

How the Status of Reform Judaism in Israel Has Affected Reform Jewish Perceptions of Zionism and Israel

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Reform Jews from all over the world have struggled since 1958 to build a progressive religious movement in Israel, under difficult circumstances. Building a vibrant, indigenous Israeli Reform Judaism is a crucial element in Reform's survival. As Rabbi Richard Hirsch, then-executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, wrote in 1999, "If Progressive Judaism can develop and thrive only in a non-Jewish environment, if we cannot succeed in impacting on the lives and values of Jews living in the Jewish state, then the charges of our critics may be substantiated." Therefore, he argued, the test of Jewish authenticity lies in whether we can build a vibrant movement in Israel: "If we succeed in Israel, we pass the test. If we fail in Israel, then doubt is cast on the authenticity of our Diaspora movement."¹

The State of Israel has played an important role in Reform Jewish identity since its creation in 1948.² While the Reform Movement had been anti-Zionist from 1897 until 1937, and non-Zionist from 1937 to 1948, the movement moved quickly to embrace the new reality immediately following the creation of the State of Israel. A Reform Zionist organization was created. Educational materials began to feature Israel prominently. The liturgy was adapted to incorporate concern for the welfare of the State of Israel and those defending it. Israeli Hebrew pronunciation became normative.

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Israel became an important mechanism for galvanizing concern for Jewish causes and motivating a potentially apathetic laity. Along with the rest of the American Jewish community, Reform Jews were deeply concerned about the threat to Israel's existence during the 1967 crisis and were thrilled by Israel's seemingly miraculous victory in the Six-Day War. Reform Jews were again extremely worried when Israel was attacked on Yom Kippur 1973 and enormously relieved when Israel was able to reverse the tide of the war and emerge victorious once again. Individual Reform Jews donated huge sums of money to Israel, and Reform congregations organized campaigns to support Israel in myriad ways.

While Reform Jews worked to help Israel, Israel consciousness helped to maintain enthusiasm for Jewish identity and the Reform Jewish agenda over two or three decades when interest in religion was waning among many in the United States. Israel provided an important, perhaps crucial, rallying cry keeping congregants involved who might otherwise have disaffiliated from Reform. Therefore, the Reform Movement benefited greatly from the embrace of Zionism, using it as a mechanism for instilling support and generating enthusiasm. NFTY launched summer trips for Reform Jewish youth, and the movement established the NFTY High School in Israel–Eisendrath International Experience (EIE), a semester-long study program based Kibbutz Tzuba. Reform families began choosing to hold bar or bat mitzvah ceremonies in Israel, and many Reform temples began organizing congregational trips to Israel. The HUC-JIR requires rabbinic and cantorial students to complete their first year of study in Israel. Jerusalem is now one of the cities in which the CCAR holds its annual conference.

Because the Reform Movement has relied on Israel in this way, there has been a reluctance to confront potentially problematic aspects of the creation and growth of the Jewish state. The leadership of the Reform Movement certainly acknowledged problems existed. In 1970, UAHC president Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath agreed with those Israelis who were criticizing “ostrich-like denial” of a Palestinian claim to land that Israel had conquered in 1967. In 1953, Eisendrath had called on the Reform Movement to help create an indigenous form of progressive, liberal Judaism in the State of Israel. On both of these issues, and others as well,

Eisendrath was well ahead of his time, although the issues were not emphasized in congregational life. For most American Reform Jews, Israel was a miracle that had arisen from the ashes of the Holocaust. It was a miraculous narrative of the few defeating the many in order to build the first independent Jewish state in two thousand years. Nothing should be said or done that might jeopardize the miracle. Not until the “Who is a Jew?” controversies of the 1970s and 1980s did even the leaders of the Reform Movement begin to object to the lack of Israeli governmental recognition of Reform Judaism and non-Orthodox Judaism generally. Even then, it was felt that to attack Israel for not recognizing Reform Judaism would harm the interests of the Jewish people, broadly conceived, which would be completely unacceptable to nearly everyone. It would in addition harm the Reform Movement itself, given Reform’s heavy reliance on Israel to create a strong, positive sense of Jewish identity.

