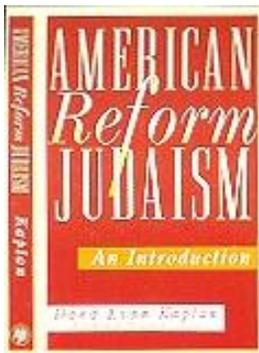


SIGNIFICANT JEWISH BOOKS

By Bonny V. Fetterman

[Please see the Study Guides for Significant Jewish Books](#)



American Reform Judaism: An Introduction

Written by Dana Evan Kaplan
(Rutgers University Press, 288 pp., hardcover \$60,
paperback \$22)

In his introduction to the American Reform Movement, Dana Evan Kaplan, a Reform rabbi and professor of Judaic studies, describes the following scenario: an Orthodox Jew stumbles into a Reform Friday night service and is shocked to find some of the women wearing *yarmulkes* and *tallitot*, while many men sit bare-headed and bare-shouldered. The phenomenon he is discussing--the interplay between tradition and innovation--raises the question: is the Reform Movement moving in two directions at the same time?

Kaplan explains that the tensions in the Movement and its seemingly contradictory tendencies came to a head in the debate over a new Reform platform considered by the Central Conference of American Rabbis at its 1999 convention. Some rabbis and congregants opposed the reintroduction of traditional rituals, calling it a betrayal of the Classical Reform principles that they grew up with; others hailed it as a move towards building the kind of distinctive spiritual community that a younger generation craves.

To solve this conflict, Kaplan calls for greater theological clarity. "If the Reform movement is to prosper and grow, both numerically and religiously, it is going to have to develop a coherent, effective strategy for reconciling autonomy and authority," he writes. In the book's Afterword, UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie provides a contravening perspective, stating that the formulation of a new theology is not required at this time. "We need to immerse ourselves in Jewish *doing*, guided always by our liberal principles, and if we do so, appropriate theological formulation will be developed afterwards," Yoffie writes.

Kaplan's concise presentation of Reform history--including chapters on the developments of recent decades: patrilineal descent, Outreach, women's impact on the rabbinate, revitalizing worship, and more--is essential reading for everyone concerned with the future of Reform Judaism.

Editor's note: The UAHC recommends two titles every quarter for book groups. A discussion guide is available on the [UAHC Significant Jewish Books Web site](#).

Bonny V. Fetterman is literary editor of Reform Judaism magazine.