

Those who maintain that Reform stands for little, if anything, will find this volume to be enlightening; those of us who have long taken the Reform movement seriously will delight in the many issues explored in this book's informative, lively, and often provocative chapters. An important contribution to the study of American religion *and* American Judaism, this book deserves to be widely read, discussed, and debated.

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The Reform Theological Enterprise at Work: Debating Theory and Practice in the American Religious "Marketplace"

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In the United States today, there is a great deal of discussion of how the Jewish community can best ensure its future. Popular authors such as Alan Der-showitz¹ and Elliott Abrams² and scholars such as Bernard Susser and Charles Liebman³ have predicted that the Jewish community may diminish in size or even disappear unless things change dramatically. Prominent rabbis have tried to point the way back to Judaism, arguing that religion alone can provide the justification necessary to perpetuate Jewishness once ethnic memory fades.⁴ Some have proposed various types of conversion campaigns⁵ and others have debated how "outreach" can best complement "in-reach." Two patterns seem to be developing simultaneously. At the same time that many American Jews are losing interest almost entirely in their tradition, many others are finding new meaning in old rituals or coming to Judaic belief and practice for the first time. American Jews are increasingly focusing on spiritual activities, and their institutions are working overtime to meet their religious needs.

Religious movements have always played a central role in the American Jewish community. The Reform movement has been an important player since it was first introduced in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early part of the nineteenth century.⁶ Today, Reform Judaism is the Jewish religious denomination representing as many as one and a half million people in more than nine hundred congregations in the United States. Local congregations are affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), which in turn provides assistance to the four campuses of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), the rabbinical, cantorial, and educator training college for the movement. Rabbinic graduates become members of the Central Conference of America Rabbis (CCAR) that now has

about eighteen hundred members. The UAHC, CCAR, and HUC-JIR together form the national institutions of the movement, while the individual congregations provide the communal structure for individual congregants in various towns and cities throughout the country.

In recent years, the Reform movement has gained adherents at a much faster pace than either of the other two major American Jewish denominations. In 1990, the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) discovered that even though the Conservative movement had been the leading American Jewish denomination for decades, a plurality of American Jews were saying that they considered themselves to be Reform.⁷ Despite the fact that many of the people who were telling the demographers they were Reform Jews were not joining Reform synagogues or participating in the Reform movement, this question was used to indicate that the Reform movement was now the largest American Jewish denomination. Even though the Conservative movement may have had more "regulars" and maybe even more nominal members, it was clear that the Reform movement was on the ascendancy. Reform Judaism was fulfilling the needs of an increasing number of American Jews.

The movement was seen as an attractive denominational home for many of those who had weak Hebrew skills, were looking for a nonjudgmental environment, had intermarried, were gay or lesbian couples, or had been unaffiliated. Much of Reform Judaism's growth was attributable to its outreach efforts toward unaffiliated American Jews.⁸ Many converts and non-Jews married to Jews have also become active in Reform congregational life. Others have been attracted by its egalitarianism, its commitment to social justice, and its liberal political consciousness. For all of these reasons, the Reform movement has been generating tremendous energy. There is a seriousness about God and holiness, and a desire to move toward integrating abstract spiritual feelings into the observance of specific rituals. More Reform Jews are studying the Torah than ever before and Talmud study groups have begun forming—something that would have been unthinkable in earlier generations. And yet, there is a need to study not only what is happening in the congregations but what it means for Reform religious thought. This collection is an attempt to study various aspects of Reform theology with a special concentration on religious statements and liturgical developments.

THE SEARCH FOR A COMMUNAL CREED

Since the Enlightenment, Jews have sought to understand Judaism as a modern religion in an intellectual context equivalent to how modern Christians saw their religion. This shifted the focus of attention from the mitzvot to the universal foundations of the faith. Since the written and oral Torahs were not necessarily given word-by-word and letter-by-letter or even concept-by-

concept from God to Moses at Mount Sinai, it became possible to accept or reject each Mitzvah on an individual basis. The criteria for ritual observance was no longer "what does the *Shulchan Aruch* say?" but rather "does a specific observance conform to the universal foundations of Judaism?" This paradigm shift put a new emphasis on the creation of creedal formulations.⁹

Creedal statements were not a modern innovation in Judaism. Already in the Bible, scholars find what they regard as historical credos of the ancient Israelite religion. In the medieval period, Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides wrote systematic formulations of Jewish belief. These individual attempts were never completely accepted by the Jewish community as a whole. Among other reasons, there was no central religious authority comparable to the Vatican that could give its imprimatur to a specific text. In the modern period, however, rabbinic groups could be created, which could build their influence to the extent that their organization could become dominant and achieve a quasi-authoritative position. In the United States, the CCAR established itself in this mold, but the flood of Eastern European immigrants had dramatically changed the dynamics of the American Jewish community by the time the CCAR was founded by Isaac Mayer Wise in 1889. The Reform movement was destined to be a minority for the next one hundred years. Even within the Reform movement, the moderates and the radicals jostled over control.

Despite the fact that there was never a completely homogenous belief system within the movement, Reform rabbis were remarkably successful at creating a series of documents reflecting their collective beliefs and religious positions. This was done through a process of extensive debate that frequently began long before the actual conference convened. For example, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 was preceded by a series of debates between framer Kaufmann Kohler and the more conservative Alexander Kohut. The debate between these two thinkers was reported in the Jewish press weekly. Much of the American Jewish community followed the reportage and formed or changed their religious views.