Israel’s difficulty with Reform comes from the fact that most of its population originated in regions lacking a strong Enlightenment tradition. They arrived in the country with the perception that there was one authentic form of Judaism, Orthodoxy, whose halachic dictates they either continued to follow or later abandoned. But the terms of religious conceptualization were framed in black and white: “Orthodox” to mean religious and “secular” to mean devoid of religious attachments. From the Reform point of view, this Israeli framework of religious experience has no room for those who would integrate advances in science and technology—as well as philosophy, history, archaeology, and biblical studies—into their religious understanding.

The State of Israel recognizes only Orthodox Judaism, and only certain Orthodox leaders at that, as authoritative representatives of the Jewish religion. Only this self-selected group has the authority to perform civilly recognized weddings, for example. Since there is no separation of church and state in Israel, a couple who wants to marry in a Jewish ceremony must go to one of these Orthodox rabbis—and only these rabbis. If they don’t want to or if the rabbi deems them insufficiently Jewish, not only can’t they have their government-sanctioned religious wedding in Israel, they can’t even obtain a civil marriage license. The monopoly granted to these Orthodox rabbis stifles religious pluralism in Israel and makes life difficult for hundreds of thousands of its citizens.

The status of Reform Judaism in Israel is increasingly problematic, complicating Reform Movement development in Israel and harming Progressive Judaism's long-term prospects around the world. This story of the struggle for religious pluralism in Israel is relatively well known. For example, the Women of the Wall controversy has drawn extensive attention for some time now. Less researched is the impact of the Israeli religious pluralism problem on Reform Jews in the United States and on Reform Judaism theologically, liturgically, and sociologically.

That the State of Israel treats Jewish denominations unequally, assigning discrete legal statuses to individuals based on denominational affiliation, is upsetting to many liberal supporters of Israel in the West. Moreover, hostile comments from ultra-Orthodox politicians, and even from politicians who present themselves as secular, are becoming increasingly unsettling. Non-Orthodox forms of Judaism, they warn, are not normative and will harm us by promoting assimilation. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the URJ objects, "Without a vibrant alternative to ultra-Orthodoxy, many choose assimilation."³ American Reform and other liberal Jews have grown more displeased as Israelis, from average citizens to those in power, make ever more clear that they dismiss non-Orthodox denominations as near-cults. They are wrong to do so, according to Jacobs. "Our Judaism," he counters, "is innovative, inclusive, egalitarian, joyful, probing, spiritually open and inspiring . . . reshaping the landscape of Jewish life."⁴

Even before the current crisis over the permanent freezing of the Western Wall compromise, savvy observers were suggesting that the chasm was widening. Former *New Republic* literary editor Leon S. Wieseltier did not mince words, saying, "The primary reason for the widening chasm between the two communities is the behavior of the (Orthodox chief) rabbinate in Israel toward the Jews of America. I am referring to its relationship to Reform and Conservative Jews and to the Women of the Wall. The conduct of the government of Israel on this subject is insulting and repellent. I can think of few subjects on which Israel has caused such disgust among American Jews."⁵

There is a steady barrage of news headlines like "Reform Jews Are in for More Humiliation at the Israeli Government's Hands,"⁶ "On Reform Judaism in Israel, Don't Hate the

Minister, Hate the Ministry,”⁷ “How Bibi Just Gave Liberal Jews the Finger—And What We Can Do About It,”⁸ “Reform Jews Can Die for Israel, but Not All Would Be Buried as Jews,”⁹ and “Israel Tells Reform Jews: You’re Not Really Jewish, but Your Money Is Just Jewish Enough.”¹⁰ The most offensive headlines condemn Reform Judaism on religious grounds. For example, “Shas Rabbi Says Reform Jews Are ‘Idolaters,’” an article in *Arutz Sheva* (Israel National News), reported a rant against the Reform Movement delivered as part of a weekly synagogue lesson by Rabbi David Yosef. Son of the late, revered Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Yosef belongs to the Council of Torah Sages. He charged that the Reform Movement is “not Jewish.”¹¹ Indeed, according to Yosef, it is worse than secular: “Reform is a collaboration of idolatry, Reform are idolaters—simply and literally.”¹²

Such publicity’s cumulative effect is to make non-Orthodox American Jews increasingly conscious both of the lack of legal recognition of their denominations by Israel and of general disdain for them among Israel’s ultra-Orthodox citizens and significant numbers of other Israelis. A question I would like to answer is, What if any impact does this kind of rejection have within North America’s non-Orthodox Diaspora communities generally, and its Reform congregations specifically?

