beautiful new Beit Daniel in North Tel Aviv. At services, the families seem to adjust without any problem to the mixed seating and the use of *Ha-Avodah she-Balev* (The service of the heart), the Israeli Progressive prayer book. There are now approximately 30 Progressive congregations in the country. Those with their own buildings and full-time rabbis have tended to attract a clientele looking for bar mitzvah celebrations, High Holy Day services, and so forth.

The Reform movement has poured effort and money into building up the Progressive presence in the State of Israel, yet the fear remains that the government would move quickly to pass new laws to bypass any legal gains achieved through future rulings by the High Court of Justice, the Israeli supreme court. Shas and other ultra-Orthodox political parties have already indicated their intention to do just that, if the need should arise. Until the movement can achieve official recognition and equal legal status with the Orthodox, it will remain a small, struggling, barely tolerated denomination on the fringes of Israeli life. The marginalization of the Israeli Progressive movement threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the Reform movement in the United States and throughout the world.

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[Dana Evan Kaplan (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]

**REFUGEES (1933–1949).** When the Nazis came to power, many Jews believed that this chapter in German history would soon pass, that Germany would come to its senses, and that Hitler could not last long. Over time, however, the ranks of the pessimists swelled. After *\*Kristallnacht* (the November 1938 pogroms) for most German Jews the question was not whether to leave but where to go. Could a place of refuge be found? Would some country – any country – be willing to receive Jews? By the beginning of the war, the quest for refuge became a matter of life and death.

The first wave of German Jews seeking refuge began in 1933 when according to Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden records, 52,000 Jews left and 37,000 who were abroad remained there. In 1934 the pace of emigration slowed down as conditions stabilized and after the Nuremberg laws of 1935, it once again intensified. Most Jews went to neighboring countries presuming that they were leaving Germany for a time and not for good and never imagining that Germany would conquer the lands in which they had found refuge. By 1938 approximately one in four Jews had left. Some countries were willing to receive some Jews but never in the numbers that would resolve the problem; Turkey imported professors, architects, musicians, physicians, and lawyers to Westernize their country.

The quest for refuge was related to the perception of the viability of Jewish life in Germany. The calmer things remained the more Jews stayed and after periods of turmoil the pace of Jewish emigration quickened. By early 1938 the process of Aryanization had impoverished many Jews, making their lives within Germany ever more difficult and making them even less desirable to potential countries of refuge. In March, Germany entered Austria and as 200,000 more Jews became part of the expanded Reich, the Anschluss reversed, seemingly overnight, the “progress” that Germany had made during the previous years to be rid of its Jews. Efforts were made to speed up the emigration of Jews and Adolf *\*Eichmann* was dispatched to Vienna to organize the departure of its Jews. His success there propelled his career. The *\*Evian Conference* of July 1938, convened ostensibly to solve the refugee crisis, proved that countries were unwilling to receive the Jews, at least not in sufficient numbers to handle the crisis. Only the Dominican Republic was willing to receive a large number of refugees, the comfortable euphemism for Jews.

In October 1938, things went from bad to worse. Jews of Polish origin living in Germany were expelled, and in November *Kristallnacht* made matters all the more urgent.

At the beginning of the Jewish quest for refuge, Jews could leave with their possessions and could dispose of what they had in an orderly fashion. Year after year, this became less possible. Economic restrictions on the Jews undermined their basic ability to earn a living and Aryanization deprived them of businesses and resources. By the late 1930s many were impoverished and appeared desperate. The *\*Haavara agreement* of 1933, which permitted Jews to dispose of their property in Germany and receive a percentage of their capital in Palestine, was not augmented by any other agreements.

[Aryeh Tartakower / Michael Berenbaum (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]

### High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany

When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, thousands of Jews, together with many non-Jewish anti-Nazis, were compelled to take refuge in adjacent countries. Democratic governments and large Jewish organizations exerted pressure on the League of Nations to deal with the refugee problem. On Oct. 26, 1933, the League appointed James G. *\*McDonald* as high commissioner for refugees from Germany, with the task of negotiating for international collaboration for solving the economic, financial, and social problems of the refugees. In order to avoid offense to Germany, at that time still a member of the League, the high commissioner worked independently and did not report to the League Council but to its own governing body. Its budget was mainly provided by Jewish organizations. The high commissioner achieved little except for conventions on political and legal protection (in 1933 and 1938), and, convinced that without the authority of the League his efforts were useless, he resigned on Dec. 27, 1935. In February 1936, after Germany left the League, Sir Neill Malcolm (1869–1953) succeeded McDonald as high commissioner, this time with direct responsibility to the League. In May 1938 his office was extended to help refugees from Austria, but it was limited to legal and political protection for refugees and intervention with the governments of the countries of asylum in order to provide residence and work permits. On Sept. 30, 1938, the Assembly of the League decided to merge the existing Nansen Office for Refugees of the League with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany and on Jan. 1, 1939, it appointed Sir Herbert Emerson (1881–1962) as high commissioner for all refugees for a period of five years. Despite the League’s efforts to ease the situation of the refugees, the practical results were not encouraging. However, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany was marginally useful both in securing legal status for stateless refugees and in coordinating the work of the numerous Jewish voluntary and philanthropic organizations.

In 1939 the situation became ever more desperate. Jews were willing to go anywhere. Seventeen thousand Jews arrived in Shanghai. Jews from Eastern Europe were later to join them in Japanese-occupied China. But there were few places to go. The United States operated on a quota system. A British White Paper limited the number of Jews immigrating to Palestine. Cuba and the United States turned away the ship *\*St. Louis*