Each of the subsequent platforms passed by the CCAR was preceded by extensive debate and usually by considerable controversy. This democratic approach was very much a modern innovation.¹⁰ In the premodern period, Judaism was experienced through the daily lives of the Jewish people living in a closed Jewish community. They saw how their elders lived their lives and learned to live as Jews by mimicking the acts that they witnessed. Although the Jews in these *Kehillot* certainly held beliefs, they did not need to articulate those beliefs because of their intensely Jewish way of life. When this communal structure was dismantled, it became necessary to consciously articulate a system of beliefs. The medieval formulations were entirely unsatisfactory due to a wide variety of reasons, and a new vision was urgently needed. The question was what vision would form the basis for a new formulation of belief and how widely accepted that document would become.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Reform movement is one of the three major movements in American Judaism. Reform Judaism began in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Israel Jacobson founded what is generally regarded as the first Reform synagogue in Seesen, Westphalia, in 1810.¹¹ Reform congregations developed throughout Central Europe and, somewhat later, elsewhere as well. Although Germany was the birthplace of Reform Judaism, it was in the United States that it thrived. Jewish immigrants wanted a form of Judaism that would allow them to adapt to the ethos of American society while still maintaining an affiliation with the religion of their forefathers. Reform Judaism allowed for change—particularly pragmatic-based innovation. Reforms were generally introduced piecemeal in response to changes in the local social and religious environment. With the exception of an early attempt to institute reforms in Charleston, South Carolina, most change in religious ritual developed from the 1840s onwards, as immigrant congregations slowly adapted to American conditions. By the 1870s, the Reform movement began to institutionalize. Bohemian-born Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, Ohio, initiated the creation of the UAHC in 1873, and founded HUC in 1875 and the CCAR in 1889.

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, classical Reform Judaism developed in America, stressing the religious concepts of ethical monotheism and the mission of Israel. Classical Reform placed a heavy emphasis on belief and minimized traditional ritual. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 was the definitive statement of classical Reform belief. This platform became the quasi-authoritative position paper of the theology and ritual practice of American Reform Judaism until 1937, when a new and radically different platform was adopted. In a famous (or infamous) declaration, the Pittsburgh Platform stated that:

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.

The Pittsburgh Platform was not the first attempt to codify a set of principles upon which American—or European—Judaism could be developed. The German Reformers held conferences in 1844, 1845, and 1846 at which a wide variety of both theoretical and practical issues were discussed and debated. As early as the antebellum period, a conference was organized in the United States. Held in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1855, Isaac Mayer Wise and Isaac Leeser attempted to find a common basis for organizational unity. They

agreed on two principles that could bind them both, but protests from both left and right almost immediately undermined the arrangement. From that point on, the various factions tended to work separately from one another. For example, in 1869, a group of radical Reformers met in Philadelphia. They did not want traditionalists or even moderate Reformers to participate and it was only out of a sense of political propriety that they invited Wise to the meeting. The 1885 conference became, by far, the most influential such gathering. The platform accepted in Pittsburgh became one of the core documents of American Reform Judaism and that is why, just over one hundred years later, the 1999 attempt to pass a new platform specifically in Pittsburgh carried with it such strong emotional overtones.

It was only at the turn of the century that the Conservative movement began to crystallize as a more traditional alternative to Reform Judaism. Although Conservative Judaism was far more ritualistic than classical Reform, it did allow for the concept of religious change. Orthodox Judaism maintained a steadfast commitment to traditionalist belief and Halachic behavior, adhering completely to Jewish law. By the end of the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism began to be perceived by the general Jewish community as extremist and assimilatory. Many Eastern European Jewish immigrants compared the local Reform temple to a Christian church, implying by their comparison that the Reform synagogue lacked any authentic Jewish religious content.

However, as early as the 1920s, a faction within the Reform movement began to reembrace selected aspects of the Jewish tradition. After the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany in 1933, many American Reform Jews began to slowly readopt a conscious ethnic identity that an earlier generation had attempted to stifle and deny. Yaakov Ariel describes the "strange world" of the classical Reform Jews in the period between 1870 and 1930. Ariel argues that the Reform movement had been described in inaccurate ways using stereotypical images taken directly from the biased Eastern European immigrant view of the "German Jews." This stereotype image has been reinforced by those scholars who had looked at the official statements such as the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform to the exclusion of the broader social and cultural trends that were clearly evident throughout the laity. Ariel argues that there was an "astounding gap" between the declared ideals of the Reform movement and the attitudes expressed by most of the rank and file. This gap slowly began to narrow.

In 1937, the CCAR adopted a new platform at Columbus, Ohio, which dramatically muted what many had perceived to be the extreme universalism and antiritualism of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform. The Columbus Platform began with a statement justifying the need for a new platform. It opened with the comment that "In view of the changes that have taken place in the modern world and the consequent need of stating anew the teachings of Reform

Judaism . . .," the CCAR felt it was proper to accept a new declaration of principles. The Columbus Platform distanced itself from some, but not all, of the religious conceptions expressed in the Pittsburgh Platform. For example, the Reform movement began to take concrete steps to accept the reality of the Zionist movement. There were numerous signs that many of the once-rejected traditionalist symbols were beginning to make a comeback. This trend continued to gain momentum in the subsequent decades and is reflected in the 1976 San Francisco Statement, written in large part by Eugene B. Borowitz. Technically referred to as "Reform Judaism—A Centenary Perspective," this paper stated that, "change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life." The "Perspective" boldly argues that "we are bound together like all ethnic groups by language, land, history, culture and institutions." An even more extreme departure from the Pittsburgh Platform could be clearly seen in the statement that "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life."