It’s a difficult question for someone trained as a historian, because there really is *no* quantitative data and very little qualitative data. Philip Mendes, professor of social work at Monash University in Australia, writes that methodologies available to begin answering the question would include analyzing the public statements of Reform leaders and congregants, interviewing Reform leaders, and surveying congregants using email.¹³ This article uses the first and second methodologies. In further research, I would hope to expand on this approach.

A person who has worked professionally to elevate consciousness of Israel in a particular Reform community argues that the stigmatization of Reform Judaism in Israel does have impacts, but impacts that are dependent on personal views. Ofir Rozenberg, who served as the 2016–2017 *sh’lichah* in Mobile, Alabama, suggests that “Reform Jews outside of Israel might develop mixed emotions towards the State of Israel (either its political system and even as a whole) because of the attitude and decisions made by the government.”

While she has no hard data to support her sense, discussions that Rozenberg has had with other *sh'lichim* in person and via message boards highlight the concern that this is a likely outcome of the political controversy. "I think some people will feel less connected and have less support towards Israel because of the Reform status here in Israel," she said. "Others might be disappointed about the government and the fact the Orthodox don't acknowledge Reform Judaism (or secular Jews too, so this is an issue many Israelis face since forever) but still feel connected to other aspects in Israel that are positive and don't have to do with the Orthodox party's decisions. They might be angry at the politics but still feel proud about the history of Israel, Israeli successful innovations and contributions to the world, love the nature/food/lifestyle/Hebrew, IDF, *tikkun olam*, etc."¹⁴

As Rozenberg points out, Reform Jews have diverse opinions on virtually every topic, based on their individual experiences and preferences. Therefore, they will always have a variety of views on Israel. However, one factor with significant impact on the Reform consensus view is concern expressed by the movement's leaders. How strongly Reform rabbis voice their frustration with Israel's religious pluralism issue will also influence the laity's potential reaction. We can certainly get some idea of what might happen from looking at the Reform rabbinate's response to the political issues relating to the Palestinians and the West Bank. Reform rabbis tend to be politically liberal, the vast majority supporting political initiatives that might be classified as left wing. This is also true for many Reform congregants, but less so than for the rabbinate.

In addition, the spectrum of political opinion in any given congregation would depend on its geographic location. Rabbis in liberal areas speak regularly on political issues involving Israel and the Palestinians. They have done this without negative repercussions, and anecdotally at least, some have seen their congregations grow, apparently as a consequence.¹⁵ In congregations characterized by more mixed political views, however, rabbis may be more cautious when speaking about Israeli/Palestinian relations.¹⁶ Of course the reason the rabbis are reticent is because their congregants' political views are divided over this issue. When there's a divided congregation, rabbis tend to shy away from speaking about these issues because doing so is potentially

divisive. Some leaders, including Rabbi David Wolpe of Los Angeles, ask whether rabbis should speak about politics at all.¹⁷ Rabbi Rick Jacobs says they must, arguing that “a ‘politics-free’ pulpit is an empty pulpit.”¹⁸

Concerning the religious pluralism crisis, almost by definition Reform Jews would want Reform Judaism in Israel to have full rights, ensuring rabbis free pulpits for speaking in favor of that cause. If however, rabbis began urging pressure on Israel’s government in ways perceived by some to be potentially damaging to the State of Israel, congregants might then split into factions: those guided by the interests of the Reform Movement versus those more strictly concerned with Israel’s survival. Most or virtually all Reform Jews today, no matter how inactive they might be, are likely aware that Reform Judaism faces a difficult environment in Israel. There is little evidence to suggest, from what I have so far seen, that this has a major impact on American Jews’ decisions to join or disaffiliate from a Reform temple or on their level of activity in their Reform temples.

Here, there is a major difference between the United States and much of the rest of the Diaspora. In many other countries, Orthodoxy is a much stronger presence than it is in the United States, meaning stronger rejection of Reform as a religious movement and of Reform’s role as a legitimate arbiter of Jewish identity. To a considerable extent, Orthodox leaders in these Diaspora communities take their lead on policy from the Israeli rabbinate. When I was a student rabbi in Australia and also when I served as a rabbi in South Africa, there were potential members I was encouraging to join my congregation who told me directly that they would not do so, because they did not want to affiliate with a movement not fully recognized in Israel. Whether this same consideration might hold true in areas of the United States with a relatively significant Orthodox presence would need to be explored.