Over the past twenty-five years, the Reform movement has developed in a number of challenging new directions. It took the lead in responding to societal trends that threatened the continuity of the American Jewish community, as well as those that redefined the role of various types of people in society. These policy changes included the widespread acceptance of complete egalitarianism, the Patrilineal Descent Resolution of 1983, the development of an outreach program to intermarried families and others, and the establishment of a significant number of congregations with special outreach to gays and lesbians.

THE 1999 PLATFORM: A STEP TOWARD GREATER "TRADITION"?

On May 26, 1999, the CCAR met at the historic Rodef Shalom Temple in Pittsburgh, the same congregation that had hosted the 1885 conference. For some, it symbolized the rejection of Jewish tradition that was seen as the hallmark of classical Reform Judaism. At 11:30 A.M., the rabbis voted to adopt a new platform called the *Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, by a vote of 324–68 with nine abstentions. This was the culmination of about a year and a half of intense and sometimes acrimonious debate. The process began when Rabbi Richard N. Levy, then president of the CCAR, proposed an initial draft of a platform that advocated trying out and perhaps adopting many ritual practices that had formerly been regarded as simply not practiced in a Reform context. During the course of 1998 and the first half of 1999, the proposed document went through six drafts. During this process, most of the references to specific ritual acts were removed in order to placate the 20 to 25 percent of the movement's members who were still classical Reformers.

The suggestion that Reform Jews might consider eating kosher food, taking ritual baths in a *mikveh* (ritual bath), and even wearing tefillin (phylacteries) was shocking to some. There were those who considered such proposals as a personal attack on their entire approach to religious life.

Reform Judaism magazine, the official organ of the Reform movement, published the third draft of what was then called the *Ten Principles for Reform Judaism*, with a cover photo of Rabbi Levy with a tallit (prayer shawl) and a yarmulke (skull cap). While many people applauded the tone and the substance of the proposed platform, others were distressed by what they felt was an abrogation of the historical positions of the Reform movement. Some of the responses were very harsh. A woman from Mequon, Wisconsin, wrote, "Abandonment, hurt, outrage, violation, betrayal. These are just a few of the first words that came to mind after I read Rabbi Richard Levy's proposal."¹² Another reader wrote sarcastically: "It was quite a surprise to read the contents of Rabbi Levy's article. . . . I did have to check the cover to make sure it said Winter 1998 and not Winter 1698."¹³ Some letters and E-mails attacked Levy personally, suggesting that he would feel a great deal more comfortable in the Conservative or even the Orthodox movement. Others stressed the fact that because Levy had spent most of his career working for the Hillel Foundation, a Jewish university campus organization, he could not possibly understand the mentality of the congregational Reform Jew. For those who associated tradition with "medievalism," Levy's proposals struck a raw nerve and precipitated a major debate over the direction that the Reform movement should take.

Working with CCAR and UAHC leaders, Levy produced a fourth draft, which was discussed at the December 1998 UAHC board meeting. This document was much more moderate in tone than the original draft had been, yet there were certainly a number of issues that still caused difficulties for certain members of the UAHC board. The primary issues now centered on the fact that the draft urged Reform Jews to speak Hebrew and encouraged them to make aliyah (move to Israel). But Judge David Davidson summed up the general response when he stated: "The issue generated a lot of apprehension, some heat, and even some dismay, but after hearing Rabbi Richard Levy's very personal and very open presentation yesterday, the apprehension is largely dissipated and most of the heat is gone."¹⁴

From that point on, the process leveled out. Although an announcement was made that no vote would be taken at the Pittsburgh conference, this decision was rapidly reversed and a new announcement went out to declare that the platform would indeed be brought to a vote. Further, the leaders of the CCAR united behind Levy in support of the new platform. They urged that it be passed as a way to show those who were watching that the Reform movement was moving forward and that the platform could serve as a stimulus for discussion and further study. Although many found this a rather

weak argument for the passing of a platform, by the time of the vote, there were very few who truly opposed the platform, at least among those in attendance at the conference.

The new platform attracted a great deal of attention, not only from American Jews but also from the broader public. The day after the conference, the *New York Times* reported on the passing of the platform in an article that appeared on page one of the first section of that newspaper, a place of honor extremely rare for a religious conference.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS REFLECTED IN PLATFORMS AND PRAYER BOOKS

Herbert Bronstein points out that each time a new prayer book was published by the Reform movement, it was preceded by a major rabbinic conference that produced an important theological platform. The *Union Prayer Book* of 1894 and 1895 came after the 1885 Pittsburgh conference, the revised *Union Prayer Book* of 1940 and 1945 came after the 1937 Columbus Platform, the *Gates of Prayer* of 1975 came one year before the 1976 San Francisco Statement (the only exception), and the siddur of 2005 will come after the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform. This is not accidental. Clearly, the Reform rabbinate responds to changing circumstances by attempting to articulate what it is that they believe. At the same time, they want to see those beliefs expressed in the movement's prayer book, the primary vehicle for the expression of the movement's theological positions. The relationship between each platform and its liturgical correlates is, however, not always as straightforward as some might imagine.

Despite the sometimes complex relationship between the platforms and the prayer books, both are concrete manifestations of what the movement's elite hold as their central theological positions. This is quite complicated because there are various factions with very different points of view under the institutional umbrella of Reform Judaism. Furthermore, the Reform movement allows by its very nature a great deal of flexibility and creativity. This means that beliefs as well as practices can evolve and that positions once held by the vast majority of Reform Jews can be rejected just a few decades later. Over the course of the last one hundred years or so, this characteristic of Reform Judaism has meant that the movement has been able to formulate and reformulate its positions through the writing of a series of platforms and the editing of a number of prayer books. In this volume, Walter Jacobs describes how Reform Jewish theology has evolved from the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform to the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform. Robert Southard describes the thinking of Kaufmann Kohler, the main theologian behind the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, and Daniel Breslauer describes the religious thinking of Eu-

gene B. Borowitz, the writer of the original draft of the 1976 San Francisco Statement. Herbert Bronstein, Judith Abrams, and Eric Friedland describe how the prayer book has changed or explore how specific aspects of the liturgy have evolved. Others in this collection do not focus explicitly on either platforms or prayer books but rather deal with the context or substance of Jewish belief.

THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN REFORM LITURGY

Observers across the spectrum have repeatedly commented that the future of the American Jewish community is, for better or worse, tied into the future of American Judaism. As Jack Wertheimer of the Jewish Theological Seminary puts it, "The American synagogue attracts more members and affords greater opportunities for participation than any other voluntary institution established by Jews in the United States."¹⁵ Jews will only continue to go to synagogues if there is some religious reason for doing so. It is not conceivable that American Jews will retain even a nominal membership in a religious organization if they are unable to sustain some sense of religiosity. That may have been acceptable to their parents, who retained a great deal of nostalgia from growing up with Eastern European parents or grandparents, but it was not going to hold the younger generation, who had no such memories.

The leaders of the Reform movement are very conscious of that fact. Furthermore, the leaders are aware that a much more democratic style of leadership is essential. Although earlier generations had been much more willing to accept the leadership of a charismatic autocrat, the younger folks expect a more egalitarian approach. The 1999 Pittsburgh Platform was the most inclusive debate over a religious platform that the movement has ever undertaken. It succeeded in involving a great many people, not only those who supported the platform in its various permutations, but also those who remained antagonistic to it. The leadership of the movement is even more concerned that the new prayer book should reflect what the people in the pews want. The prayer book is going to be used by the rank-and-file members, even those who appear very infrequently in synagogue. It would be catastrophic for people to have a strong negative reaction to this new liturgical project. Therefore, the editors have to take care to balance the ideological demands of the liberal fringe of the movement with the expectations of the typical suburban member.

Reform worship has changed a great deal over the course of a generation.¹⁶ In earlier decades, classical Reform dominated virtually every Reform synagogue. Prayer services were conducted almost entirely in English. There was certainly music, but most of it was in English. A mixed choir hidden in

the loft of the "cathedral-style" temple sang these English prayers. Most traditional rituals were not only abandoned but actually prohibited. Men sat bareheaded and no longer wore *talesim*. The Torah was still read at services, but the reading was abbreviated and done on Friday night rather than Saturday morning. A minority of Reform synagogues actually moved their main service to Sunday morning. Others added a weekday service that featured prominent orators such as Emil Hirsch and Joseph Krauskopf and, in a later period, Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. The large majestic Reform temples created an atmosphere of awe. The worshipers—frequently referred to inappropriately as "the audience"—sat passively, sitting and standing as the rabbis commanded.

The interwar and World War II years were a period of slow change. More and more Eastern European Jews began to join Reform congregations. The rise of Hitler and the outbreak of hostilities exposed the naiveté of much of what the Reform rabbinate had been preaching. By the time that Jews began moving to the suburbs in large numbers in the early 1950s, most Reform Jews were ready for a change. The move to the suburbs was accompanied by a strong emphasis on the needs of the many children, and the huge formal sanctuaries of the classical Reform temples in the cities were decidedly inhospitable to little ones unable to sit still for long periods. Parents wanted services that were less formal and that involved their children in what was going on. They wanted something more meaningful for themselves, a trend which continued and gained steam over the last decades of the twentieth century.

By the end of the twentieth century, the Reform movement had experimented with a series of new prayer books. Individual congregations had tried out and in some cases adopted their own additions. Most featured English translations that were more modern and informal. Out was the stiff, formal language of the *Union Prayer Book*. In was a colloquial language that reflected how people actually spoke. Also noticeable was the gender inclusive language. Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah now joined Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is no longer being referred to as He but rather in gender-neutral language. Egalitarianism is accepted as a principle of overriding importance.

The approach to music also changed dramatically. Hidden choirs were eliminated. In fact, the move to the suburbs did away with the huge sanctuaries that provided the space in which to hide large choirs. Cantors were increasingly in demand and volunteer choirs trained to involve the congregation rather than perform for them. Traditional melodies made a comeback, as did new tunes composed by Debbie Friedman, Doug Cotler, and many others.

As this book goes to press, the Reform movement is working on a new prayer book to be published in 2005. The as-yet unnamed volume is being referred to as a siddur, the traditional Hebrew word for prayer book. It will

be radically different from the one currently in use in synagogues throughout the country and the world. The editors, as well as the various committees that oversee the editorial work, have to take into account not only their personal religious viewpoints but also the various religious and social needs of the individual congregants, congregations, and the movement as a whole. Rabbi Peter Knobel, the chairperson of the Siddur Editorial Committee and of the Liturgy Committee for the CCAR, put the double-directional focus clearly. The main goals for the new prayer book, he said, would be "to both move toward tradition and away from tradition."¹⁷ The new siddur will replace the *Gates of Prayer*, the standard Reform prayer book from the time of its publication in 1975. *The Gates of Prayer* in turn replaced the *Union Prayer Book* that was originally developed in 1895 and was based in large part on Rabbi David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*¹⁸ prayer book that had been published decades earlier than that, originally in German.