That is not to say that Reform’s stigmatization in Israel does not have an impact on individuals, even in areas without a heavy Orthodox presence. Jamie Novetsky practices Judaism but has not yet converted. She and her husband moved to Mobile, Alabama, about a year ago and immediately joined the local Reform temple. When its director of music resigned, she was appointed interim director of music and is likely to soon hold the position long term. While Novetsky is committed to Judaism, she

is unsure about converting under Reform Movement auspices. In part this is due to her preference for a more structured religious system, but in part it is due to what Israel is doing. A few months ago, our congregation helped send her and our director of education to a ten-day seminar at the HUC-JIR in Israel, on a program sponsored by the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Novetsky returned deeply concerned about the lack of acceptance of Reform in Israel. Novetsky wonders whether strength of feeling about Israel's acceptance of Reform correlates with length of time spent in Israel (where a non-Orthodox Jew is liable to personally experience rejection based on religious affiliation).¹⁹ One of the issues for Novetsky was whether she herself would be accepted as Jewish by Israelis. She wrote me that the current situation is tolerable if not ideal. "While I'm saddened that I will never be considered Jewish by most Israelis, I can," Novetsky finds, "live with qualifying as Jewish only under the Law of Return, because my non-acceptance by Israel makes it more likely that there will always be an Israel to which I can return." Yet I sense that her experience in Israel made her less eager to convert through the Reform Movement. She feels that the Reform Jews most likely to care about Israel's acceptance of Reform converts, and Reform Judaism generally, are those who have been affected directly by it.

Diaspora-Israeli conflicts have arisen periodically over who should be counted as a Jew. But a long period of relative quiet on the issue ended on Sunday, June 25, 2017, when the Israeli government froze plans to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall.²⁰ The Western Wall is one of the most visible historical remnants of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, the Second Temple period lasting 530 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. The issue for American Reform Jews and other non-Orthodox Jews throughout the world is that the Western Wall, which was liberated by Israeli troops during the Six-Day War in 1967, was essentially made into an Orthodox synagogue. This meant that to pray there would require following Orthodox religious rules. This was uncomfortable not only for non-Orthodox Jews, but also for certain Modern Orthodox Jews, including some of the women who constitute the group calling itself Women of the Wall. This multid denominational feminist group began praying at the Western Wall in the late 1980s. Orthodox objections to the women's prayer

services became the galvanizing factor in an eventual legal effort to get the Israeli supreme court to force the government to take action.

On January 31, 2016, following several years of study and negotiation, the Israeli government adopted a plan for a new space at the Western Wall designated for egalitarian prayer. Almost immediately, elements of the ultra-Orthodox community began to lobby hard to prevent implementation of the plan, and for well over a year, action was stalled. Then, on June 25, 2017, the Israeli cabinet (again facing a supreme court deadline) voted to freeze the plan indefinitely. Freezing the plan to give non-Orthodox Jews a special place to pray at the Western Wall was symbolically disenfranchising the non-Orthodox denominations. Real disenfranchising had occurred long before, in truth: Reform Judaism and other non-Orthodox forms of Judaism were never actually legitimized by the political structure in Israel. But for many Diaspora Jews, the additional symbolic action was worse than their denominations' lack of legal recognition: something tangible, visible, was being taken from them. It is symbolically of great importance, particularly the plan for a single entrance with two pathways, affording the Orthodox prayer area and non-Orthodox prayer area equal sanctity and status.

Predictably, non-Orthodox Jewish leaders reacted with outrage. Natan Sharansky, who chairs the Jewish Agency for Israel, said, "Passions are high, and will go even higher."²¹ Rabbi Rick Jacobs gave a sense of the emotion in the wake of the plan's abandonment. "People get this news and they're stunned," said Jacobs. "Frankly, it's a very very dark day."²² Rabbi Steven Fox, the chief executive of the CCAR, has wondered why Jews outside Israel are still expected to "support Israel politically, economically, socially" when more than one Israeli minister has said "to our people 'you're not really Jewish' or 'you don't have a place here in Israel.'"²³ The incongruity poses an obvious difficulty. Jacobs asks rhetorically, "How could it be that a government that claims to speak on behalf of the Jewish people could be so deeply destructive of a deep commitment?"²⁴

This combination of rhetoric and negative political behavior on Israel's part will lead some people to want to take action. Some Reform Jews will be moved to reduce the amount of, or cancel, their donations to Israeli charities. Although Sharansky acknowledges that "almost every government decision taken in Jerusalem leads

to someone in the Diaspora who cancels his donation, and someone who adds a contribution,"²⁵ it is very much a warning sign that important players are becoming disenchanted.