The buzz around the editorial process has it that the new siddur will be in many ways much more traditional than the *Gates of Prayer*. Because of the traditionalist elements that will be included in the volume, Rabbi Elyse Frishman commented, "I'm certain it will be controversial within the movement, which is not a bad thing."¹⁹ Many classical Reformers may not see the new liturgical work in that same light. Certainly, the debate over the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform upset many of these longtime Reform Jews. They felt that the abrupt change in religious orientation was not just a minor adjustment but rather a sea change in attitude. This dramatic shift would pull the movement away from its traditional positions, positions that they continue to value and support. Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus, the longtime chair of the Liturgy Committee who had overseen the editing of the *Gates of Prayer*, admitted that with a more traditionalist approach, "there's always the possibility of alienating part of the Reform movement. I don't know if all these changes are called for. But there's certainly a degree of resistance along with a large degree of acceptance."²⁰

For the relatively small number of congregations that have continued to prefer the classical Reform approach, the Chicago Sinai Congregation has published a new version of the *Union Prayer Book*. Edited by Rabbi Michael P. Sternfield, this prayer book is revised to take into account the dramatic historical events that have taken place since the *Union Prayer Book* was last edited in 1940. The *Union Prayerbook*, Sinai edition, also incorporates material that shows an awareness of the women's movement, the gay and lesbian struggle for equality, the high numbers of intermarried couples, advances in racial equality, and so forth. Despite the fact that many classical Reformers liked the formal English style of the *Union Prayer Book*, editor Sternfield agrees that "the *Union Prayerbook's* use of Elizabethan English, which was common to most English-speaking congregations in the past, seemed arcane, and no longer appropriate."²¹ The new text is not only written in a

more contemporary English but is also gender neutral. A few exceptions were made for prayers that had been recited in a certain manner with great devotion. For example, the Shema is printed in the contemporary manner: "Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God; The Eternal God is One," alongside the older, nongender-neutral language "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." A small number of congregations have adopted this prayer book, but most prefer to use the prayer books published by the national movement.

THE MOVE TOWARD MEDITATION AND OTHER INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO SPIRITUALITY

One of the liturgical changes is a move toward the greater use of meditative approaches. Transcendental meditation, Buddhism, and other Eastern mystical techniques have influenced many Jews. Poet Rodger Kamenetz wrote a very popular work entitled *The Jew in the Lotus* about his rediscovery of Jewish identity in Buddhist India.²² Sylvia Boorstein wrote another volume entitled *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist*, which she describes as being about how she can be a faithful Jew and a passionate Buddhist at the same time.²³ Others have tried to draw their inspiration from Kabbalah and mystical Judaism.²⁴ In our collection, Eric L. Friedland explores the development of the use of meditation in Reform liturgy. This is a much-used term, but what does it actually mean in the context of Reform Judaism? Friedland explains and goes beyond a general description of the phenomena to a close liturgical reading of the use of meditation in liberal liturgy from German developments in the mid-nineteenth century up until the latest meditative reflections in contemporary Reform works of the 1990s.

Meditation is only one example of new approaches that are finding their way into Reform worship. As the Reform movement continues to evolve, its relationship with the other American Jewish denominations also changes. Particularly interesting is the increasing common ground that the Reform movement shares with the Reconstructionists. Reconstructionism was somewhat reluctantly founded by Mordechai Kaplan out of the Conservative movement but it has evolved into a movement that is characterized by a very strong, socially liberal, stream combined with a fairly traditional style of worship. Thus, it comes as no surprise to find out that Reconstructionism has moved closer and closer to the Reform movement over the past two or three decades. The Reconstructionists have even joined the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ). The Reform movement has begun using more Hebrew and a more traditional style of worship and the Reconstructionists have become more institutional oriented and more suburbanized. Both movements have long held liberal positions on a wide range of social and politi-

cal issues. What differences then remain? Richard Hirsh explains that there are such issues and that they remain significant.

THE CALL FOR A WORSHIP REVOLUTION

Speaking at the UAHC biennial in Orlando, Florida, in late 1999, UAHC President Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie called for a worship revolution. "Our movement came into being as a liturgical revolution," Yoffie told the more than five thousand Reform leaders at the Dolphin Hotel in Disney World. "Reform Judaism did not begin with ethics, social justice, or personal autonomy; it was a reaction to the chaos and mechanical mumbling of the then-dominant forms of Jewish prayer. Worship reform was the very heart of early Reform Judaism."²⁵ Yoffie bluntly described American Reform Jews as "the least worshipful of peoples in North America." This may indeed be the case. Researchers have found that while 52 percent of fundamentalist Protestants and 51 percent of Catholics attend religious services thirteen or more times a year, only 20 percent of Conservative Jews and 9 percent of Reform Jews do.²⁶ With the exception of the observant Orthodox, no group in the American Jewish community was particularly devout, at least in the terms of the discussion. Even liberal Protestants attended services far more frequently than Jews. But the perception persisted that Reform Jews were the worst offenders, that they had the least emotional investment in Jewish identity in any form, and that many were outright assimilationists. Yoffie called for a "revolution" to address this problem and bring the "two-day-a-year Jews" back to worship services in the synagogue. The UAHC president described a situation of apathy and alienation in many congregational services. He argued that many temples had stagnated in their prayer practices and that this had directly resulted in low attendances. Yoffie described a scenario that he felt was not atypical. "A twenty-seven-year-old rabbi, newly ordained, from the Hebrew Union College, will often look out at her congregation on *Erev Shabbat* and realize that she is the youngest person there by several decades. Why has this happened?" The formula for success had to be a delicate balance between rabbinical leadership and lay involvement. "We do not want to be rabbis who are spiritual imperialists, insisting that worship is ours alone," he stated. "We do not want to be cantors who are operatic obstructionists, intent on performance at the expense of prayer, and we do not want to be lay people who are conscientious objectors, objecting to everything that is not as it was." New forces are starting to have an impact and the last decade has seen some very dramatic changes. Many Reform Jews have begun "turning toward tradition" and voluntarily accepting upon themselves certain ritual practices that had formerly been all but unknown in the Reform context. This was done voluntarily, since virtually no one would dare to threaten the hallowed

belief in religious autonomy. That belief is changing and several of our contributors discuss this phenomenon from different perspectives.