There are voices calling for some sort of partial economic or touristic boycott of Israel. Because of Reform's reliance on Israel as a source of Jewish identity, and also because support for Israel is a bedrock, basic value of Reform, I do not believe the movement would endorse such action. Even as Rabbi Jacobs and other leaders criticize specific policies of the Israeli government, calling for a boycott of any sort would be seen as breaking the relationship between the Reform Movement and the State of Israel. Large numbers of Reform Jews would protest, arguing that such action might weaken the State of Israel at a time when it continues to face serious security concerns of various types. It would also be used by the ultra-Orthodox as further evidence that the Reform community does not support the State of Israel and does not deserve accommodation from the Israeli government.

Calling for any sort of economic boycott against Israel, or even the cessation of philanthropic efforts for Israel, was previously taboo. But this has seemingly been reversed in the wake of the most recent Western Wall controversy. Writing on Facebook, Rabbi Jeff Salkin of Temple Solel in Hollywood, Florida, provided a link to a report that a Miami real estate tycoon has announced that he is "suspending" his philanthropy, just as the Israeli government has "suspended" its decision to build an egalitarian prayer space.²⁶ Isaac "Ike" Fisher explained, "It isn't a matter of Reform or Conservative. This is a serious act of contempt for the rabbis and leaders of our communities . . . They say to our women 'your Judaism isn't Judaism.' It is intolerable and we have an obligation to put an end to it."²⁷ After reading of Fisher's action, Salkin wondered out loud whether, "Perhaps—just perhaps—this is the only way to make a change. It goes like this. 1. Who are the top ten givers to Israel in the United States? 2. What do we know about their commitments to pluralism? 3. Who of us, or our Conservative colleagues, knows them? 4. Who can get to those big givers? 5. Who can convince them to divert their funds to Jewish pluralist causes, and to say so publicly? Could this work?"²⁸

Two rabbis responded immediately. Joel Schwartzman wrote that, "Not giving to Federations removes a percentage that goes to fund Orthodoxy in Israel. Just as I take issue with some of what

the NIF [New Israel Fund] undertakes, I question why we should be supporting that which denies us legitimacy and rights in Israel. It makes no sense whatsoever."²⁹ Sam Gordon retorted, "Israel has a GDP of \$340 billion. Israel is not a charity case, and it is absurd to think that getting even the wealthiest of donors to withhold funds will have an impact on policy."³⁰

Other non-Orthodox Jews have threatened to cancel visits to Israel, not so much to protest something specific but out of a general sense of alienation and disgust. Sharansky said that Jewish organizational representatives told him some of their constituents were so angry that they didn't want to visit Israel: "Several American [Jewish] Federations have said that members of delegations no longer want to come . . . I am against that. On the contrary, we need more delegations."³¹

While reactions among American Reform Jews toward Israel might damage Israel–Diaspora relations, an even more damaging outcome could potentially result. The shadow cast over Reform Judaism might make people hesitate to join Reform congregations, fearing that joining could impede their recognition as legitimate Jews, should they ever choose to emigrate to Israel. Even if they never want to go to Israel, some must think to themselves that it's simply not a good idea to be part of a group that is not seen as legitimate in the eyes of the country that, presumably, is the arbiter of this religious identity.

The Israeli government wants to maintain as much political support for Israel as possible among American Reform Jews. This becomes important when the Israeli government needs to lobby the Congress and Senate for votes for or against some controversial Israel-related bill, nor do they want to unnecessarily alienate a funding source. Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie has argued that the Israeli government's support of the Orthodox religious establishment is now having an appreciable impact on American non-Orthodox Jews. "Israelis are in complete denial about the threat the government-sponsored Orthodox religious establishment poses to Israel's strategic interests," Yoffie has stated.³² Many liberal-leaning American Jews are already skeptical about Israel's policy toward the Palestinians. It is perilous to act in any way that would further alienate these Americans.