CAN REFORM JUDAISM COMPETE IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH "SPIRITUAL MARKETPLACE"?

Yoffie's comments suggest that the UAHC leadership is deeply concerned that the Reform movement is not successfully competing in the American religious "marketplace." Despite the fact that articles in Jewish newspapers frequently talk about the relatively large numbers of gentiles who are converting to Judaism, larger numbers of born Jews are disaffiliating. Although demographic studies show that many American Jews who have been raised in the Conservative and Orthodox movements have found their way to the Reform movement, it seems from anecdotal evidence that a very high percentage of the most intensely committed individuals leave the Reform movement for Orthodoxy.

If Reform theology is so profound and is so successful at blending fidelity to the tradition with contemporary innovation, then why is it that so many of the *baalei teshuva* (returners to Judaism) immediately embrace Orthodoxy rather than Reform Judaism? Debra Renee Kaufman addresses this question and her findings may serve as a "reality check" for those Reform leaders who have not yet faced up to the actual situation facing the Reform movement in the American "spiritual marketplace."

A religion in the United States today has to meet the needs of the "consumer." The consumer will decide what it is that he or she wants out of the congregation, and it is then up to the congregation to fulfill those real or perceived needs. There is tremendous pressure on religious movements to adjust to this spiritual marketplace. Logically, it should make sense that the more a denomination caters to the emotional needs of the individual, the more popular that denomination will become—but this does not seem to always work out quite that way in reality. Rather, it seems that many Americans are attracted by stricter rather than more liberal approaches to religion. This phenomenon has been widely studied. Kaufman now puts the discussion in the context of Orthodox versus Reform.

Kaufman addresses how beliefs actually have an impact on behavior. She brings excerpts from narratives of women who have "returned" to Orthodox Judaism and asks the question how is it that this male-dominated form of religion is so appealing to women at such a feminist-dominated time. The title of her chapter, "Better the Devil You Know," refers to the fact that some see the negatives of Orthodoxy as at least known entities whereas, they suggest, the liberalism that is embodied by the Reform movement comes with hidden negatives that manifest themselves much later down the road. Specifically,

Orthodoxy provides a very real sense of community that the less-demanding movements lack. Community is something that can exist or be created independent of theology. In the case of American Judaism, however, the building of a strong religious community is directly connected to the theological underpinnings that support it. Individuals who have a strong belief in a commanding, personal God will find it much easier to bond together if for no other reason than that they have a common need of observing the mitzvot together. Being an observant Jew requires one to attend synagogue regularly, even daily. It is also necessary to seek out kosher food and observe a myriad of other commandments, both small and large. In contrast to this, the flexibility of Reform Judaism does not provide the individual with a framework for the daily ritual life that is so central for the Orthodox Jew.

Kaufman's chapter may help the reader gain a new appreciation for the role that psychological factors play in making religious commitments. She describes how all of the women that she interviewed believed that the "secular lifestyle" had let them down. Specifically, they told her of their frustration of having been in relationships with men unwilling or unable to commit. This "dark side" of individualism was having a very real and detrimental impact on their lives, at least as they perceived it. Their embrace of Orthodoxy was thus not only a theological decision but also a practical maneuver designed to put them into a more secure social environment. This is certainly a new perspective on a form of Judaism that would seem, on the face of it, to empower men at the expense of women.

These women are a minority of their age cohort. Kaufman argues that for most young Jews, a strong ethnic identity remains more important than a religious one. Many are trying to find a way to balance their particularistic identities as Jews with their universalistic needs as Americans. She writes that for this group "the Reform tradition . . . is uniquely qualified to aid these young people in finding that balance."

THE EMBRACE OF FEMINISM AND ITS IMPACT ON REFORM MEN

The Reform movement has embraced feminism and feminist thinking, and the result has been very gratifying to many. Many women have become involved in the Reform movement in ways that were considered inconceivable just a generation ago. Women have been a source of new leadership in professional and lay spheres and the new opportunities for participation have revolutionized congregations throughout the United States. Yet there has been a downside to this trend. As women have become more active in spheres that were more male dominated, if not exclusively male, many men have no longer felt needed in those spheres. The dynamics involved are

complex and beyond the scope of this chapter, but there is undoubtedly a problem. As Eric Yoffie put it, "There is terrible confusion in our congregations . . . the men did not know what role they should play, or what their place was."²⁷ The traditional synagogue was a male dominion. Men led all of the prayers and ran the synagogue, but as the nature of American society changed, the synagogue changed with it. It slowly developed into more of a community center that focused heavily on activities that catered to families. Both worship and study became far less important than they had been earlier, and when they were done, they carried an entirely different meaning for the modern American. As a consequence, what had formerly been a male role in the congregation slowly disappeared. Gender equality is now taken for granted, not only in the liturgy, but in the congregational power structure as well, but there is a need to address the male withdrawal from active involvement. As Yoffie put it, "Men need to be involved in a serious and significant way in worship and in study. Let me be clear; men are not going to dominate or control these areas as they once did. We don't want them to. We recognize the accomplishments of women, and we want women to remain fully involved. But in the modern Reform synagogue in the twenty-first century, men must see worship and study—which constitute the very heart of Jewish life—as being part of their responsibility and their domain."²⁸

THE ROLE OF HEBREW IN CONTEMPORARY REFORM LITURGY

The role of Hebrew in the Reform prayer book is an issue that has been present from the time that German prayers were introduced in early-nineteenth-century Central Europe. The debate over how to deal with the use of Hebrew took on a new dimension in 1994 when the CCAR introduced an experimental prayer book, *Gates of Prayer for Shabbat and Weekdays*, with transliterations of the major prayers actually inserted into the prayer services. The 1975 *Gates of Prayer* had introduced a much greater amount of Hebrew than had previously been found in the *Union Prayer Book* but transliterations of the prayers were put into a special section at the very back of the volume. The CCAR editors were now recognizing that a substantial proportion of congregants did not have the Hebrew skills necessary to read the prayers in that language. Worshippers were either unwilling to keep turning to the back of the book in order to find transliterations of Hebrew prayers, or were unable to find the correct page in time. Either way, it was felt that something had to be done to assist such individuals.

The increasing use of Hebrew in worship services conflicted with the desire for increased participation, another trend that had become very important in the Reform movement. Many rabbis most influenced by the "turn to-

ward tradition" were keen to introduce much more Hebrew into the service. Some felt that this was essential in order to allow the congregation to speak the ancient words of specific prayers that had been seen as of central importance throughout the generations. Others simply felt that Hebrew provided the congregation with a greater sense of ethnicity and a stronger cultural connection with Jewish history and Jewish thought. One of the by-products of this move, however, was that it made many worshipers unable to participate because they could not read the Hebrew, or could read the Hebrew only with difficulty. In most Reform synagogues today, even a one-time visitor can hear the difference in sound level between the English prayers plus a few of the most basic Hebrew prayers as opposed to the rest of the Hebrew liturgy.

The solution proposed was to teach congregants Hebrew. This would seem to be a relatively simple task, since the goal is limited to teaching congregants to read prayer book Hebrew. They neither have to understand what they are reading nor be able to speak it. Nevertheless, the effort involved is more than many, perhaps most, congregants are willing to make. The lack of Hebrew literacy makes personal engagement with the texts of the tradition difficult but not impossible. Many of the most important holy books, including the Talmud, have been translated in recent years. These translations are characterized not only by the use of modern English but also by user-friendly formats that maintain a high degree of fidelity to the intent of the original writer or writers. Nevertheless, the American Jewish community has not been able to generate the type of personal transmission of the tradition that cannot be captured on the printed page. This is true even in American Orthodoxy, and *kal vechomer* (all the more so) in the Reform movement.

THE ROLE OF JUDAIC TEXTS IN THE FORMATION OF REFORM JEWISH LIVING

Literary scholars have explained how the assumptions that a reader brings to a text help in the replication of a given culture. Like many other cultures, Judaism replicates itself through its interpretive tradition. Michael Satlow argues that current conceptions of what makes an educated Reform Jew do not have enough room in them for the concept of "Oral Torah." This is critical because culture is replicated through its interpretive tradition; in the Judaic context, that interpretive tradition is "Oral Torah." The model of what constitutes an educated Reform Jew must be reformulated to allow for the individual's encounter with the tradition itself and not just the written texts of Judaic tradition. Satlow argues, "There is no more of a need to accept the absolute authority of the oral tradition than there is a need to accept the authority of a written Jewish law code." But the individual must read Judaic

texts in a Jewish manner, meaning that they must be read through the eyes of the tradition. Done in this way, the Reform movement will develop its own interpretive tradition—but a hermeneutic that is abruptly detached from Judaic tradition as understood throughout the course of history is not going to produce the rich religious culture that serious Reform Jews desire.

The implications of Satlow's argument are staggering. While he is too polite to say so, one could suggest that the rabbis being produced by HUC-JIR lack both the ability and the desire to read Jewish texts through the eyes of the classical rabbinic tradition—but nobody knows for sure. None of the four campuses of the Reform rabbinical schools has any predetermined minimum standards for what is required in the area of rabbinic literature. Nor is there any vehicle for assessing the Talmudic curriculum on these campuses. Certainly there is a lot of pressure to minimize such study in favor of more "practical" activities. It has long been known that the students at the New York school are so busy commuting to their campus in Greenwich Village and to and from part-time positions in the suburbs that they have relatively little time to devote to study of any type. It is also clear that most congregation leaders are looking for rabbis who can "relate well" to them and are puzzled and perhaps put off by candidates who display too much learning or appear to be too immersed in what is essentially a foreign culture from their point of view.