At the URJ biennial held in Orlando, Florida, in November 2015, URJ president Rabbi Rick Jacobs spoke more bluntly than previous

leaders have done: “Asking Jews around the world only to wave the flag of Israel and to support even the most misguided policies of its leaders drives a wedge between the Jewish soul and the Jewish state. It is beyond counterproductive.” Jacobs said that he could not list a single policy of Benjamin Netanyahu’s government that the Reform Movement could fully embrace. The two *main* issues of contention are and long have been the Palestinians and Israel’s difficulty with religious pluralism.

The Reform Movement is far more united over religious pluralism. It is, therefore, more willing to respond strongly concerning, for example, the egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall. That response, in turn, has generated accusations of hypocrisy and lack of proportionality. Simone Zimmerman, who came to prominence when briefly appointed Bernie Sanders’s Jewish outreach coordinator (later pushed aside after a Facebook post in which she used profanity against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu) ripped into Rick Jacobs. She wrote in an op-ed, “Why are we non-Orthodox Jews only fighting for ourselves, at precisely the point where our energy and passion are so obviously, so desperately needed elsewhere?”³³ She cited a tweet from Jacobs that said, “we feel that at this moment after over 4 years of negotiations it is not clear that the current Israeli government honors its agreements.” Zimmerman sharply criticized this, “As if this is the one agreement this government has chosen not to honor in the last four years. The detachment from reality is embarrassing.”³⁴

Reform rabbinical student Rena Singer rejected Zimmerman’s argument that the Western Wall impasse reveals Reform’s complicity in ignoring the worse problem because it does not affect them as directly. “This false equivalency dangerously suggests that Jews must choose between religious freedom and repairing the world,” Singer wrote. “But it is a fallacy to say that the two struggles do not go hand in hand.”³⁵

Singer wrote that she and Zimmerman share common values: “Our goals and our challenges are the same. We both work to create a world where people can live in freedom and dignity.” Singer believes that many leftwing social-justice advocates ignore the many things that the Reform Movement is doing to help create a more just world: “Critics of the American Jewish establishment either do not know or do not like to admit that Reform congregations across the country are waging highly organized fights against poverty,

racism, and anti-democratic forces. Take Reform California, Bend the Arc, Raise the Age, Get Organized Brooklyn, and the Religious Action Center, just to name a few of the hundreds of groups that are organizing Reform Jews."³⁶ Singer concludes, "Whether you view this from the perspective of intersectionality, as I do, or just common sense, it is so obvious that the fight for religious freedom in Israel is inextricably bound with the fight for freedom for the Palestinians."³⁷ But certainly many Reform rabbis, albeit a minority, have more middle-of-the-road political views on the Palestinian issue. Likely, many of that particular group would hesitate to link the Palestinian issue to the religious pluralism controversy. Such political moderates frequently cite Rabbi Richard Block, of Temple Tifereth Israel in Beechwood, Ohio, a past president of the CCAR.³⁸ There is no evidence that most Reform rabbis, of whatever political stripe, perceive any direct linkage between these two controversial issues.

In conclusion, although most American Reform Jews are aware that Reform Judaism is treated in a negative manner in the State of Israel, they are not sufficiently concerned to initiate a grass-roots campaign to fight the ultra-Orthodox establishment in Israel. Rather, it is the leaders of the Reform Movement who are most likely to travel to Israel, not only to do a few weeks of touring but to meet with government and societal leaders. Therefore, any major change in the environment of the typical American non-Orthodox congregation is going to be initiated by the rabbis and movement leaders.

American Reform Jews are seeking an ideological key to help them frame their concern about the state of religion in Israel. Some contextualize the problem in terms of their belief in democracy. They want to hope that because Israel is a democracy and because they see religious pluralism as an essential component of democracy, Israeli society will eventually recognize the importance of religious pluralism to their democratic values. This hope was expressed by Jerry Friedlander, one of my congregants: "The real issue is the legitimacy of Reform Judaism in the Diaspora. My hope would be that because Israel is a democracy, the people will eventually insist on equality for all Israeli Jews of whatever branch (and even us Jews outside of Israel). It will take inspiration and action on the part of the citizenry, but if the Knesset acts, and the Israeli Supreme Court upholds the change, the Orthodox

will simply have to live with it. How long this will take . . . remains to be seen.”³⁹

Recommended Reading

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Notes

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