POSTMODERNISM AND A REFORM RESPONSE

Theology is a religious response to the problems we see in the world around us. Intellectual achievement thus begins, at least in the religious realm, when we become aware that we face an existential crisis. Daniel Breslauer argues that this has certainly been true in the development of Reform Judaism that from its beginnings has attempted to respond to the intellectual challenges of the contemporary world. One of the most important aspects of that response has been the creation of a system of religious thinking that could provide support for that response. He concentrates on the contribution of Eugene Borowitz, a professor at the New York campus of HUC-JIR. Borowitz has published a number of books and a larger number of articles in which he articulates the concerns of most American Reform Jews. As Breslauer puts it, Borowitz's thought "provides a prism through which to understand how contemporary Reform Jews look at themselves and Judaism even while it acts as affirmative influence on that perspective." Borowitz attempts to articulate a Reform Judaism that is radically different from modern Jewish thought on one hand and traditional Judaic thinking on the other. Rather, he writes in the context of postmodernity, a time in which boundaries are dissolving and previously well-defined categories are dissolving. The postmod-

ern Jew—like the modern Jew—rejects the idea that God sets and maintains an absolute pattern. The postmodern Jew, however, rejects theurgy, meaning that he or she rejects the idea that one can change the course of human affairs by appealing to God. Likewise, it is not effective to rely on tradition or traditional modes of behavior in the expectation that this will aid one's quest for happiness and fulfillment. On the other hand, the postmodern Jew also rejects science as an absolute foundation of truth or knowledge. This means that there is no certitude in a post-Holocaust world. There is, however, the possibility of redemption and because of that, not everything is a lost cause. The postmodern Jew must therefore affirm the existence of divine goodness as well as the necessity to fight against evil, an evil that is permitted by God to continue to exist. This type of religious thinking will, of course, understand Jewish identity in primarily religious terms. Jewish ethnicity is seen as inseparable from Jewish religiosity. Despite the postmodern intellectual challenges to religion, Jews must continue to believe in revelation, but the concept of revelation being offered is a pluralistic one and is seen from a vastly different perspective than the medieval Jewish tradition would have had it. The possibility of redemption remains, but it is both saving and destructive.

The articulation of a postmodern form of Judaism is thus not a simple endeavor, and yet Reform Jews are being bombarded by the assumptions of a postmodern society everyday. Without articulating it, they begin to echo those assumptions. Without consciously rejecting it, they find themselves increasingly estranged from the Judaic tradition. Therefore, there is a dire need for a way to communicate the new approaches being pioneered by liberal Jewish theologians such as Borowitz to those in the pews. Congregants need to have a new understanding of religion that can help them to replace the old one that is slipping away so quickly.

BEYOND AUTONOMY

From a traditional point of view, religion is fixed and cannot be changed at will. Indeed, a religious doctrine and practice are seen as divine, and are not subject to any alteration under normal circumstances. Jewish law, in Hebrew *Halacha*, means "the path" or "the way," and derives from the Hebrew verb *Lalechet*, which means "to go." God told Moses to "Make known to the people the way they are to go."²⁹ According to the tradition, there are 613 mitzvot, or commandments, including 365 negative commandments, and 248 positive commandments,³⁰ 365 corresponding to the number of the days of the year, and 248 corresponding to the number of parts of the human body. The sages emphasized that the mitzvot included every type of human behavior that could occur at any point in the entire year. Most American Jews

today are far removed from Halachic practice. Reform Jews in particular demand religious autonomy.

The Reform movement has an ironclad commitment to religious autonomy. This approach is very attractive to many contemporary Jews because it allows them to emphasize personal spiritual meaning as the arbiter of their Jewish involvement. "Each individual has to decide the proper way to serve his religion," one subject told Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen in their recent study of the "Moderately Affiliated American Jew."³¹ Many American Jews today have a great deal of interest in "spirituality" but feel no commitment to "Jewish survival" for its own sake. If they are to become involved in Judaism, it will have to be with a form of the religion that stresses choice and is nonjudgmental. Liberal Judaism is a good match for them because of its stress on the primacy of individual choice in the search for meaning. As Leon Morris puts it in his chapter, "Autonomy is the watchword of American Reform Judaism." This has been one of the constants in the movement from its origins in early-nineteenth-century Germany up to the present day, but some critics worry that significant segments of the leadership in the CCAR, HUC-JIR, and even the UAHC have begun to retreat from the movement's historic commitment to this concept. Mitzvah, previously a word that was never used in the Reform movement, has made a comeback, and many Reform rabbis have begun using it with a great deal of regularity. Many see this trend as an encouraging sign, while others tremble with fear every time they hear the word. One of the reasons that religious autonomy has been so discredited is that virtually everyone now acknowledges that the past four decades have seen a dramatic drift in the Jewish community toward religious minimalism.

While the more traditional movements continue to preach that there was a need for Halachic observance, the Reform movement was perceived to have adopted an antinomian approach that actually encouraged adherence to abrogate cumbersome practices. This process of moving away from traditional observances was by no means limited to those who define themselves as Reform, however. The late sociologist Marshall Sklare identified criteria that could help to explain why certain rituals were more likely to be retained while others were more likely to be abandoned. American Jews across the spectrum were more likely to observe holidays that came once a year rather than every week. They were willing to make an exception for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because they came only once a year and had come to be perceived as the most important days of prayer. But they preferred home rituals that were short and colorful and had lots of food. Some Reform rabbis would like to move toward a greater balance between authority and autonomy, but it is far from certain that the Reform laity would cooperate in any such endeavor of that sort. Like other liberal Americans, they are profoundly committed to individualism. Personalism and voluntarism are central to their way of life, and even those who speak of commitment do so out of that context.

The Reform theological enterprise is nothing short of an attempt to justify the continued existence of the Jewish community in America. The Reform movement is only one of numerous religious and communal organizations fighting this battle but they are on the "front lines." The Reform movement has the highest percentage of intermarried couples, for example. In virtually every category, Reform Jews are more "Americanized" than their Conservative or Orthodox counterparts. Thus, the success or failure of the Reform movement will have a major impact on the American Jewish community as a whole. The theory that is being debated therefore has very practical implications. We hope that this collection may contribute to the understanding of not only the Reform platforms and prayer books but also how Reform Jewish "lived religion" connects to the American Judaic theological debates of recent years.

NOTES

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THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT