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"Dual Identity: Living in Two Worlds." Metrowest and Philadelphia, Pa. classes. 1990-1991.

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WEXNER HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Rabbi Herbert Friedman

MetroWest/ 1990-1991 Academic Year  
and Philadelphia I and II

Session #2: DUAL IDENTITY  
Living in Two Worlds

This session will deal with how we became American-Jewish and how we are continuously improving our ability to live creatively with both our nationality and our peoplehood.

Outline:

I. EMANCIPATION

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- (1) Tolerance, (1779) which grew into
- (2) Citizenship, (1806 ff), which grew into
- (3) Political Equality (1858)

II. SELF-DEFINITION

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- (1) Two hundred years ago, we said "We are a religion only"  
-- Napoleonic Sanhedrin
- (2) Today, we define ourselves as "Peoplehood and Civilization"  
-- M. Kaplan & Zionism

III. THE BALANCING ACT

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- (1) Reconciling American nationality with Jewish nationhood, or
- (2) Living in two Worlds

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Readings:

I. EMANCIPATION:

- Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, The Jew in the Modern World,  
Tolerance:  
"A Parable of Toleration -- Nathan the Wise" pp. 57-60  
Citizenship:  
"Answers to Napoleon" pp. 116-121  
Political Equality:  
"Macaulay: Civil Disabilities of the Jews" pp. 132-136  
"The Jewish Relief Act" pp. 137-138

Students  
have book  
either take book -  
or xerox above pages →

## II. SELF-DEFINITION:

- Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism,  
pp. 31-41; 96-100
- Silberman, A Certain People,  
pp. 221-273
- Karp, Haven and Home,  
pp. 360-373
- Plaut, "Emancipation -- The Challenge of Living in Two  
Worlds", from Judaism  
pp. 437-448

## III. MAPS

- Gilbert, Jewish History Atlas,  
Please refer to the Maps on pages 58 & 59:  
Napoleon and the Jews  
The Emancipation of European Jewry, 1789-1816

*The student  
have not maps*

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Questions and Issues to consider while reading:

### THE BALANCING ACT

1. How can we maintain a strong sense of Jewish identity, while living in a free permissive society as absolutely equal Americans?
  2. How do we prevent a deterioration of values, so that we don't descend to the lowest common denominator of ideal-less, mind-less materialistic mores?
  3. How do we teach our children the best and highest aspects of American culture and at the same time the full richness of the Jewish heritage?
  4. How do we grow from mere "survivalists" to a full Jewish "creative society"?
  5. How do we relate ourselves to Israel in a manner which benefits both her and us?
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Cultural Literacy Terms (that will be discussed this class)  
Section VI:#1-3; Section IX:#7-10; 41-42; 52-53

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Emancipation

"The Jews Should be Denied Everything as a Nation, but Granted  
Everything as Individuals"

Napoleonic Sanhedrin

HUC -- Hebrew Union College 1875

Pittsburgh Platform 1885

Columbus Platform 1937

JTS -- Jewish Theological Seminary

Mordecai Kaplan -- Reconstructionism

Judaism as a Civilization

Assimilation

Intermarriage

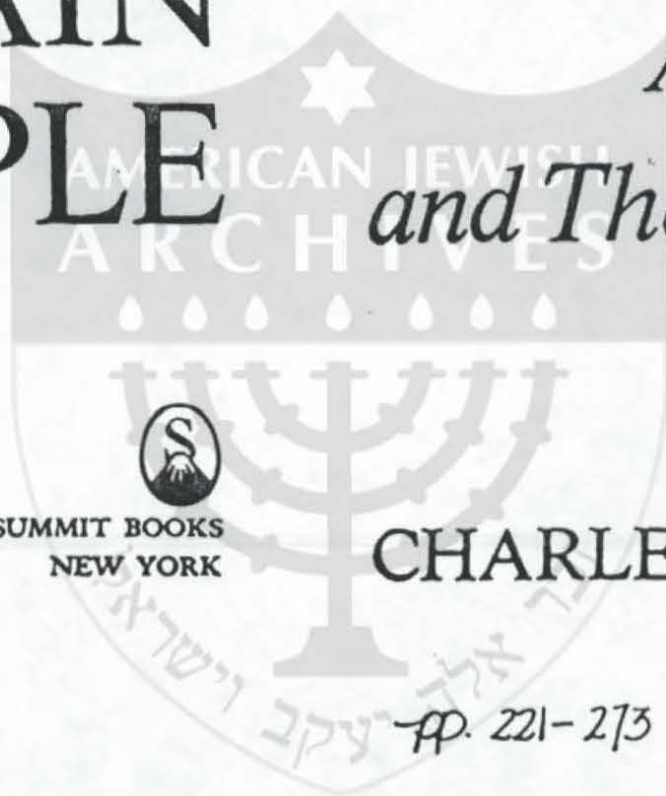


# A CERTAIN PEOPLE

*American Jews  
and Their Lives Today*

SUMMIT BOOKS  
NEW YORK

CHARLES E. SILBERMAN



Acceptance of Judaism 228 ff  
Christmas + Chanukah  
and Passover 230 ff  
Judaism vs. Jewishness  
religion ethnic 237 ff  
Baal Teshuvah phenomenon 244 "  
Sews who never strayed 254 "  
women's energy 262 "

pp. 221-273

CHAPTER SIX

LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW:  
THE RENEWAL  
OF AMERICAN JUDAISM



AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

1

"We're the last generation with memory," a contemporary told me recently, explaining why he was so worried about the future of Judaism in America. For him, in fact, the Holocaust and the creation of the Jewish state were more than memories; they were the central experiences of his life. Those experiences, along with memories of his grandfather, who had been one of the great preachers of the Lower East Side, served to bind him to Jewishness in an irrevocable way. For his children and grandchildren, however, the Holocaust and Israel's formation are not memories but historical events, as remote in some ways as the destruction of the First Temple and the return from Babylonian exile 2500 years ago.

My friend's concern is real and cannot easily be dismissed. "Memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties," the historian Yosef Yerushalmi has written, "yet the Hebrew Bible [has] no hesitation in commanding memory. Its injunctions to remember are unconditional, and even when not commanded, remembrance is always pivotal." Indeed, in its various declensions, the Hebrew verb *zakhar*

(to remember) appears no fewer than 169 times in the Bible, with the obligation incumbent on both God and Israel. (In Israel's case it usually is accompanied by the complementary obligation not to forget.) The ritual of the Passover seder is designed to bring to life what Abraham Joshua Heschel called "the commandment of faith"—to "remember that ye were slaves in Egypt," and to "remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt."

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jews of my generation talk, and worry, about the loss of memory. The novelist Anne Roiphe, once totally alienated from Judaism, gave the book describing her search for a way back to Judaism the title "Generation Without Memory." True enough, many Jews of my generation have enlarged their Passover ritual to include readings recalling the Holocaust and celebrating Israel's existence, but neither event can resonate for their children as it does for them.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the loss of memory in negative terms alone. One reason Israel is central to the Jewish identity of older Jews, after all, is that it gives us a vicarious sense of potency and power. Israel's existence—most of all, perhaps, her military exploits—have transformed the way we see ourselves, because, as I discussed in Chapter Two, our consciousness was formed at a time when Jews lived in fear. Centuries of powerlessness, of survival through accommodation, had bred a distaste for physical combat and a tendency to shy away from confrontation. The self-image that resulted is parodied in Woody Allen's remark that at the interfaith summer camp he attended he was beaten up by kids of every race, religion, and national origin. For my generation, in fact, fear of Gentiles formed a staple subject of Jewish humor.

*ITEM: From The Big Book of Jewish Humor: "Two Jews are walking through an anti-Semitic neighborhood one evening when they notice that they are being followed by a pair of hoodlums. 'Sam,' says his friend, 'we better get out of here. There are two of them and we're alone.'"*

Young Jews have never known this kind of fear. For one thing, they have not experienced anti-Semitism—certainly not the physical kind that existed during my own childhood. Equally important, they are now sufficiently acculturated into American life to have acquired the athletic and other physical skills needed for peer acceptance during adolescence. As a result, there has been a dramatic change in the self-image of young Jews.

*ITEM:* In the 1980 American Council on Education survey of college freshmen, 42 percent of the Jewish students rated themselves above average in athletic ability—half again as many as had given themselves that rating just ten years earlier. Indeed, more Jewish than non-Jewish freshmen (42 percent as compared with 40 percent) now consider themselves "above average" in athletic ability—a reversal of the relationship that existed in 1970.

Never having known their parents' fear, young Jews do not need the vicarious sense of potency their parents derive from Israel's military accomplishments. As Jews, they may take pride in Israeli strength, but they are far less likely to turn Israelis into mythic heroes. Because they were not alive during the Holocaust, moreover, they do not share their parents' sense of guilt; and because they have never known a time when there was *not* a Jewish state, they take Israel's existence for granted in a way their parents never can; they see Israel as a fact—a flesh-and-blood state—rather than as a symbol or myth. For young Jews, therefore, the covenant is truly voluntary; they enjoy a freedom of choice that is not available to their parents, who are bound by guilt and other primordial ties.

Most important of all, young Jews do not see Jewishness as a burden, still less as an affliction. Having grown up in an almost completely open society, they are at home in America—and at ease with their Jewishness—in a way their parents can never be. I first appreciated the magnitude of the change some seventeen years ago when my wife and I celebrated our third son's tenth birthday by bringing him and his three brothers to Washington. A friend had arranged for the boys to meet then Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. A warm and gracious host, Mr. Humphrey brought us into the vice-president's ceremonial office, a cavernous room off the Senate chamber, which contained all the trophies he had accumulated in his lifetime of public service. While my wife and I chatted with the vice-president at one end of the room our son wandered off on his own. Suddenly, in the piercing tone of a thoroughly uninhibited ten-year-old, he called out to me from the other end of the room, "Hey, Dad, come look at the Torah in the showcase!" As I heard him I knew that with all the piety and ritual of my intensely Jewish upbringing, I could not have called out to my father that way if my life had depended on it. Had I been in that situation, I would have sidled up to my father, tugged at his coattails to get his attention, and given him the information in as inaudible a whisper as I could manage.

The total absence of inhibition my son displayed was not unique



with him; it goes to the heart of the difference between the generations.

*ITEM:* "We were living in Miami Beach when Castro took over Cuba," Nathan Perlmutter, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, has written. "When the refugees began pouring into Miami, my daughter was thirteen years old and in junior high school. One dinner time, in response to my serviceable, if uninspired, parental conversation opener, 'How was school today?', she replied that there were now over forty Cuban children in her school. 'Really?' 'Yes,' she answered, 'and they have such crazy names: Menendez, Morales, Gonzales.' She paused, and then added thoughtfully, 'But some of them have American names: Goldstein, Schwartz, Levy, Cohen.'" (The first wave of Cuban immigrants included a number of Jews, most of them refugees from Hitler's Europe who had settled in Havana when they could not gain entry to the United States.)

In short, the old burden has been lifted, and with it the self-consciousness, bordering on embarrassment, that Jewishness once entailed. The most striking evidence of this is the ease with which Jews now display their Jewishness in public. I described the rise of "public sector Judaism" in the last chapter, but it is evident as well in the facts that young Jews no longer feel obliged to anglicize their family names and that some have even reclaimed the names their parents or grandparents had abandoned. The best-known instance of this is the decision by novelist Irving Wallace's son, David, to revert to the surname Wallechinsky. Young Jews not only are keeping their own family names but a growing number are giving their children biblical or modern Hebrew first names instead of the "American" given names so popular a generation and two ago. My favorite example involves a college classmate who had changed his name from Isaacson to Iselin; his daughter, who is married to a young man named Tyler—himself the offspring of a mixed marriage—named their firstborn son Isaac in a deliberate attempt to recapture the family name.

This new attitude is significant, for names are a public as well as private expression of identity—a public expression, moreover, with enormous emotional resonance, for names have always played a powerful symbolic role in human consciousness. In the Bible, for example, the great moments in the lives of the patriarchs were almost always accompanied by a change in name: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and Jacob to Israel. The early Zionist settlers in Palestine displayed a similar "mania for renaming," as the Israeli journalist Amos Elon has called it. When a settler changed his name, say, from Gruen to Ben-

Gurion (son of a lion), as Israel's first prime minister did early in the century, or from Rachmilewitz to Onn (vigor), he was not simply *Hebraizing a Russian-sounding name; the settler was, in Flom's formulation*, "re-enacting a piece of primitive magic, reminiscent of the initiation rites of certain Australian tribes, in which boys receive new names at puberty and are then considered reborn as men."

In the United States today young Jews have no need to be reborn; nor are they at war with their parents, as earlier generations were. On the contrary, the distance that once separated one generation from the next is now largely closed; children no longer feel embarrassed by their parents' foreign accents and mannerisms, for the parents are now almost all native-born Americans, most of them college graduates with middle-class occupations. Thus a principal cause of earlier generations' flight from Jewishness has disappeared; young Jews wear their Jewishness with ease, whether they practice their religion or not.

There is another side to the coin, of course: that same ease means that young Jews can surrender their Jewishness without any struggle or trauma; they can simply drift away and disappear into the crowd, through apathy rather than deliberate choice. Some are doing precisely that; it would be feckless to pretend that all is for the best in this best of all possible Jewish worlds. Full acceptance also means that a significant minority of young Jews are marrying outside the faith, a phenomenon whose dimensions and consequences are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The fact remains that the great majority of American Jews, young as well as old, are retaining their Jewish identity. As a group, in fact, young Jews are at least as committed to Jewishness as their elders; and among a small but significant minority, generational change now involves an intensification rather than diminution of Jewish religious, intellectual, and cultural life. Reading or listening to the gloomy forecasts that are a staple of American Jewish life, I am reminded of the advice a wise meteorologist once gave a young colleague: "Before committing your forecast to paper, look out the window." The Talmud makes a similar recommendation: before reaching a firm conclusion, it advises, "go and see what the people in the street are doing."

For nearly six years I have done precisely that: I have traveled the length and breadth of the American continent, talking to rabbis and congregants, communal leaders and followers, professors and students, cab drivers and corporate chief executives, teenagers and retirees, Orthodox Jews who pray three times a day and nonbelievers who never enter a synagogue or open a prayer book—in short, Jews of every age and rank and persuasion. I have read the literature and analyzed the data, and I have sat in on more meetings of more Jewish

organizations than I care to total. The bottom line, as financial analysts like to put it, is that the end is *not* at hand, that Judaism is not about to disappear in the United States.

On the contrary, a major renewal of Jewish religious and cultural life is now under way, one that is likely to transform American Judaism. This is not to deny the existence of contrary trends; many young Jews who make no attempt to escape their Jewishness nonetheless see it as an irrelevant fact, one that has no impact on the way they live their lives. But if some are passively dropping out of Judaism, others are electing to come in—and when young Jews freely choose to be Jewish, they often do so with a seriousness, creativity, and élan that are wholly new to American Jewish life.

Religious renewal involves a number of separate if often overlapping trends. Some Jews who had appeared irretrievably lost to Judaism are finding their way back; others, who had never strayed, are intensifying their religious practice and commitment; still others are creating new ways of expressing their Jewishness, which is more important to them than they had thought. The openness of American society has created a whole new set of options for American Jews, who can now express their Jewishness in a wide variety of ways without surrendering their full participation in American life.

Until recently the greatest weakness of American Jewish life had been its intellectual dependence on the older centers of Jewish scholarship in Europe and, after World War II, in Israel. The faculties of rabbinic training schools were staffed almost entirely by European-born and -trained scholars, and until Brandeis University opened its doors in 1948, there were only two full-time professors of Jewish history and thought in secular American universities—Harry Austryn Wolfson at Harvard and Salo W. Baron at Columbia.

Today, in contrast, more than 300 American colleges and universities offer courses in Judaic studies; at least 40 have Judaic-studies majors, and 27 offer graduate programs at the master's and/or doctoral level. These courses and programs are staffed almost entirely by American-born and -trained scholars, who have already made major contributions to knowledge. Enrollments, moreover, are not limited to those who plan to specialize in Jewish studies; more undergraduates now study Jewish history, literature, language, and thought than are enrolled in courses in Greek and Latin. Nor are the programs confined to institutions with a particularly large proportion of Jewish students; there are important programs at such places as Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, Ohio State University, the University of Minnesota, and Indiana University. In the 1983-84 academic year at Indiana, for example, 881 students were enrolled in the 32 courses that

were offered; and Indiana University Press has become the most active publisher of books on Jewish life and thought. (Among the university presses that now have separate publishing programs in Judaic studies is the University of Alabama Press.)

The explosive growth in the number of Jewish-studies courses and programs is the result of a transformation in the way both Jews and Gentiles view Judaism. Jewish students used to shun any visible connection with Jewish tradition; they were in college, after all, to acquire the culture of the West, which meant—or so they and their mentors assumed—that they would have to shed the inferior culture and manners in which they had been raised. One of the axioms of academic life in Europe and the United States was that although Jews had a religion and a set of laws, they had no culture—at least none that any educated person needed to know anything about. In 1929, for example, when a gift from a Jewish alumnus enabled Columbia University to create a chair in Jewish history, literature, and institutions, it took forceful intervention by the university's president, Nicholas Murray Butler, to persuade the history department to accept Salo Baron on its faculty; the Jewish experience, the members argued, was not a fit subject for historians to study. (Baron himself was initially reluctant to accept the post. Who will take a doctorate in Jewish history? he recalls having thought.)

What is new, then, is not simply that Jewish students (and in some universities, non-Jewish students as well) are interested in learning more about Judaism—a fact that never ceases to amaze those who grew up in the 1920s or 1930s. More important, perhaps, a university curriculum, as Jacob Neusner suggests, is “an enormously effective symbolic statement about what matters and what does not.” Specifically, the creation of Jewish-studies programs and departments, and the inclusion of courses about Jews and Judaism in departments of religion, sociology, and history constitutes a recognition that the Jewish experience is worth learning about. And recognition of Jewish studies as “part of the fabric of Western civilization,” Gerson Cohen states, “marks a radical change in the place of the Jew in Western society.”\*

• Interest in the Jewish experience extends far beyond the academy.

\* The iconoclastic Neusner offers a partial dissent. “Jewish studies locate themselves in universities,” he claims. “But they have yet to become part of universities,” by which he means that too many Judaic-studies programs consist of random collections of courses taught by Jews for Jews for their own parochial purposes. Unless Judaic scholars put their work in the broader context of scholarly inquiry, Neusner argues—unless they speak to everyone in the university—“Jewish studies will pass from the scene.” But a significant number of scholars are doing precisely that.

Consider, for example, the case of New York City's 92nd Street Y. Long known for its musical and cultural programs, the Y until recently provided relatively meager programs of specifically Jewish interest; today it is a major center for adult Jewish studies. In the first five years after John Ruskay, a young educator, assumed the post of education director in 1979, the number of Jewish programs quadrupled, and the number of people attending them increased fivefold; in the 1983-84 program year some 14,000 individuals attended the courses, lectures and lecture series, workshops, and films offered as part of the Y's Jewish Omnibus program.

The same kind of change is evident in the arts as well; the last decade has seen an explosive growth of interest in Jewish music.

*ITEM:* From a front-page story in the April 15, 1983, *Wall Street Journal*, datelined Poughkeepsie, New York:

The joint is jumping. As the band cranks up the tempo, dozens of people break into an impromptu hora, the standard circle dance for countless Jewish weddings. Others kick their legs in the style of the Mexican hat dance. Still others simply run in place to the beat . . . while the rest of the 400 concertgoers clap to the music.

The agent of all this pandemonium is a young group with the unlikely name Kapelye, Yiddish for "the band." Kapelye plays klezmer music, and klezmer is hot. . . . "Klezmer knocks everybody's socks off," says Garrison Keillor, host of the radio comedy and folk show "A Prairie Home Companion."

Until recently, klezmer was little more than a historical footnote—the music of Jews from Eastern Europe and immigrant neighborhoods in the U.S. But now, a dozen young klezmer revival bands are drawing enthusiastic audiences in cities such as Boston, New York, San Francisco, Providence, and Cincinnati. Although few of klezmer's fans understand the music's Yiddish lyrics and even fewer know the right dance steps, they are embracing klezmer for its unusual mixture of foot-stomping energy and piercing soulfulness. . . .

Despite their differences [in background], the musicians tell strikingly similar stories of how they rediscovered klezmer. Most are nonreligious Jews who were looking for a music that expressed their heritage and had a beat that moved them. "As soon as I heard the music I knew that was it," says 30-year-old Lev Lieberman, leader of Klezmorim, a band in Berkeley, Calif.

The klezmer revival is significant because it is not simply a turn toward nostalgia or a search for a romanticized past that never was.

"We're not playing it as part of 'roots,'" Lieberman says, "We're simply playing a fascinating kind of music to the highest professional standards." (Since Lieberman cofounded the Klezmerim in 1975 the group has performed in twenty-eight states, including a sold-out concert in New York City's Carnegie Hall.) Indeed, the last ten years have seen the emergence of "a new Jewish music," as critic Neil Riesner calls it. "Like most things Jewish nowadays, it is not entirely new," Riesner writes, "It is the old, seen and heard with fresh eyes and ears—partly a revival of folk music around the world and throughout the ages and partly a reflection of American Jewry's new-found maturity." Most klezmer groups integrate elements of jazz and the blues with their "Jewish soul music," as they like to call klezmer, while others, such as the Fabrengen Fiddlers, of Washington, D.C., combine klezmer and Hasidic music with bluegrass and country music.

The emergence of a new Jewish music is part of a much broader upsurge of activity across the whole spectrum of the arts. There are at least ten theater groups across the country, for example, that perform both old and new works with Jewish themes, and there are annual Jewish arts festivals in Boston and Washington, D.C., among other cities. The eight-year-old Martin Steinberg Center for the Arts, an American Jewish Congress affiliate established to encourage activity in the Jewish arts, now publishes a quarterly newsletter so that interested parties can keep abreast of what is happening. One of the most striking changes, perhaps, has been the emergence of a group of successful novelists and short-story writers, such as Cynthia Ozick, Mark Helperin, Jay Neugeboren, and Johanna Kaplan, for whom Judaism and Jewishness are not material for satire but an intrinsic part of the air their fictional characters breathe.

What is happening, says Richard Siegel, who directs programs in the arts for the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, is that the third generation is trying to recapture what the second generation had tried to forget, just as historian Marcus Hansen had predicted. "We now have a group of people who are . . . well integrated within the surrounding culture and who have no bones to pick with their Jewish baggage," Siegel explains. One reason is that the gulf that once separated the generations has been largely closed; both parents and children are likely to be American-born, and both inhabit the same cultural milieu. In 1980, for example, three Jewish high school students in five had at least one parent who had a college degree; and since the overwhelming majority of Jewish students come from middle-class backgrounds, "making it" no longer involves estrangement from one's parents. Whatever tensions there may be between the generations, moreover, children no longer are ashamed of their parents because

they are "Jewish" rather than "American." As a result, the principal cause of the flight from Jewishness by earlier generations has been removed. Having gained the acceptance that earlier generations craved, contemporary Jews are comfortable enough with their Jewishness to express it publicly through literature, music, dance, theater, and a variety of other art forms.

## 2

The growth in public expressions of Jewishness has its counterparts in the private sphere, and for the same reasons. Consider, for example, the profound change in the attitudes of American Jews toward Christmas and Chanukah. For American Jews, Christmas used to be the most awkward season of the year. From January until Thanksgiving, Jews might have been able to persuade themselves that they were just like everyone else, except that they observed (or more often did *not* observe) the Sabbath on Saturday instead of on Sunday; but from Thanksgiving until New Year's Day the pretense fell apart, for the world suddenly became Christian. The omnipresence of Christmas trees and decorations in homes and public places; the ubiquitous Santa Clauses in department stores and on street corners; the public school pageants and carol recitals; the manger scenes in front of churches and, often, City Hall; the genuine warmth that normally reticent people displayed; and, most of all, the kindly strangers asking young children what they hoped Santa would bring them—all these normal manifestations of the Christmas spirit served to remind Jews of how different they really were.

In an age in which to be different was to feel inferior, Christmas came to be seen as a Jewish problem as well as a Christian holiday. "While the awkwardness with which they once again confront Christmas is not the most desperate problem faced by American Jews," a young scholar wrote in 1954, "it yields to few in complexity." Such were the complexities, in fact, that Jewish families did not merely see Christmas as a problem; they felt the need to have a *policy* toward it. For example:

- Should children sing religious Christmas carols in school? Should they *pretend* to sing? Or should their parents ask that the youngsters be excused from participating?

- Should Jewish families acknowledge Christmas in some form—say, by sending Christmas cards—or should they try to ignore it? If

they send Christmas cards, should the cards go to Gentile friends only or to Jewish friends as well?

• Should the family go beyond acknowledgment and actually *celebrate* Christmas, and if so, how? Should family members exchange gifts, and if so, what kind? Should the children be permitted (encouraged?) to hang Christmas stockings? And what about Santa Claus: should children's gifts be attributed to him or should they come directly from parents and grandparents?

• These questions were resolved relatively easily, compared to the great symbolic issue of the Christmas tree. Families had to decide whether or not to have a tree, and if so, how large it should be and how it should be decorated—specifically, whether it should have a star on top, and if so, what kind—the conventional five-pointed star or a six-pointed Jewish star?

For all the variations in the Christmas "policies" Jew adopted, they tended to fall into one of three groups. Among Orthodox Jews, insulated against the larger society, Chanukah remained what it had always been—a minor festival in the Jewish calendar. (Unlike the major holidays, work is not prohibited on the first or last days of Chanukah, nor is there an elaborate synagogue liturgy.) A much larger group, eager to acculturate without becoming fully assimilated, tried to hold their children's allegiance to Judaism by turning Chanukah into a major holiday. Chanukah was "better than Christmas," children were told, because they received eight gifts—one on each of the eight nights of the festival—instead of only one. But parents who made this argument usually did so without conviction and without persuading their children. The pull of Jewish tradition was sufficiently strong, in any case, so that Chanukah never really became a major holiday—certainly not an occasion on which the extended family gathered, as was the case with Passover; but the pull of Christmas was so strong that many families continued to be ambivalent about their choice.

For a significant number of Jews, however, substituting Christmas for Chanukah was an important step on the road to becoming fully American; most members of "Our Crowd" adopted Christmas as their holiday early in the century. Christmas played an important symbolic role for upwardly mobile Eastern European Jews as well; as Anne Roiphe has put it, "Christmas is a kind of checking point where one can stop and view oneself on the assimilation route." Roiphe's mother, whose Polish-born father had founded the firm that manufactures Van Heusen shirts, had been eager to have a Christmas tree during her own



childhood. She "described to me how at Christmastime she would stare at all the store windows on upper Broadway, at the gentle, glowing lights of the Christmas tree, and how she wanted that tree in her home, bright and covered with tinsel and sparkling cotton at the base," Roiphe has written. But her mother's parents, who remained moderately observant Jews despite their wealth, would not consider it. When she was first married, therefore, Roiphe's mother had trouble deciding what her "Christmas policy" should be.

The question was resolved by Roiphe's German governess when Roiphe was born on December 25; it became customary for the entire extended family to gather for a combined Christmas-birthday dinner. "We exchanged presents under the tree, extra ones for me because it was my birthday," Roiphe recalls. "My birthday cake was always decorated with red and green. My mother, who may have experienced some guilt over the first tree, threw herself into the Christmas spirit with all her unused energy. On the dining table we had wreaths and reindeer pulling little carts. We had ice cream molds in the shape of Santa Claus and Christmas bells. We had holly on the mantel and mistletoe hung from the chandelier. . . ." "We [are] American," her mother explained when family members objected, "and Christmas . . . is an American holiday!"

Until a few years ago that was how Anne Roiphe and her family saw it too. In fact, in 1978, Roiphe wrote an article for *The New York Times Magazine* entitled "Christmas Comes to a Jewish Home," in which she described the Roiphe family's observance of Christmas. The article was greeted by an avalanche of angry, often hostile, letters from Jewish readers. The mail came from close friends as well as from strangers; almost everyone who wrote was enraged that Roiphe appeared to be recommending her assimilated life style to others.

It is a sign of the times, and of the changing attitudes of American Jews toward "the assimilation parade," that the Roiphe family now celebrates Chanukah with an elaborate party and exchange of gifts, lighting candles on a beautiful menorah that Anne Roiphe's children helped her select. The change had its origin in her 1978 article. Taken aback by the reaction, Roiphe spent the next few years exploring Judaism and her attitudes and relationship to it.

It was a profitable exploration. Roiphe discovered that there was considerably more to Judaism than "the thin, watered-down Jewishness" she had experienced as a child. To her surprise she found that she felt a close connection, even attachment, to Jewish tradition, and she came to see her Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations as "eclectic, thin, without magic or the density of time." Roiphe's attachment

is cultural, not religious; there is much about Judaism that she finds hard to accept and some things she rejects outright. But the attachment is real, and her searching goes on, guided by "a renewed or new connection to Jewishness, an amazed connection that supersedes all my ambivalences and doubts." "Taken all together," she has written, "the nationhood is a landscape of incredible grandeur, and the culture itself, the more one knows of it, well, the more it shines with radiance."

Anne Roiphe's experience is worth recounting because it exemplifies an important trend, in which lighting Chanukah candles increases, generation by generation, among secular as well as religious Jews.

*ITEM:* A distinguished publisher grew up in a completely assimilated home in which Christmas rather than Chanukah was celebrated. As is customary in this heavily Jewish industry, he used to give an annual Christmas party for literary agents, authors, and other publishers. He still gives the party, but since 1979 or 1980 it has been a Chanukah party, with a menorah on the mantel and potato *latkes* (pancakes), the traditional Chanukah food, among the hors d'oeuvres. A small change, perhaps, but one with important symbolic overtones.

This kind of change first became evident in the 1950s when, as we saw in the last chapter, Jews who had left their "urban shtetls" for predominantly Gentile suburbs began to worry about whether their children would remain Jews. Studying the relatively assimilated Jews of "Lakeville" in 1957-58, Marshall Sklare discovered to his surprise that lighting Chanukah candles—a ceremony that occupies a fairly low place in the hierarchy of religious obligations—had become the single most widely observed ritual. Two Jews in three lit Chanukah candles; the only other ritual observed by a majority of Lakeville residents—three in five—was attending a Passover seder. Comparing Lakeville Jews' ritual observances with those of their parents, Sklare found an increase from one generation to the next in the proportion lighting Chanukah candles and only a slight decline in the number attending a seder; with every other ritual—observing the dietary laws, lighting Sabbath candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, and so on—the pattern was the reverse—there were precipitous declines from the parental to the next generation.

Although this pattern of observance was hard to understand from a traditional religious standpoint, Sklare pointed out, it made perfect sense from a sociological perspective. The decisions of Lakeville Jews concerning which rituals to observe were the result of two quite contrary pulls: their desire to remain Jews and their desire to be at home

in American culture. Thus the most popular rituals, Sklare suggested, were those that met five criteria: they can be redefined in contemporary terms; they do not require social isolation or a distinctive life-style; they provide a Jewish alternative to a widely observed Christian holiday; they do not have to be performed with great frequency; and they are centered on the children.

Chanukah and Passover meet these criteria perfectly. They are child-centered festivals—Passover intrinsically so and Chanukah through a long process of adaptation to American life. Unlike the Sabbath, moreover, Passover and Chanukah need be observed only once a year instead of once a week; and unlike the dietary laws, they do not require a distinctive life-style, nor do they impose any barriers to easy social relations with non-Jews. On the contrary, acculturated Jews increasingly invite Gentile friends to their seder services, and an interfaith seder the Sunday before Passover has become commonplace in many communities. By downplaying the traditional emphasis on God's benevolence and miraculous intervention and emphasizing instead the struggle for religious and political freedom, American Jews have turned Chanukah and Passover into holidays that subtly underscore their Americanness as well as their Jewishness.

*ITEM:* The racks of Chanukah cards one now sees in greeting-card stores in most large cities provide clear evidence of how American that holiday has become. "You know it's Hanukkah," Snoopy says on the cover of one popular card, "when the 'Fiddler on the Roof' comes down your chimney." We would have flinched at such a card when I was young—if, indeed, we could have conceived of venturing into a store to buy a Chanukah card at all; it was not until after World War II that manufacturers saw a potential market and began turning out Chanukah cards in sizable numbers. Now one can even buy a "Chanukah stocking"—a blue-and-white sock sprinkled with six-pointed stars.

It is not surprising, therefore, that observance of Chanukah and Passover have become the principal means by which American Jews affirm their Jewishness.

*ITEM:* According to Steven M. Cohen's annual surveys of American Jewish attitudes and behavior, nearly nine Jews in ten report that they attend a seder, either at home or elsewhere. Jews in their twenties and thirties are more likely to attend a seder than those in their sixties.

*ITEM:* More than three American Jews in four now light Chanukah candles—a number well above the level of a generation or two ago. Lighting Chanukah candles is more frequent now in every age group

than it had been in the parental generation, with the largest discrepancy reported by Jews in their twenties and thirties.

Chanukah has become more popular, interestingly enough, despite a small increase in the number of Jews who celebrate Christmas.\* For some American Jews, it would appear, having a tree is no longer a mark of detachment from Jewish life. Witness the fact that 12 percent of the Jewish communal leaders whom Cohen surveyed in 1983—board members of the United Jewish Appeal, B'nai B'rith, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, and American Jewish Congress—have Christmas trees; yet 94 percent of the leaders had been to Israel at least once, and 78 percent had been there two or more times—proportions far above those in the Jewish population at large. (The communal leaders were also more likely to light Sabbath candles, attend a Seder, light Chanukah candles, and observe most other rituals.)

Some critics of American Jewish life dismiss the growth in observance of Chanukah and Passover as a trivialization of Jewish tradition. Many of those who light Chanukah candles, they point out, do not recite (or know) the blessings and prayers that are supposed to accompany the ceremony, and many a Passover seder is little more than a particularly warm family dinner party at which matzoh-ball soup is served and a prayer or two recited.

The observations are true enough; they also happen to be beside the point, for they reflect a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the change that has occurred. For many American Jews, attending a seder or lighting Chanukah candles is an ethnic far more than a religious act; it is a way of asserting cultural and national identity rather than of obeying God's law. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson's famous quip about the vaudeville dog that walks on two legs, what is remarkable is not that American Jews perform the rituals badly but that they perform them at all. Despite the frequent forecasts of Judaism's imminent demise, secular Jews are turning to religious rituals to affirm their Jewish identity.

It is historically appropriate to use Chanukah in this fashion; the triumph that Chanukah celebrates, after all, was that of Jewish particularists over Jewish universalists—a victory of those who were determined to maintain a separate Jewish identity over those who wanted

\* According to Cohen's 1984 survey, 12 percent of American Jews now have Christmas trees, compared to 11 percent ten years earlier; 9 percent reported that their parents had had trees. Younger Jews are more likely to have trees than their elders, a difference attributable to their higher rate of intermarriage. It is not surprising that this should be so; for born Christians, after all, Christmas is filled with childhood memories and inextricably tied to present as well as past relations with parents, grandparents, and siblings.

Jews to disappear into the universal and highly accepting culture of Hellenism.\* To be sure, Purim would be even more appropriate; it commemorates the triumph of a highly acculturated community of Diaspora Jews rather than of a faction within ancient Palestine; and secular American Jews are likely to be more comfortable with the Book of Esther, which never mentions the name of God, than with the religious zealotry of the Maccabees. But there is no Christian or secular American holiday in February to which Purim can be a Jewish counterpart; hence the festival is largely ignored by secular Jews. (In Israel, in contrast, it is more widely observed than Chanukah.)

It is even more fitting that attendance at a seder has become almost universal. Passover has always been the most popular Jewish holiday—and not only because it is so inextricably bound up with home and family.† The child-centeredness of the seder is not an accident, still less a modern interpolation. As I have said, it is the means of carrying out the biblical injunction that lies at the heart of Passover and, indeed, of Judaism itself: to remember Egyptian slavery and the Exodus and to transmit that memory from one generation to the next. To attend a Passover seder, therefore, no matter how watered down it may be, is to keep that memory alive and thus to affirm the desirability, as well as mystery, of Jewish survival.

What survey data do not show, moreover, is the seriousness with which a growing number of Jews take the responsibility of keeping the memory alive.

*ITEM:* As a child Eugene Eidenberg, senior vice-president of MCI, occasionally attended a seder in other people's homes but never in his own; his father, who had grown up on the Lower East Side, spent his adult life trying to escape his Jewishness. As a result, Eidenberg told me, "the content of the Haggadah [the text of the seder service] did not register on me until I was a father myself and began presiding over my own seders. I had to think about what it meant and signified—what knowledge had to be passed on from one generation to another." Now, he says, the seder is the most important evening of the year; but "in a secular more than a religious sense." Eidenberg, his two teen-

\* As the historian Elias Bickerman has demonstrated, the Maccabean uprising was directed less against the Hellenistic rulers of the Jews than against the Hellenist sympathizers among them—those who wanted to eliminate the laws and rituals that had kept the Jews a distinct religioethnic group within the Hellenistic world.

† The seder is conducted at home, not the synagogue, and the elaborate meal is an intrinsic part of the religious service, rather than a diversion from it; making food part of the ceremony is a way of underscoring the Jewish view that one cannot liberate the soul without first liberating the body.

age sons, and their guests spend much of the evening talking about "the meaning of freedom and bondage, of responsibilities and opportunities, and the obligations of justice. These values are so important," Eidenberg adds, "that they *have* to be conveyed."

It is not only parents, moreover, who think about what Passover signifies; one of the most striking changes in recent years is the growing tendency for young single Jews to join with friends to hold their own seder—in some cases a traditional one, in others an "alternative," or "freedom," seder.

ITEM: "What do unaffiliated Jews do if they feel Jewish but don't feel they belong?" a woman in her early thirties asked me in a letter describing her own complex mixture of alienation and commitment. "The 'Freedom Seder' I attended," she wrote, "was loosely organized and alternated between following the seder format and being a free-flowing 'be-in,' complete with poetry and singing, some story-telling and political discussion, and a pot-luck dinner that was strictly vegetarian but hardly kosher (someone brought homemade brownies for dessert). About 30 people were present, scattered on the floor and furniture of a small living room in Queens." The group used a Haggadah published by New Jewish Agenda, an organization created by radicals who wanted a Jewish context within which to express their political views—still another indication of the eagerness of young Jews to affirm their Jewishness in one form or another.

But if the growth in observance of Chanukah and Passover provides clear evidence that American Jews are determined to remain Jews, it says relatively little about their interest in being what Jacob Neusner calls "Judaists"—practitioners of the Jewish religion. For, as I have argued, many of those who light Chanukah candles or attend seders do so for ethnic and cultural rather than religious reasons. Those who worry about the future of Judaism, as opposed to Jewishness, point to survey data indicating a steady erosion of religious commitment. Whatever the indicator—whether it is lighting Sabbath candles, observing the dietary laws, fasting on Yom Kippur, belonging to a synagogue, or attending services with some regularity—there seems to be a steady decline from older to younger people and from one generation to the next.

My accent is on "seems," for when the data are examined more closely, the trends prove to be different and far more complex than they appear. What is at issue, after all, is not whether American Jews are as religiously committed as they might be or as an observer might wish they were. As we have seen, American Jews never have been

noted for their religiosity; despite the widespread assumption that the present represents a fall from grace, the American Jewish community of the first half of this century was a religious wasteland.

The question, then, is not whether American Jews are observant, according to some absolute scale; it is whether an inexorable erosion is going on, whereby each generation is less observant than the preceding one, as straight-line theory would lead one to expect. The answer is that it is not. True enough, there had been a generation-by-generation decline in observance of certain rituals as second- and third-generation Jews struggled to shed their image of being an alien, unassimilable group, but now that American Jews are accepted as fully American, that erosion is a thing of the past.

Consider, for example, the 1965 and 1975 Boston demographic surveys that I used in Chapter Four to illustrate the generation-by-generation shift from business to the professions. At first glance the Boston data seem to confirm the gloomiest prognostications about Judaism's disappearance: observance of most rituals declines steadily from one generation to the next. But simple generation-by-generation comparisons provide a misleading picture because they fail to take account of differences in age, and thus of stages in the life cycle, from one generation to the next. Third- and fourth-generation Jews, that is to say, are much younger than members of the first and second generations; in 1975 the median age of third- and fourth-generation Boston Jews was thirty-two and twenty-seven, respectively, compared to seventy-one and fifty-two for members of the first and second generations. Young Jews are less observant than their elders—not because they are young, however, but because a far larger proportion of them are single or childless, and in every age group single people and childless couples are less likely to belong to a synagogue or to observe religious rituals—other than lighting Chanukah candles or attending Passover seders—than those who have school-age children. (The same pattern, interestingly enough, is characteristic among American Christians as well.)

In his analysis of the Boston data, therefore, Steven M. Cohen analyzed the generational data separately for each age group, thereby reducing the distortions due to differences in the life cycle. The results are striking. When the purview is limited to the first three generations, straight-line theory seems to be vindicated: there is a steady decline in traditional observances, such as lighting Sabbath candles and keeping the dietary laws, and an increase in behaviors associated with integration into American society, such as membership in nonsectarian organizations and contributions to both Jewish and non-Jewish charitable causes.

When one looks at the youngest members of the third and fourth generations, however—those under the age of forty—it is apparent that the erosion not only has run its course but that the fourth generation is somewhat *more* observant than the third! Specifically, young fourth-generation Jews are more likely to light Sabbath candles, fast on Yom Kippur, belong to a synagogue, and attend services with some regularity than third-generation Jews in the same age group. These increases in religious commitment, interestingly enough, did not result from self-ghettoization on the part of fourth-generation Jews; there was, in fact, a sharp increase in the proportion belonging to nonsectarian organizations.

But what about now? The second Boston survey, after all, was taken ten years ago; perhaps religious observance has fallen off since then. Since 1979, however, demographic surveys have been completed in metropolitan areas that include more than 60 percent of the American Jewish population; those surveys confirm the turnaround shown in the Boston studies.

In his analysis of data from a 1981 survey of the New York metropolitan area, for example, Cohen studied the ways in which marriage and child rearing affected ritual observance, Jewish communal activity, and friendship patterns; I am indebted to him for sharing his findings with me before publication.\* What appears to be a rapid decline in religious observance and communal affiliation as one goes down the age scale turns out to be a by-product of the fact that Jews today are marrying and having children at a later age than in the past. Postponement of the age of marriage creates the illusion of a decline in observance, because, as I have already mentioned, single Jews rarely join a synagogue or other Jewish organization, nor do they observe many rituals other than those connected with Chanukah and Passover. Observances and affiliation rates increase, however, when Jews marry; they take a sharp jump when children are born and another jump when children reach school age, as does the proportion having all or mostly Jews as close friends.

By analyzing the way in which the ritual observances and com-

\* The ritual observances reported on included attending a seder, lighting Chanukah candles, attending synagogue services on the High Holidays, lighting Sabbath candles, "making Friday night special," observing the dietary laws at home, and refraining from handling money on the Sabbath; an index of religiosity was constructed according to the number of rituals observed. A second index of communal activity was built on four behaviors: belong to a synagogue, belonging to another Jewish organization, contributing at least \$100 to Jewish charitable causes, and reading a Jewish newspaper. Intragroup friendship patterns were analyzed according to the proportion of respondent's three closest friends who were Jewish.



munal activities of married couples with school-age children vary from one age group to another, Cohen was able to separate the effects of age from those of differences in the life cycle. Young (twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-old) couples with school-age children report slightly lower levels of communal involvement but significantly higher levels of ritual observance than do older (fifty-five-to-sixty-four-year-old) couples. To simplify the analysis Cohen divided the respondents into four groups according to the number of rituals they observed; nearly twice as many young couples were categorized as *frum* (the highest level of observance) and fewer than half as many were classified as nonobservant (the lowest level).

But what about those who are still single or childless? One cannot assume automatically that when they do have children they will be as religiously committed as their peers now are, since those who marry and have children at a young age come from somewhat more traditional backgrounds than those who do not. Cohen's analysis, however, indicates that any reduction in overall religiosity will be modest; in both the twenty-five-to-thirty-four and the thirty-five-to-forty-four age groups, single people and childless couples were *more* observant than their parents. Since the reverse was true for the older age groups, it would appear that the generation-to-generation decline in observance came to an end some twenty years ago.

## 3

The "most significant religious reality among American Jews," Nathan Glazer wrote nearly thirty years ago in his now classic *American Judaism*, was something that had *not* happened: American Jews had not stopped being Jewish. Because of that fact, he explained, even the most superficial manifestations of Jewishness contained the potential for religious renewal: American Jews may be "as ignorant of Judaism as a Hottentot," but their stubborn insistence on remaining Jews "means that the Jewish religious tradition is not just a subject for scholars but is capable now and then of finding expression in life. And even if it finds no expression in one generation or another, the commitment to remain related to it still exists. *Dead in one, two or three generations, it may come to life in the fourth* [emphasis added]."

It was a remarkably prescient observation, for this is precisely what is happening now. All over the United States one can see a return to Judaism on the part of third-, fourth-, and even fifth-generation Jews, who, a few years ago, had appeared to be irretrievably lost to Jewish life. Consider the route traveled by Paul Cowan, a staff writer

for *The Village Voice* and fifth-generation scion of a highly assimilated American Jewish family. If one were to draw up a list of American Jews least likely to become religiously observant, Cowan would be near the top, for he was raised, as he says, as "a Jewish WASP." At twenty-one, beginning a climb that led to the presidency of CBS-TV, Paul's father, Louis, had changed his name from Cohen to Cowan and cut himself off from his family and his religion; amputating his past seemed to be the price of acceptance. The flight from Judaism had begun even earlier on Paul Cowan's mother's side; Polly Cowan had been raised as a Christian Scientist, her parents having adopted that faith in 1910. And so Polly and Lou Cowan and their four children observed no Jewish holidays or rituals; they celebrated Christmas in an elaborate way, gathered each year for an Easter dinner of ham and sweet potatoes, never entered a synagogue, and knew almost no one who did. When Paul was ready for high school the Cowans enrolled him in Choate, an elite Episcopalian prep school with compulsory daily chapel, so that he would feel at ease in the upper-class world in which they hoped he would travel.

Instead Paul Cowan has embraced the cohesive, communal Judaism his father had abandoned and his mother had never known. The transformation began when he and his wife, Rachel, decided "to make sure that our own children wouldn't grow up to be as ignorant and confused as we." Convinced that they would be uncomfortable in a conventional synagogue setting, the Cowans and some like-minded friends asked members of the New York Havurah, a Jewish religious fellowship with roots in both Jewish tradition and the American counterculture, to set up a school for their children. The Havurah agreed, on condition that the parents participate and not merely drop off the children at the school. In the spring of 1975, a year after the school had started, Paul and Rachel Cowan and their children lit Sabbath candles and recited the prayers over wine and bread for the first time in any of their lives.

By fall the Friday night ritual had become one of the anchors around which the family's lives were organized. In the cosmopolitan circle in which Paul and Rachel Cowan traveled, the combination of women's liberation, the sexual revolution, and the growing emphasis on "personal fulfillment" had begun to shatter the norms of adult behavior. To the Cowan children, then five and seven, who saw friends being abandoned as their parents' marriages fell apart, the world was becoming an unstable and frightening place. Thus the Sabbath, with its tranquil rituals and its assurance that parents and children would be together, without any distractions, on the same night each week, became an important source of comfort and stability.

But Judaism is a communal, not just an individual or family religion; in Judaism, community plays the role that in Christianity is occupied by God's grace. It is the community that "touches and moves people and brings them back to the faith," Glazer explains. "And the return to faith, which in Christianity means the acceptance of beliefs . . . in Judaism means the return to the community, which is made holy because it lives under God's law."

Sudden tragedy brought the Cowans into contact with Judaism as a holy community. At 3:00 A.M. one November morning in 1976 two New York City policemen rang their doorbell to tell them that Paul's parents had died at home in a fire. In the days that followed they found themselves supported and comforted by the community that had formed, almost invisibly, around the Havurah school. For the most part, Cowan recalls, his journalist and "movement" friends did not know how to respond to his grief; they were so uncomfortable with death and mourning that they made *him* uncomfortable, treating him as though he were the carrier of some dread disease. The members of the Havurah community, in contrast, knew exactly what to do, for they were familiar with traditional Jewish rituals of mourning. "They helped Rachel's mother cook and take care of the kids as if these were routine matters of communal responsibility," Cowan has written. "They treated us like mourners, not victims," thereby "letting our grief ebb and flow."

When the period of mourning was over, Cowan went to see Joseph Singer, a Hasidic rabbi and social worker on the Lower East Side, in search of a story his father had once urged him to pursue—or so he thought at the time. In fact, as he came to understand later, he was in search of some deeper meaning for his life, some way of exorcising his grief and coming to terms with his tragedy. And so the sixty-two-year-old European-born rabbi, tenth-generation descendant of the founder of Hasidism, became the fifth-generation American journalist's teacher and friend.

More than that, Rabbi Singer became a powerful force in Cowan's life. Accompanying the rabbi on his endless rounds—to comfort the sick and lonely, to find an apartment for the homeless, to purchase a comfortable mattress that an emotionally disturbed woman insisted was the only thing that would ease her distress (he was not sure that the mattress itself mattered, Rabbi Singer told Cowan, but he was certain that the woman needed to know that someone was concerned about her), to perform any number of other good deeds—Cowan was reminded of the emphasis on doing good that had attracted him to the New Left in the early and mid-1960s. But whereas the impulse to perform good deeds had evaporated among the members of the New

Left, Cowan realized, it was firmly woven into the fabric of Rabbi Singer's faith, and so was "far more durable than anything I had found in the secular world. Moreover, he helped me get outside myself and my grief and feel that all of us . . . were part of something—call it a tradition or a faith—that was bigger and more mysterious than ourselves."

Despite occasional fantasies of becoming Orthodox and moving to the Lower East Side, Cowan had no real desire to abandon his own world and submerge himself in Rabbi Singer's; instead he began taking parts of that world home with him, gradually adapting them, as best he could, to the world in which he lived. As a result, he has managed to find community and faith without abandoning his identity as an acculturated American; he has joined his new Jewish identity to his old American one, so that he now sees the world through two sets of eyes.

For all the idiosyncratic nature of Cowan's background, there is nothing idiosyncratic about his decision to become a practicing Jew. He is not even unique in his own family. His sister, Holly Schulman of Washington, D.C., now keeps a kosher home and belongs to a Conservative synagogue; she learned Hebrew so that she could chant the Haftorah (the Prophetic portion read in synagogue each Sabbath morning) on a Saturday morning in 1982 when she celebrated the bat mitzvah she had not had as a child.

And countless others are finding their own routes back to Judaism; wherever I have gone I have met men and women who are more observant than their parents had been or whose children are more observant than they are.

**ITEM:** A Des Moines, Iowa, insurance executive grew up in a small town sixty miles away, in which his was the only Jewish family. He attended a Methodist Sunday school until he was fifteen, when his concerned parents moved to Des Moines and joined the Reform temple so that he could be with other Jewish children. The executive's wife, who had a Jewish mother and Christian father, raised their children as Christian Scientists; one child continues in that faith, but the other is now an observant Conservative Jew who sends his own children to a Conservative-sponsored "day school."

**ITEM:** At breakfast in Houston, before a meeting of the American Jewish Committee's National Executive Committee that I was about to address, I chatted with the man seated to my left, a midwestern industrialist who is active in Jewish communal and philanthropic affairs but religiously nonobservant; his synagogue-going is limited to an occasional appearance at High Holy Day services at the Reform

temple to which he belongs. In the manner of men our age, we talked about our children. His older son, he told me, has no Jewish involvement whatsoever, but his younger child recently transferred from Dartmouth (my acquaintance's alma mater) to Yale so that he could observe the dietary laws, a semester spent in Israel having turned him into an observant Jew.

This *baal teshuvah* phenomenon, as it is called (literally translated from the Hebrew, "the one who repents"—who returns to Judaism), is broader and deeper than most observers have recognized. The term is often used to refer to young people, many of them alumni of the counterculture, who have dropped out of mainstream American life to join Hasidic or other right-wing Orthodox sects. But although the return to Orthodoxy is important in its own right, it is only a small part of a broader and deeper trend.

The only way to comprehend the phenomenon, in fact, is to use the definition suggested by Charles Liebman of Bar-Ilan University: a *baal teshuvah* is anyone of college age or older who is more observant than his or her parents, teachers, or childhood friends would have predicted. Under this definition the number of *baalei teshuvah* (plural, or BTs, as they sometimes are called), is substantial. I have met them in every part of the country—men and women of every age and from every kind of background who are more religiously observant than they had been five or ten or twenty years before; many are also more observant than their parents had been. The specific reasons for returning to Judaism vary from person to person, as do the routes the returnees have followed, the particular forms their new-found observance takes, and the intensity and seriousness with which they approach their religion.

And yet as Carl Scheingold, director of the National Havurah Committee, discovered in a study of Jewish religious renewal that he conducted for The American Jewish Committee, certain common threads run through almost all the stories.\* The most important is a search for meaning and purpose, a realization (sometimes conscious and sometimes not, sometimes before the fact and sometimes after) that full immersion in American secular life does not answer the ultimate questions of meaning, that life is fuller and richer when people attach themselves to something larger than themselves. It is not only

\* I am indebted to Dr. Scheingold for sharing the full and unpublished draft of his study with me; a briefer version of the manuscript was published by The American Jewish Committee under the title *New Pockets of Jewish Energy*. (The portrait of Professor X beginning on the next page is drawn in part from Scheingold's manuscript and in part from my own conversations with X.)

Jews, of course, who are engaged in this kind of search, it is going on among Americans of every religious background. As Professor Robert N. Bellah of Berkeley, a leading sociologist of religion, explains, "There is a reaction against extreme individualism and self . . . a search for roots with a capital R, which takes people back to religion."

Nowhere is the change more evident (or more unexpected) than on college and university campuses, which have long been havens for religious skeptics. Religion was on the defensive when he arrived at Harvard a quarter of a century ago, Rabbi Ben-Zion Gold, director of the Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel, observes. "But people lost confidence in progress, in the social engineering they thought would usher in the Golden Age. This punctured the self-confidence of the academy's priests." The sociologist Daniel Bell of Harvard makes the same point: "The exhaustion of modernism, the aridity of Communist life, the tedium of the unrestrained self . . . all indicate that a long era is coming to a close"—an era in which intellectuals viewed religion as superstition. That view "makes little sense today," Bell argues. Every generation has to struggle with "the existential questions"—questions about the meaning of life and death, tragedy and obligation. And we have come to recognize that "the most coherent responses, historically the most potent responses," are the ones that religion provides. And so the theologian Harvey Cox of Harvard Divinity School, who twenty years ago argued that religion was "disappearing forever," now speaks of the "tremendous resurgence of religious interest" on college campuses.

The turn to religion on the part of Jewish professors is all the more striking in view of the self-hatred with which Jewish intellectuals have been afflicted for so long. As we saw in the first half of the book, "making it" in the world of high culture seemed to require abandonment of one's Jewishness. "Here I am, finally, out in the big world, a Jewish boy in fifth-century Athens," a Harvard Law School professor recalls having felt twenty years ago when he entered Harvard College. To Professor X, as I will call him (he prefers to remain anonymous), Judaism seemed "pale and inadequate" compared to "the world of Harvard—the world of universal, cosmopolitan culture" that he entered twenty years ago. True enough, immersing himself in that culture involved no great loss for X; his Jewish identity and knowledge were both rather meager, for he had grown up in a socialist, rabidly antireligious home in which no Jewish holidays were celebrated.

Professor X's relation to Judaism began to change in the mid-seventies. Having established himself professionally, this son of a cab driver-turned-milkman was less in awe of "the world of Harvard" than he had been at the start of his career, and his opposition to Amer-

ican involvement in Vietnam had led to a growing disillusionment with the universal, cosmopolitan culture he had admired and which Harvard seemed to embody. "Rationalism was tottering; the 'best and the brightest' didn't know their spiritual asses from their elbows," he says. "Fifth-century Athens had disappointed me terribly."

While this was happening, the oldest of X's three children was approaching adolescence. Eager to connect her to Judaism in a way that made sense to him—his own bar mitzvah had helped alienate him from Judaism—he enrolled her in an afternoon religious school affiliated with Harvard. He also visited Israel with a group of other academics on a trip sponsored by The American Jewish Committee. Examining the issues of Jewish identity with a group of people who were his intellectual peers, he gained a new sense of "the plausibility of religion" and a consequent desire to find a link to Jewish tradition.

The question was: How? The answer was not evident at first, since X had an aversion to ritual and prayer, which he considered servile and unthinking, and felt an even greater antipathy to what he calls "the typical suburban temple." After his return from Israel he attended High Holiday services at Harvard for the first time. Although he enjoyed the services, he was not moved by them; he still felt uncomfortable with the religious aspect of Judaism. A year or two later, however, he attended a bar mitzvah at the Harvard Worship and Study Group, whose members, most of them Harvard faculty members and graduate students, worship together on the Harvard campus each Saturday morning.\* "Incredibly turned on" by the group—"they are a collection of serious people struggling to make meaning out of Judaism"—X began attending Saturday morning services on a regular basis. The group provided a comfortable, nonthreatening environment; instead of feeling embarrassed by his ignorance, as he might have been in a conventional synagogue, X felt free to proceed at his own pace.

The result has been an increasingly intense and meaningful involvement with Judaism. "Humanism does not seem to be the source of values for me that it once was," X explains, "and I've turned to the Jewish tradition as an alternative." What attracts him is precisely "the experience of particularity" that once had repelled him—the "concrete root" of the tradition "and its history and its suffering and its pain and the fact that for some weird reasons I am here to continue it." Not that he has suspended his disbelief. On the contrary, prayer still is "a difficult issue" for him; he continues to see many rituals as "hollow and empty" and to view much of Jewish law as "fundamentally alien

\* Rabbi Ben-Zion Gold, the Harvard Hillel director, helped organize the group and is a regular participant, but he avoids any formal leadership role; the egalitarian services are run entirely by the members.

## A CERTAIN PEOPLE

to [his] sensibilities." He would like to believe in God but remains a nonbeliever.

Now, however, X is a committed and observant nonbeliever, who speaks of "the evocative power of ritual" while wondering what he means by the phrase and who describes communal prayer as "an intense spiritual experience" while professing his atheism. This kind of mixture of skepticism and doubt is typical of intellectuals who have turned to religion in recent years. "I can't say to you I believe in God," the psychiatrist Robert Coles, who has played a significant role in the Christian revival at Harvard, told Fran Schumer, author of a *New York Times Magazine* article on the return to religion on college campuses. "There are moments when I do stop and pray to God. But if you ask me who that God is or what kind of image He has, my mind boggles. I'm confused, perplexed, confounded. But I refuse to let that confusion be the dominant force in my life."

Professor X feels the same way. He is intellectually and emotionally engaged by Judaism—by the intellectual depth embodied in the structure of the Sabbath liturgy, the nuances of feeling and meaning that different ways of reciting a particular prayer can impart, and the complex relationship between ritual and belief. Having always thought that one had to believe in God before performing any rituals, he is fascinated by the traditional Jewish notion that the relationship runs the other way—that behavior precedes belief, that one begins with ritual and moves on from there. He wonders whether his observance of ritual can be sustained without the belief he does not (or does not yet) have, but he is "prepared to see what happens." What was happening when I checked on his progress last was that religious observance was falling into place as "part of a more elaborate whole"—the result, as he put it, of "a normalization of my Jewishness." Thus his interest in Israel had grown—he had spent six weeks teaching in Israel under the Fulbright exchange program—and he had become an informal adviser to Jewish students at Harvard Law School. He is still uncertain about a number of aspects of his Jewish identity, but he feels that the outcome is not in doubt, for, as he told me, "the core has been secured."

It is being secured for a great many once highly assimilated Jews. For philosophy professor Hilary Putnam the first experience with "transcendence"—the sense of "belonging to a group larger than oneself"—came from involvement in radical political action during the 1960s; he was a member of the Progressive Labor Party, the extremist offshoot of the radical Students for a Democratic Society. But the turn to violence disillusioned Putnam. "It was a painful experience," he says, to discover that people on the left were as willing as those on the



right to accept torture and murder as a political weapon. "I grew weary of people with political panaceas." Today he is an observant Conservative Jew who attends services regularly with his wife and family. "I recognized that I was, by nature, a religious person," he explains, and concluded that he "should no longer fight this, but accept it." It is the sense of belonging to something larger than himself that is the primary appeal. "Whatever one's image of God, there is a notion in religious thought of an obligation very far from one's own vanity," he says. "I try to think about the question of service now, service to the culture."

For Michael Medved of Santa Monica, California, an ebullient thirty-eight-year-old author and screenwriter, Judaism is a total way of life, the particulars of which are determined by the requirements of traditional Jewish law; he is a devoutly Orthodox Jew. That was not the way the San Diego-born and -bred Medved had been raised. "I majored in spitball-throwing," he says of his years in the afternoon religious school to which his outwardly assimilated parents sent him—for nostalgic reasons rather than religious commitment. (Their primary commitment seemed to be to liberal politics of the Henry Wallace variety.) After his bar mitzvah Medved abandoned his tenuous connection to Judaism. In college in the late 1960s, he wrote in *What Really Happened to the Class of '65*, he "was looking for roots, for a sense of belonging," and thought he had found it in the New England WASP tradition he encountered at Yale. "I loved the pomp, the pretensions, the Gothic entryways, the fireplace in my dorm room, the civility of the dining hall."

He also loved a woman from an upper-class Protestant background and planned to marry her. When her parents reluctantly agreed to the match—"You Jewish men never get drunk and never beat their wives," they told Medved—he returned to California to get what he assumed would be the blessing of his liberal, open-minded parents. Instead they responded with outraged anger. "They threatened that they'd never see my wife or their grandchildren," Medved recalls. "We didn't speak for six months." Medved postponed the wedding and used the time to read as much about Judaism as he could. "I had grown up worshiping my father; I thought he was the most brilliant man I knew," Medved told me. "When he reacted the way he did, I decided I had to find out what it was that he found so precious in Judaism; I figured there had to be something there that I didn't understand." His readings were "a major revelation for me," Medved says. "I discovered that Judaism is more than just a nostalgic ache or a remembrance of Yiddish phrases; it is a way of life"—one that challenged the very basis of the free-flowing life he had been leading.

And so his journey began. Back in California in the spring of 1971, Medved began lighting Sabbath candles and praying each morning, wearing *tefillin* (phylacteries), although, as he told me, he could barely read the Hebrew prayers. A year later he began observing the dietary laws at home, and the next year he experimented with observing the Sabbath by refraining from driving—a major change in life-style in Southern California. In 1978 Medved, by then a devout Orthodox Jew, and Daniel Lapin, an Orthodox rabbi with whom he had begun studying the year before, organized the Pacific Jewish Center—"the only community of bohemian Orthodox Jews in the world," one was called it, referring to the offbeat backgrounds and occupations of the young men and women who were attracted to it. When I visited the community in 1979 it had eighty members, one of them Medved's divorced father, David, a physics professor at UCLA. Most, however, were young singles, many of them alumni of one or another of the many cults and communes that then existed in Southern California. "In a way, we are just another manifestation of the impulse behind the cults," Lapin told a reporter in 1980. "But we offer something far more wholesome."<sup>\*</sup>

Today, the Pacific Jewish Center has nearly three hundred members, two thirds of them married couples, most with young children. "We sometimes call it the Prolific Jewish Center," Medved told me. The bohemian flavor has diminished as the onetime hippies have settled into conventional life-styles, but it is not what one would call a typical Orthodox community. Virtually everyone there is a *baal teshuvah*, and a large proportion of the still young members work as screenwriters, television and film producers, Hollywood agents, talk-show hosts, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts—occupations not typical of Orthodox Jews. Turnover is fairly high: some cannot accept the system of beliefs, others find the demands of Orthodox law incompatible with their

\* There was a decided cultlike atmosphere to the *shiur* (study group) I attended in 1979. It was evident in the authoritarian manner in which Rabbi Lapin conducted the "discussion" and, even more, in the sheeplike way in which the forty-five or fifty participants accepted his pronouncements as if they were profound and revealed truths. They were not. To someone familiar with the rabbinic commentaries on the biblical passage under discussion—Abraham's argument with God over the latter's proposed destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—Lapin's comments seemed banal as well as unpleasantly chauvinistic. Yet no one in this group of seemingly bright, articulate young men and women questioned or challenged anything Lapin said, even when he was denigrating Christianity in what I found to be a crude and offensive way. "They don't want to be bothered any more," an Orthodox rabbi friend explained to me. "They are running away from complexity."

careers or private lives, still others pass through the community on their way to a far more rigid, fundamentalist Orthodoxy.

Like most Orthodox Jews, those who remain are firmly rooted in an intimate, close-knit community. Because of the requirements of Orthodox law—riding and handling money on the Sabbath are prohibited—members live close to the synagogue and thus to one another. And the prohibition against the use of electricity, as well as against work, on the Sabbath means a twenty-four-hour respite from the distractions of the world each week, thereby providing a period in which families and friends can renew their relationships.

It is not only Californians, however, who feel a hunger for community, nor is it only Orthodox Jews who seek the intimacy that comes from membership in a close-knit group. Sometimes the search is explicit, but many do not recognize their hunger until it has been satisfied—until they have discovered what membership in an organic community can mean in their lives. "Through all of our work," Leonard Fein and his colleagues wrote toward the end of their study of Reform congregants and congregations, "no single conclusion registers so strongly as our sense that there is, among the people we have come to know, a powerful, perhaps even desperate, longing for community, a longing that is, apparently, not adequately addressed by any of the relevant institutions in most people's lives." The Jews in question rarely spoke of their longing. "The need for community is so strong, and the prospect of community so weak," Fein concluded, "that people are reluctant to acknowledge the need." Thus some Jews find community accidentally; others find it as a by-product of their search for some connection with Judaism or Jewish peoplehood; still others seek it directly.

*ITEM:* "I had a need for something Jewish in my life," a member of the Havurah of South Florida told me, a need he had been unable to meet. Having grown up in the intimate atmosphere of the Havana Jewish community, he was turned off by what he felt was the coldness and impersonality of the huge temples he encountered in Miami. When the Havurah was started in 1980 he began attending a monthly study group and was drawn to it by the warmth he encountered. "I love the idea of this being a group where you can achieve closeness and sharing among people of a wide age range."

Community serves another function as well. Many if not most of those who return to Judaism are uncomfortable with their ignorance of the language, prayers, rituals, and procedures—so much so that they often refrain from attending a synagogue service for fear of being embarrassed and are reluctant to ask questions or to voice uncertainties

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and doubts. As we saw in Professor X's case, it is reassuring to meet others as ignorant as oneself who are also exploring their relation to Judaism. It is also comforting to meet intellectual or social peers who can serve as Jewish role models and who are willing to share their knowledge and experience without making the newcomers feel diminished.

Support is needed too in order to overcome the alienation from Judaism that most returning Jews have experienced—an alienation that can be intense. When he surveyed the people attending the Jewish Omnibus programs of the 92nd Street Y in 1980, John Ruskay discovered that 60 percent were not affiliated with a synagogue or other Jewish institution, and most of those who gave a reason for their lack of affiliation attributed it to what Ruskay calls "powerful negative memories—real or alleged—of what had been done to them by the Jewish institutions they had been affiliated with in the past." For many the most negative memory of all was the primitive nature of the theology offered to answer (or suppress) their youthful questions and doubts; having rejected the theology, they felt obliged to reject Judaism as well, for they had never been taught that Judaism offers multiple routes to religious expression. As a result, Ruskay established a program called "Connect," designed to help unaffiliated Jews learn about those routes and thereby find their way back to Judaism.

The return to Judaism rarely is the result of any peak experience, or rebirth, to use Christian terminology. In most instances it is a gradual process, albeit one that often is accelerated by some fortuitous event—attending a bar mitzvah, as in Professor X's case; spending a Sabbath with friends or even with new acquaintances; hearing a lecture or going on a weekend retreat sponsored by a Jewish organization; attending Sabbath services with some regularity during the year preceding a child's bar or bat mitzvah.

*ITEM:* For a midwestern couple I will call the Schwartzes (they prefer to be anonymous) the accelerating factor was their Reform temple's requirement that they attend Sabbath services before their son could become bar mitzvah. Until then the fact that Dan and Myra Schwartz were Jewish had had no discernible effect on their lives; but when their children were born they decided, in the vague fashion of many American Jews, that they "wanted the children to know they were Jewish." Thus the Schwartzes joined a nearby temple, attended High Holy Day services, and, at the appropriate time, enrolled the children in the religious school of the temple, which held classes two afternoons a week as well as on Sunday. Required to attend Sabbath services before their older son's bar mitzvah, they discovered after a

while that they enjoyed the respite it provided and were stimulated by the way the rabbi connected Jewish tradition to the pressing issues of the day. They now observe the Sabbath on Friday nights—lighting candles, chanting kiddush (the prayer over the wine), and eating a leisurely meal with their sons before attending the temple service. Moreover, Myra Schwartz has enticed several other women with similar backgrounds to join her in a course of study leading to their belated bat mitzvahs—a phenomenon one now encounters in a great many Reform and Conservative congregations.

*ITEM:* Before she was married, says Malka Drucker, a California author, she believed that "ritual was for ignorant people or hypocrites. All one needed to be a good Jew was to be a good person." Having grown up "thinking that *Shabbat* and *kasbrut* were part of some ancient time," it was difficult for her at first to adjust to her husband's observances. "I liked to do things when I felt like it," she writes, and not at set times. But before long Friday night "became our time to reach one another again after the long week." Even so, she was uncomfortable in synagogue until she attended Sabbath morning services at Valley Beth Shalom, a Conservative congregation in the San Fernando Valley. It was a revelation. "Rabbi [Harold] Schulweis talked about the Torah the way my English professors talked about Shakespeare—with wit, drama, and respect," Drucker explains. She began attending regularly and came to see the synagogue as more than an intellectually exciting classroom. "One day tears came to my eyes when the Torah was returned to the ark. It was no longer just intellectual nourishment; it had finally become my tree of life. A few weeks later, I began to call myself by my Hebrew name, Malka."

As Malka Drucker's story reveals, a charismatic rabbi or teacher often plays a crucial role in people's return to Judaism. The growing availability of such people is one of the factors that make the return to Judaism more than a passing fad. That was not the case a generation ago. "If Judaism is to have any vitality in the United States," Nathan Glazer wrote, "it will be by virtue of examples of Jewish lives that are meaningful." Role models were crucial, he said, because "the abstract demand to seek faith, to find God, tends to find little answer among Jews, and . . . concrete examples of Jewish living must be given before religion has an impact on their lives."

One of the strengths of the current religious renewal is the abundance of such "concrete examples of Jewish living"—in particular, examples of people who have been able to combine participation in American society with a rich Jewish life. Role models of a more traditional sort—the scholar or the *tzaddik* (righteous person) living in an

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entirely Jewish world—have always been present; what had been in short supply were men and women whose Jewish commitments were played out on a larger stage. The late Abraham Joshua Heschel was one such person; he influenced an entire generation before his death in December 1972.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, president of the National Jewish Resource Center and a "postmodern Orthodox rabbi," as he likes to call himself, is another. In Washington, D.C., Des Moines, Iowa, Houston, San Diego—almost everywhere I have gone—I have met men and women who have either returned to Judaism or greatly intensified their observance as a result of workshops and weekend retreats that Greenberg has run, usually for the Young Leadership divisions of the United Jewish Appeal and the various local federations. A Harvard Ph.D. in history, Orthodox rabbi, participant in ecumenical dialogues, and husband of a leading Jewish feminist (Blu Greenberg is a major figure within the Jewish women's movement and its principal spokesperson in the Orthodox community), "Yitz" Greenberg, as almost everyone calls him, is living proof that one can be fully Jewish and fully American. The six-foot-six Greenberg is a dynamic speaker as well, with a rare ability to explain the reasons behind the traditional Jewish way of life. "In a way Jews have become evangelicals," he explains. They need to be; in an open society such as ours "all religions have to broadcast their message," for "if they don't, they get nowhere."

In fact, Greenberg is one of a growing number of "guru rebbes," as they have been called, who, in greater or lesser degree, devote themselves to religious "outreach" to unaffiliated and/or alienated Jews. Jonathan Omer-Man, a British-born *baal teshuvah* who lived in Israel for eighteen years, now works for the Los Angeles Hillel Council as a full-time "religious counselor" to "young Jews who are having difficulties integrating their religious feelings within Judaism." Much of the time he meets people over coffee at a local McDonald's because "it's neutral ground." "The people I deal with," he explains, "feel uneasy in a Jewish setting" because "they are bright, and they have been talked down to." A key part of his job, he feels, is to help established Jewish institutions understand their failures and change themselves so that they can attract some of the people who have been turned off by them.

Harold Schulweis is trying to do precisely that within his own congregation. When he moved to Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, he told me, he realized that he "was dealing with a new kind of Jew"—men and women so consumed by their own problems that they were unable to commit themselves to anything larger than themselves. "This is not because they are selfish," Schulweis insists, but because "they are

bleeding from hurts to which the synagogue pays no attention"—marital discord and divorce, abandonment, alcoholism and drug abuse, career problems, difficulties in parent-child relationships, and so on. "Instead of blaming them," he says, "we have to meet them where they are and try to deal with their problems."

To do so Schulweis has turned his synagogue into a counseling center. "It seemed wrong that I always had to send people away to a specialist," he told me, and even wronger that "the 'community of care' existed *outside* the synagogue." Enlisting the aid of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, he set up a program to train congregants and other interested people in counseling and crisis-intervention techniques and to give them some knowledge of the ways in which Judaism relates to individual and family problems. The fifty or so paraprofessionals, each supervised by a social worker or psychologist, are housed in a wing constructed for that purpose, and see a hundred or more people a week. "The synagogue has established itself as a caring institution," Schulweis told me with evident pride.

He has changed the synagogue in other ways as well. Borrowing the most inspired innovation of the Jewish counterculture, he has adapted the idea of the *havurah* to the needs of a middle-aged, suburban congregation. The result has been the creation of *havurot* (plural), usually involving ten individuals and/or families, within the synagogue itself, to provide a more intimate and less threatening setting for religious observance as well as a system of mutual support in time of need. In the fall of 1984 there were more than 60 *havurot*, involving a third to a half of the congregation's 1700 family units. (Some *havurot* are little more than coffee klatches, while others are intensely involved in study or ritual practice.)

The success of the paracounseling program has led Schulweis to extend the idea to his religious role as well; he has trained a group of congregants to serve as pararabbis. "There are paramedics and paralegals; rabbis need help as much as lawyers and doctors do," he says. Equally important, "Jews need other Jews to be Jewish, far more than they need books or courses." Thus the twenty-five to thirty pararabbis meet with newlyweds, prospective parents, bar and bat mitzvah youngsters and their parents, and other congregants to help them understand the whys and hows of Jewish ritual and expression.

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religious interest and activity on the part of Jews who never strayed. The distinction between those who have returned and those who have always been religious is not always clear-cut; what matters, in any case, is that large numbers of Jews are now more observant than they had been. The change is most striking, perhaps, in the Orthodox community, which shows a vitality few had anticipated a generation ago, but the intensification or religious observance is evident across the whole denominational spectrum.

Consider, for example, the interest in Judaism that some college students now display. True, religious observance is more the exception on campus than the rule; the college years, after all, are a time for questioning and often temporarily abandoning old values and identities and for "trying on" new ones. And yet there are a number of colleges—UCLA, the University of Chicago, Harvard, Brandeis, Princeton, and Columbia are particularly striking examples—that have a vibrant Jewish religious and cultural life. For those who grew up in the thirties, forties, and fifties the change is astounding.

During my undergraduate and graduate years at Columbia, for example, there was a single Adviser to Jewish Students, a rabbi whose principal responsibility was to help Jewish students cope with the problems their Jewishness often entailed; if he conducted Sabbath or other services for Jewish students, the memory escapes me. Today, in contrast, Columbia's Jewish Office is staffed by two Jewish chaplains and an administrative assistant; three services are conducted on Friday evening and two on Saturday morning, and students who want kosher food and/or a Jewish ambience can choose between two off-campus residences. Moreover, the Council of Jewish Organizations, a union of some fifteen student groups, includes a monthly Jewish student newspaper, a Jewish theater group, two Zionist organizations, and a Sabbath Meals Committee, among others. Most impressive of all, perhaps, are the extracurricular Jewish-studies courses sponsored by the Jewish Office; a recent bulletin offered twelve courses, ranging from introductory and intermediate classes in Hebrew to an advanced Talmud study group.

**ITEM:** The change at Harvard is even more dramatic: as Henry Rosovsky, who was the dean, noted in his 1979 address dedicating the new Hillel building, Hillel had moved "from the periphery of the campus to its very center." The physical move has had its behavioral counterpart. When Ben-Zion Gold became the Hillel rabbi twenty-five years ago, there was a Conservative service on Friday night that attracted no more than 20 students and an Orthodox service on Saturday morning that attracted 40 to 50; there were no Reform services at all.



Today there are five worship groups, three of which meet on Saturday morning; between 300 and 400 students and faculty attend each week—a fivefold increase.

This kind of religious ferment, to repeat, is still more the exception than the rule and is testimony, in part, to the imagination and character of the Hillel rabbis on the campuses in question. Religious activity on campus is a reflection too of the religious environments from which the students come and of the harmony that exists between them and their parents. "The students are far closer to their parents than they imagine they are," Rabbi Gold told me. Certainly they are less rebellious and more conventional than the students of the 1960s; in an age in which one of Princeton's eating clubs offers kosher meals, students can retain their Jewishness without any psychic or social cost. One unfortunate by-product of this harmony is an absence of the creativity that was the hallmark of the Jewish counterculture described in the last chapter.

The erstwhile rebels, meanwhile, continue to make their presence felt. The old communitarian emphasis has largely disappeared as the founders have married, born children, and become immersed in their careers, but the *havurot* remain. There are at least 300 throughout the country and perhaps as many as 500. (Most are groups of 10 to 20 individuals or couples, but some have memberships of 60 or more.) New *havurot* continue to be formed—but by Jews in their thirties and early forties rather than by members of the next generation.

New or old, *havurot* continue to display most of the characteristics that distinguished them from conventional synagogue life. Specifically, they continue to be distinguished by their emphasis on celebration and joy (most *havurah* members reject the obsession with Jewish persecution and suffering that characterized their own religious upbringing); their insistence on equality of the sexes (women play the same religious roles as men) and on lay participation (members conduct religious services themselves, refusing to delegate religious worship or practice to rabbis and cantors); the importance they attach to study, especially of traditional texts; their experimentation with liturgy; and the worship style they have developed, which combines the warmth and fervor of Hasidism with the informality of American youth culture.

Whether the *havurot* are a passing fad, as their main-line critics have maintained, or a permanent entry in Jewish life remains to be seen; it was not until 1969, after all, that the first *havurah* came into being. But permanent or not, the *havurot* already have exerted a profound influence on Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist synagogues; witness the number of congregations, such as Valley Beth Sha-

lom, that are now creating *havurot* of their own. Estimates of the number of synagogue *havurot* run as high as three thousand. One can see the influence of the *havurah* movement too in the number of congregations, especially Reform congregations, that are adopting elements of the *havurah* worship style.

The reason, quite simply, is that some of the impulses that led to the creation of the *havurah* movement are felt throughout the organized religious community. Among Reform Jews, for example, one can see a notable return to traditional rituals, ceremonies, and forms of worship.

*ITEM:* The headline on the front-page article of the September 30-October 5, 1984, issue of *Our Town*, a weekly newspaper serving Manhattan's fashionable Upper East Side, read "The New Year's call for renewal." The article that followed, written by Harvey M. Tattlebaum, rabbi of Temple Shaaray Tefila, a Reform congregation in the neighborhood, concluded with an invitation "to join us on Rosh Hashanah afternoon for our 'Tashlich' service (casting away of our sins) at the East River at about 81st Street (Finley Walk) at 3:00 P.M. New breath is infused into an ancient ritual. The Shofar is blown, songs are sung, prayers are intoned. It has become our Synagogue's Rosh Hashanah 'happening' by the waters."

The article leaped off the page, because this is precisely the kind of ritual that used to be anathema to Reform Jews, who emphasized the rational and rejected anything that appeared "unscientific" or incompatible with modern thought. Tashlich is an ancient folk ritual in which one throws bread crumbs into a body of flowing water to symbolize the casting away of one's sins and the hope for purification. When I was young, acculturated Orthodox Jews as well as Reform and Conservative Jews had abandoned the ritual, for it carried too many overtones of Eastern European folk superstition.\* But American Jews no longer worry about appearing modern and up to date, and Tashlich is coming into favor again. When I took a late afternoon stroll along the East River this past Rosh Hashanah afternoon, I passed four separate groups performing the ritual, ranging from the smartly dressed members of Shaaray Tefila to a group of Hasidim in their traditional garb.

Cleveland's Fairmount Temple provides another example of the return to tradition within the Reform movement. Until recently this

\* Tashlich is, in fact, a folk custom and not a ceremony required by Jewish law. Indeed, rabbinic authorities tried to suppress the ritual precisely because of its superstitious overlay; but, as happened with a number of other rituals, the folk tradition prevailed.

huge congregation (2300 families) was one of the prototypes of "high church" German Reform Judaism: services were conducted almost entirely in English, with music performed by a large choir; there was no cantor—the office was abandoned in the 1870s as too "Oriental"—and no congregational singing, except, perhaps, for an occasional English hymn; rabbis were bareheaded and wore ministerial robes; and the bar mitzvah ceremony was strongly discouraged, when it was not forbidden.

Today the senior rabbi, Arthur Lelyveld, wears a *kippah* (skull-cap) and *tallit* (prayer shawl), as do a number of congregants; there is a cantor, who encourages the congregants to join her in singing the prayers; and thirteen-year-olds celebrate their bar and bat mitzvahs (an average of two a week) by chanting part of the weekly Torah portion to the traditional melody. Some congregants are even building their own sukkah (a thatched hut used for meals during the festival of Sukkot, which begins five days after Yom Kippur). What surprises him, Lelyveld told me, is not that his congregants have shown resistance to this return to tradition but that they are so willing to participate; even the old-timers "see the need for a warmer, more affirmative expression of Jewishness."

Nor are these isolated examples. As Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the (Reform) Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), told me, "The movement that used to be hyper-rational now recognizes that it is important to feel, not just to think." In Schindler's judgment, the movement toward greater traditionalism and toward what he calls "a more participatory religious life,"—active participation in worship by the laity—is "irreversible." Publication of a new Reform prayer book in 1975 reflected but also greatly accelerated, this trend, for the new prayer book gives far more prominence to Hebrew prayers.

The change in the Reform rabbinate is also contributing to the return to tradition. In the past, Reform rabbis tended to be lapsed Orthodox or Conservative Jews, and they often felt the need to prove—to themselves, if not necessarily to others—that they had abandoned the shackles of the tradition against which they had rebelled. But the men and women who have entered the rabbinate in the last ten or fifteen years are almost all products of the Reform movement, particularly its youth groups and summer camps, and they do not feel the need to prove how "modern" they are. Having grown up in an open society, they are comfortable with their Jewishness; having spent part of their rabbinic training in Israel, they are usually fluent in Hebrew and often far more traditional in their personal observances than their elders. Some, in fact, are as meticulous in their observance of the Sab-

bath and the dietary laws as most Conservative (and many Orthodox) rabbis.

The growth in the number of women cantors is having a similar effect. Because they are more accepted than women rabbis, the cantors feel freer to be themselves; there is, after all, a long association of women with music, and besides, a cantor is less of an authority figure than the rabbi. Lacking any female role models, many women rabbis try to imitate their male peers, thereby repressing their warmth and expressiveness. Women cantors, in contrast, tend to put their expressiveness to work for them, imparting a warmth and informality that Reform services previously had lacked.

What happens to Reform Judaism is important, because it may soon replace the Conservative movement as the largest denomination. At the time of the 1971 National Jewish Population Survey, for example, nearly half the second-generation Jews identified themselves as Conservative, compared to fewer than a third classifying themselves as Reform. Among third-generation Jews, however, Reform had a slight plurality—41 percent compared with 40 percent. (The Orthodox proportion dropped from 11 to 3 percent.) More recent studies of individual metropolitan areas indicate that the shift to Reform continues in the fourth generation.

Many of those who identify themselves as Reform Jews do so, however, only in a nominal way, without joining a congregation; others join but observe little and rarely attend religious services. Having permitted Reform Judaism to be defined as the denomination of those who observe nothing, Reform leaders are now trying to bring their followers back to more traditional observance. It is not easy for them to do so, because of the emphasis Reform Judaism places on individual autonomy. As "the leaders of liberal Judaism, we cannot command, we can only convince," Rabbi Schindler told the UAHC convention delegates in 1983. "We lead not by precept but by example. The task of self-renewal, therefore, must begin with us."

Within the Orthodox community, on the other hand, leaders are running as fast as they can to catch up with the growing religiosity of their rank and file. The dramatic resurgence that Orthodoxy is enjoying is not the result of any increase in numbers; there is, at most, a stabilization of numbers after three quarters of a century of steady decline.\* The vitality that Orthodoxy displays is due instead to the fact

\* That stability is the net effect of contrary trends in different communities. In much of the country the number of Orthodox Jews continues to decline, generation by generation. That decline has been offset, however, by small increases in major centers of Orthodox life, such as New York, Baltimore,

that the "nonobservant Orthodox"—Jews who belonged to Orthodox congregations out of nostalgia or habit and who once constituted a majority of the membership—have dropped out of Orthodoxy, leaving an increasingly committed core of true believers.

Those who continue to practice Orthodoxy, therefore, now do so with far greater intensity and commitment than was the case in the recent (or even distant) past, observing rituals that had been widely ignored in this country a generation ago. There is an equally striking tendency to follow the strictest rather than the most lenient interpretation of each of the many laws Orthodox Jews are expected to observe. Rabbinic authorities have always differed in their interpretations and explications of religious law; today, it sometimes seems, only the strictest interpretation has any credence. For many Orthodox Jews, for example, it is no longer enough for a restaurant to be kosher; it has to be *glatt* kosher—an additional requirement that is entirely extralegal. And the movement toward the strictest and most rigid interpretation of Jewish law—"the *Chumrah*-[stringency] of-the-Month Club," one critic calls it—is being led by the young rather than the old.

This change is not primarily the result of a return to Orthodoxy on the part of third- and fourth-generation Eastern European Jews; it is a phenomenon of the second generation—the second generation of an entirely different immigrant stream. There are exceptions, of course, such as Michael Medved and his community in Venice, California, but most young Orthodox Jews today are the children of the half million or so Jews who came to the United States just before, during, and after World War II. In the almost exclusively Orthodox Boro Park section of Brooklyn, for example, only 10 percent of the Jews are third-generation, and in Flatbush, which contains another large Orthodox enclave, the proportion is 21 percent. In both Manhattan's Upper East Side and the North Shore of Long Island, in contrast—areas with relatively small Orthodox communities—54 percent of the Jews are members of the third generation.

A number of factors explain why the new immigrants were better able to retain their Orthodoxy than their predecessors. To begin with, the World War II immigrants came to a different America from the one in which their predecessors had settled. It was a far more open society, one that was more hospitable to religious and ethnic differences, in which children (and their parents) therefore felt less pressure to discard immigrant ways. They also felt less need to do so. By the early postwar period the five-day week was becoming standard; that in turn

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and Cleveland, and by the creation of new Orthodox communities in metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and Miami.

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eliminated the enormous penalty that earlier generations had had to pay for observing the Jewish Sabbath.

If the United States was different, so too were the immigrants themselves. As a group they were far more observant than the Jews who came during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they also were more committed to maintaining their Orthodoxy and more experienced at doing so in a modern, Western society. To oversimplify just a bit, the earlier immigrants had had to make two separate adjustments when they arrived: first to the modern world, and then to American culture. The later immigrants, however, had already come to terms with modernity in Europe. (Hasidic Jews had done so in their own way by keeping contact with the outside world to an absolute minimum.) Thus the new immigrants had only one adjustment to make—to American culture.

There was another difference, as well. During the era of mass immigration, Orthodox Jews had come without their rabbis—certainly without rabbis of distinction and standing; to move to the United States, as we have seen, was to defy rabbinic injunctions. The World War II immigrants, by contrast, were often led, and sometimes preceded, by their rabbis, some of whom were charismatic leaders. Determined to keep their followers within the Orthodox fold, the rabbis made a deliberate decision to forgo the construction of new synagogues (any building can be used for prayer) or other luxuries and to concentrate their energies and resources on a single goal: the intensive Jewish education of the next generation. Scornful of American Orthodoxy, they proceeded to create their own advanced yeshivas (rabbinic training schools), which turned out a cadre of right-wing Orthodox teachers. They then built a large network of day schools and yeshivas, so that the teachers could be employed and the children could be educated without being exposed to the secular culture of the public schools.

The growth in the number of day schools and in the number of students enrolled has transformed American Orthodoxy: there now is an entire generation of youngsters who are Judaically better educated than their parents. And because they have been taught by graduates of the right-wing yeshivas, they often are more observant than their parents. This intensification has come about, moreover, with parental encouragement. Within the Orthodox community the traditional desire of parents that their children should be "better" than they are has shifted from the socioeconomic to the religious sphere. In part because the parents have been so financially successful themselves, they seem eager for their children to be "frummer" (more observant) and better educated than they.

The result is a second generation unlike any that American Juda-

ism has seen before: corporate lawyers and accountants, biologists and chemists, doctors and medical school professors, academicians, and successful businessmen who are also yeshiva graduates (often with rabbinic ordination) and who remain devoutly Orthodox. A number of large New York law firms now have lunchtime Talmud study groups, and the kosher restaurants in midtown Manhattan are filled at lunchtime with businessmen and professionals, who have their choice of kosher French, Chinese, or traditional Jewish food.

Whether the third and fourth generations will remain Orthodox remains to be seen. It is hard to know how durable the insulation against secular culture will prove to be—in particular, whether the growing affluence and acculturation of Orthodox Jews will turn out to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, affluence undoubtedly makes it easier to remain Orthodox; *glatt* kosher pizza parlors and hamburger joints enable Boro Park teenagers to imitate the eating habits of the other members of American youth culture, and kosher camping trips and cross-country tours permit them to enjoy pleasures previously available only to less devout members of the upper middle class. At the same time their parents take all-kosher package vacations in Europe, Mexico, and the Caribbean. These "cultural amalgamations," as Egon Mayer calls them in his study of the Boro Park Orthodox community, help reduce the dissonance between Orthodox Jewish and secular American cultures, but they do so at a price: the absorption of secular values into the religious domain. In subtle and not so subtle ways, *glatt* kosher pizza parlors, vacations in Acapulco, and teenage camping trips serve to legitimate the contemporary emphasis on individual autonomy, self-fulfillment, and the pursuit of pleasure. "The focus on self-realization and personal pleasure," Mayer says, "is a profound and chronic deviation from a religious system that emphasizes obligation to God and community."

## 5

In the long run the energy being released by the Jewish women's movement is likely to provide the most important source of religious renewal. Until recently, after all, Judaism had been the product not of the Jewish people but of the half of it that was male. The exclusion of women from Jewish religious life and learning, Cynthia Ozick has written, involved "a loss numerically greater than a hundred pogroms," and was "culturally and intellectually more debilitating than a century of *autos-da-fé*."

The loss was all the greater for being so completely thoughtless.

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Sitting in the women's section of a Jerusalem synagogue one Friday evening, Blu Greenberg recalls, she noticed that the congregational prayer book opened with an introduction explaining the laws governing the *tefillin* (phylacteries) that traditional Jewish men put on at morning prayers; as the prayer book put it, "Every single Jew is required to put on tefillin each weekday." "At first I was stunned," Greenberg writes. "How progressive, I thought, to find such a siddur [prayer book] in an Orthodox synagogue! Then I noticed the publisher's date: 1905. In 1905 siddur compilers spoke the language of the community: every single Jew, the whole community, the entire spiritual congregation. But—I checked myself—it all refers only to men. Quietly, unself-consciously, with one stroke of the pen, the complete class of Jewish women simply was excised."

At the time, Greenberg adds, she was not troubled by that excision: "My newly raised consciousness was no match for layer upon layer of conditioning." And besides, she told herself, "This was 1975 and things were changing." They were not changing nearly as rapidly, however, as Blu Greenberg's consciousness.

*ITEM:* The time is four years later, the setting Greenberg's own modern Orthodox congregation during the services for Simchat Torah, the festival celebrating the completion of the annual Torah-reading cycle and the commencement of the new one; the center point of the service is the *bakafah* ceremony, in which every male member of the congregation makes a circuit of the congregation carrying a Torah scroll. It is a joyous, often almost raucous ceremony in which children are encouraged to participate. "At one point the noise level reaches a new high," Greenberg writes. "The rabbi pounds on the podium. 'Let us have silence here. We won't complete the service until every single person here has had a *bakafah*.' For a fleeting moment I find my husband's eye across the partition. He smiles. He knows."

Cynthia Ozick speaks of the same kind of experience. "In the world at large I call myself, and am called, a Jew," she has written. "But when, on the Sabbath, I sit among women in my traditional shul and the rabbi speaks the word 'Jew,' I can be sure that he is not referring to me. For him, 'Jew' means 'male Jew.' . . . My own synagogue is the only place in the world where I am not named Jew."

The most important fact about American Judaism, and the most favorable omen for its future, is that women as talented as Greenberg and Ozick have not turned away from Judaism. On the contrary, a group of highly talented writers, scholars, and activists, as well as a good many housewives, "professional volunteers," and women with conventional occupations are struggling to reconcile their commitment



to equality for women with their commitment to Judaism. Some have never strayed from religious observance, whether of the Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, or Reform variety; others have been drawn to Judaism *because* of their feminism.

*ITEM:* "I had never considered myself religious. I am a daughter of the secular city," Betty Friedan has written. "For me as for other Jewish feminists, religion perpetuated the patriarchal tradition that denied women access to Judaism's most sacred rituals and enshrined them within the strict confines of their biological role. But when women like me broke through to our authentic personhood as women, we also found the strength to dig deep into ourselves on other levels."

For some time, Friedan continues, "[I had been] uncomfortable . . . with my conventional sophistication about religion. I was, in effect, denying the great questions of beginning, end and purpose, which are the substance of every religion. Now, with a sense of confidence born of the woman's movement, I and many other feminists found we could embrace our authentic Jewishness in a new way."

Attending an American Jewish Congress conference on women's rights in Jerusalem in the summer of 1984, Friedan found that "in some strange and wonderful way, my feminism and my Judaism were converging." That convergence reached its peak at the conference when, for the first time in her life, Friedan was invited to help form a *minyan* (the quorum of ten) for morning prayers. "It moves me very much, in that small hotel room, to watch young Naamah Kelman, an American-born Israeli, daughter of 13 generations of rabbis, in her white prayer shawl, leading us in the ancient rituals only men have been allowed to perform," Friedan wrote in *The New York Times Magazine*. "And tears came to my eyes as I join the young women in prayer: 'Blessed are You, O God, who has made me free. Blessed are You, O God, who has made me Jewish! Blessed are You, O God, who has made me in Your image.'"

One of the most striking manifestations of change has been the emergence of women's prayer groups among Orthodox women in cities as diverse as San Francisco, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Boston, Teaneck (New Jersey), Great Neck (New York), and New York City. Nor are the groups limited to younger women.

*ITEM:* From the second article in a six-part 1984 Associated Press series on American Jews, datelined San Francisco: "Eva Oles, an Orthodox Jew, does not drive on Sabbath. So at least once a month, the 59-year-old woman walks to services—a hike of six miles up and down San Francisco's hills.

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"She need not go so far to find an ordinary Orthodox synagogue. But there, Mrs. Oles would have to sit in an area reserved for women, behind a curtain. She could not climb the pulpit and read from the Torah, like a man.

"I've always felt that I was as good a Jew as a man," said Mrs. Oles."

In New York, which contains more than half the Orthodox population of the country, there are a growing number of Orthodox women's prayer groups. The most significant, perhaps, is a three-year-old women's *davening* (praying) group in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, one of the most traditional Orthodox communities in New York. The thirty or so members are so devout that they refuse to call the group a *minyan*—a term that would imply acceptance of the notion that they are qualified to conduct a regular service. Determined to live according to Halachah (Jewish law), which holds that only men can comprise a *minyan*, the women do not recite any of the prayers that can be recited only when a *minyan* is present. Even so, they have been sharply criticized by local rabbis; indeed, the principal right-wing Orthodox organization issued a proclamation declaring that participation was forbidden.

The women meet nonetheless; since the summer of 1984 they have a Torah scroll of their own, donated by one of the members, New York City councilwoman Susan Alter. "They're afraid of what it looks like," says Rivkeh Haut, a founder of the group, referring to the rabbis who oppose its existence. (Haut teaches Talmud to the group's members.) "They're afraid we're feminists and that soon we'll want to come into the shul and want *aliyahs* there [calls to the reading of the Torah] and women rabbis."

"I'm sorry, I can't help what it looks like," Haut adds. "If we wanted [*aliyahs* or women rabbis] we could go to Conservative shuls. We're doing this precisely because we want to remain within Halachah," and because they are determined, as Haut puts it, "to have a physical closeness to the *Sefer Torah* [Torah scroll] that is impossible in an Orthodox shul." The first time she was called up to the Torah, councilwoman Alter says, echoing Betty Friedan's response, "it was very emotional. What to a little boy is nothing was to a grown woman a very emotional, moving experience."

And so it is that significant numbers of Jewish women are now insisting on being included as full members of the Jewish people; they are demanding equal access to the roles from which they have traditionally been barred—as teachers and scholars, religious and communal leaders, and participants in congregational worship. The result has

been the release of an extraordinary burst of energy and talent, much like that accompanying the entry of Jewish male writers and scholars into the American scene after World War II.

Jewish religious and communal life will never be the same again. Some Orthodox thinkers, for example, believe that the way in which Orthodoxy responds to the women's movement will determine its future course. With the shift to the right over the last quarter century, Rabbi Moshe Adler, former Hillel director at the University of Minnesota, has argued, Orthodox Judaism "has turned itself into a garrison state," and the women's movement can be the catalyst that enables it to find its way out. To Adler the issue is clear: whether Orthodoxy will be simply "a form of scoring celestial brownie-points" or a means of acquiring "heightened spiritual awareness," of demonstrating "justice and compassion in the way [one] lives" his or her daily life.

Whatever its impact on Orthodoxy turns out to be, the women's movement already has had a profound effect on Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism. Since 1972, when Rabbi Sally Preisand became the first woman ordained as a rabbi in the United States, the Reform and Reconstructionist rabbinic colleges have ordained well over a hundred women rabbis. The number is growing rapidly; in recent years 40-50 percent of the students entering the two institutions have been women. And in September 1984 eighteen women entered the rabbinic training program at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America after a long and bitter fight over ordination of women as Conservative rabbis.

The Seminary's decision to ordain women as Conservative rabbis is a major turning point in the evolution of American Judaism. So long as women rabbis were confined to the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, they lacked a certain legitimacy; Reform Judaism, after all, has never accepted the authority of Jewish law, and Reconstructionism is still a small splinter group. But despite the growth of the Reform movement, Conservative Judaism is still the largest denomination. More important, it not only accepts the authority of Jewish tradition but lays claim to being its most authentic contemporary form—a claim that Orthodoxy heatedly denies. At the very least, therefore, the ordination of women as Conservative rabbis will make it impossible to avoid consideration of the complex problems that feminism raises for Jewish theology, liturgy and worship, and ritual practice.

The decision has other implications as well. Conservative Judaism may be revitalized by the infusion of female energy, talent, and sensibility; it has been floundering for a long time as a result of its own indecision about change. But the movement may also be fractured if members of its right wing, who bitterly oppose ordination of women,

decide to join the Orthodox camp; for the moment, at least, they prefer to continue their losing fight within the Conservative movement. What does seem certain, however, is that ordination of women will significantly widen the division between the Orthodox community and everyone else, if for no other reason than that it almost inevitably commits the Conservative movement to make more radical changes in the near future.\*

One important symbolic change—the creation of new religious rituals to celebrate the birth of a daughter—is being accepted fairly readily. Understandably so; few Jewish rituals have been so sacred as *brit milah*, the religious ceremony accompanying the ritual circumcision performed on male children on the eighth day after birth to symbolize in physical form their entry into the covenant. The absence of any comparable ceremony for girls involves a religious anomaly, for the Bible explicitly declares that the covenant at Sinai included women as well as men. Hence a growing number of young Jews, including Orthodox Jews, are developing their own rituals and ceremonies in order to give the birth of a daughter the same religious significance that the birth of a son has always entailed.

But Jewish feminists are demanding more than equality—more, that is, than the right to assume the roles, rituals, and symbols previously limited to men. They are seeking something larger and more profound: the incorporation of women's experiences and sensibilities into the corpus of Jewish religious thought and experience. "There is another pole to Jewish feminism," Paula Hyman, dean of the Jewish Theological Seminary's undergraduate College of Jewish Studies, argues, "and that is the assertion of our uniqueness, of our distinctiveness. We seek to develop our own spirituality and our own Jewish identity." More than that, feminists are trying to reinterpret the Jewish past from a woman's perspective—"as a resource for all Jews," Hyman explains, not just for women. "We want to contribute our insights and our experience to the heritage of the Jewish people." That contribution is likely to transform American Judaism in ways that cannot be anticipated.

\* The really sticky issue, as far as Halachah is concerned, is not the ordination of women—that can be justified fairly easily—but the fact that women, along with children and the mentally impaired, may not serve as witnesses—to a wedding ceremony, for example, or in a court of Jewish law. The Conservative movement has avoided that issue so far; it will have to confront it once women are serving as rabbis.

When I began my research in the summer of 1979, most observers doubted that a return to Judaism was under way; by 1984, articles describing the return had become almost commonplace. What is at issue now is not the *existence* of a religious revival but its nature and significance. Students of the phenomenon disagree over how many people are involved, how durable the return is likely to be, and what it portends for the future of Judaism in the United States.

Some Orthodox thinkers, for example, have criticized the triumphalist mood with which their colleagues have greeted the *baal teshuvah* phenomenon. In a controversial article in *Jewish Life*, Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz called attention to "the dangers as well as the opportunities which this movement presents to the Jewish community in general and to the Orthodox community in particular." Those who have had contact with Orthodox *baalei teshuvah*, Pelcovitz wrote, "can attest to the mercurial moods of some of these penitents and the ever-present danger of their leaving us as suddenly and abruptly as they arrived." Pelcovitz attributed this instability to the fact that many Orthodox *baalei teshuvah* "are not necessarily attracted to Judaism *per se*: they are young men and women who have found their lives devoid of values and lacking direction. Some have been with cults, others with drugs; they seek a safe harbor as well as some meaning and purpose for their lives. They are easily attracted to a religious leader who possesses a charismatic personality to whom they can cling and lean upon as a pillar of strength and support which they so desperately need." The same need that brings these troubled youths back to Orthodoxy, Pelcovitz suggested, drives many of them away. "The attrition rate is not documented," he writes, "but one gets the feeling that it is substantial."

By and large, however, the instability of which Pelcovitz speaks is characteristic only of those who are attracted to fundamentalist Orthodox sects. Among most of the people involved in Jewish renewal, as Carl Scheingold has documented, the religious impulse does not grow out of any sense of personal inadequacy or failure. "This surprising flowering of unorthodox Judaism," Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard wrote in the summer 1982 issue of *Dissent*, "must be seen against the backdrop of the highly successful integration of Jews into American life."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The fact that this socialist journal published a serious evaluation of the Jewish revival is itself testimony to the breadth and depth of the phenomenon, as is the fact that *Dissent* is edited by two intensely committed Jews,

That same fact, however, leads Bershtel and Graubard to question the staying power and significance of the movement. "Do these activities really hold out hope for the revitalization of Judaism?" they ask, after describing a number of examples of what they call "active Judaism." Their answer is no: "The richness of the revival gives a misleading basis for hopes of glowing reconstruction, and . . . the resurgence of interest in practical Judaism is a problematic phenomenon, expressive of the very forces of dissolution it seeks to combat."

For all its apparent vigor, Bershtel and Graubard submit, the revival is ephemeral, because it is "expressive of dilemmas of modernity rather than of Judaism, of questions and discontents, yearnings and confusions that characterize thoughtful individuals today, whatever their cultural, religious, ethnic, or political allegiance. The various forms of new Jewish activity suggest origins traceable to ideals of social justice, to assertions of ethnic pride, to the questions evoked by family and parenthood, to the healing function of ritual in giving fragmented lives a longed-for sense of ceremony and significance, to that most contemporary desire to feel better, more existentially at ease."

In their view, the essence of the problem—the reason Jewish renewal will not last—is that it is the product of individual choice rather than a response to communal or divine demands. The Jews in question select only those parts of the tradition that are meaningful to them; their Judaism is "a self-conscious recreation . . . of tradition, theology, and ritual by individuals for themselves, in response to contemporary values, anxieties, and aspirations." Indeed, "the willing of meaning by individuals who believe that such commitments must be *chosen* is the distinguishing mark of this revival [emphasis in original]." The emphasis on individual choice makes the revival fragile, Bershtel and Graubard believe, for "if the form of Jewish commitment one has chosen at present does not satisfy one's emotional or spiritual needs next year, then one must move on—perhaps to a universalist politics or to a new version of Eastern mysticism or whatever."

Bershtel and Graubard have correctly described the distinguishing mark of the current religious revival. It is not coincidental, for example, that the most important literary creation of the *havurah* generation is *The Jewish Catalog*. First published in 1973, its three volumes have sold over 500,000 copies—more than any book, other than Bible translations, published in the Jewish Publication Society's ninety-seven-year history. *The Jewish Catalog's* subtitle—"A Do-It-Yourself Kit"—reflects the *havurah* movement's emphasis on individual autonomy.

The size of the audience the books have attracted makes it clear that large numbers of American Jews are comfortable with the approach to Judaism that they represent. As the Reform theologian Eugene Borowitz points out, their content is heavily ritualistic and highly traditional; the authors are at great pains to show the beauty and meaning inherent in rituals and observances that liberal Jews had long considered archaic or even primitive. And yet the *form* of the books, Borowitz adds, is anything but traditional. Previous generations turned to the *Shulchan Aruch* (literally, "the set [or ordered] table")—a compendium of Jewish religious laws—to learn what was required of them. In contrast, the new guide to Jewish practice is called a catalog, and a catalog, as Borowitz points out, "is a book you look through, in order to pick and choose what you will order." "We have become a cafeteria people," Borowitz concludes, "and each of us is on his or her own individual diet."

This emphasis on individual autonomy—on finding an approach to Judaism that has meaning for oneself—is the greatest *strength* of the current Jewish renewal movement, not its fatal flaw. Indeed, no religious revival that denied the centrality of will and choice would have any chance of survival; for the critical fact about modernity, as we have seen, is that it brings about "a near-inconceivable expansion of the area of human life open to choices." By shattering the traditional order, the scientific, technological, intellectual, and political revolutions of modernity have made every aspect of life subject to human volition. As Peter Berger puts it, "What previously was fate now becomes a set of choices . . . . Destiny is transformed into decision."

The need to choose in turn means that "the modern individual must stop and pause where premodern men could act in unreflective spontaneity." "Quite simply," Berger states, "the modern individual must engage in more deliberate thinking—*not* because he is more intelligent, *not* because he is on some sort of higher level of consciousness, *but* because his social situation forces him to this. . . . Ordinary, everyday life is full of choices, from the most trivial choices between competing consumer commodities to far-reaching alternatives in lifestyle [emphasis in original]."

One consequence is a heavy emphasis on the subjective self. When destiny is transformed into decision, the answers to the fundamental questions of human existence no longer are provided automatically by the place in society into which each person is born. Since people need answers in order to function, they are forced to turn inward—to evaluate each option by how it looks, or feels, to *them*. "Fate does not require reflection," Berger explains; but "the individual who is compelled to make choices is also compelled to stop and think. The more choices,

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the more reflection. The individual who reflects inevitably becomes more conscious of himself . . . he turns his attention from the objectively given outside world to his own subjectivity." Indeed, concern with self—the belief that reality is a function of individual experience—lies at the heart of modern consciousness.

This is as true of religion as it is of every other aspect of life. Certainly some contemporary individuals inherit their faith and never question it, just as there were people before the modern period who were racked by religious doubts; both groups are exceptions to the rule. As Berger observes: "In premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation . . . modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative."

When Bershtel and Graubard complain, therefore, that "one can choose anything, whatever one was last year, or yesterday," they are simply describing the objective situation in which everybody, Jews and Christians alike, now find themselves. Freedom of choice is the prerogative even of Orthodox Jews, notwithstanding the fact that many, perhaps most, act as if there were no choice. Orthodox Jews, that is to say, submit to communal or family demands and follow what they believe to be God's laws; but that submission is in itself an act of choice. Orthodox Jews are able to maintain their Orthodoxy, in fact, by "compartmentalizing Judaism," as Charles Liebman puts it—by viewing their Jewish and their non-Jewish lives as if they were completely separate spheres and by making a virtue of the inconsistency between the two world views they are forced to maintain.

Even in the seemingly closed communities that Orthodox Jews have created in certain neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Detroit, significant numbers of Jews choose their own approach to Judaism. If it appears otherwise, it is only because the monolithic nature of these communities forces those who choose a different approach to leave. "Among the dozens of boys and girls who were my own classmates in the yeshivas Toras Emes and Kamenitz, and who were my peers and friends in such organizations as the Young Israel, the 'Y,' and the Agudah, several became reputable rabbis, Talmudic scholars, or traditional housewives," Egon Mayer wrote in *From Suburb to Shtetl*, his sociological analysis of the Orthodox community of Boro Park, in which he was raised. "But I know a great many more who became doctors, lawyers, college professors, psychologists, editors, and executives. Many of the latter have become Orthodox by their own definition of the term," Mayer adds, "but all have left the



Boro Park community and settled in communities where religious demands do not have as easy and direct access to their private life as is the case in Boro Park (emphasis added)."

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Jewish renewal movement is self-centered, in the literal and nonpejorative sense of the term. Nor is it purely coincidental that the most influential Jewish theologians of our time—Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Mordecai M. Kaplan, Joseph Baer Soloveitchik—have been concerned, in ways their predecessors were not, with problems of individual meaning and faith. To be sure, Buber, who defined the central religious experience as the relationship between I and Thou—between the solitary individual and God—has been attacked in traditionalist Jewish circles as more Christian than Jewish.

But no one questions the Jewish authenticity of Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, the most respected Orthodox theologian and Talmudist of our age. Although the *Rav* (the teacher par excellence), as he is known, is a stern traditionalist whose approach to Jewish law is at the opposite pole from Buber's, he is equally concerned with the individual's relationship to God. "The one consistent element in Soloveitchik's thought," David Singer and Moshe Sokol have written, "is his preoccupation with a religious problematic uniquely his own." Thus Soloveitchik's magisterial essay "The Lonely Man of Faith" is an explication of his personal theology—or, as he puts it, an analysis of "the great dilemma confronting contemporary man of faith," a dilemma whose nature "can be stated in a three-word sentence. I am lonely."

The "I" of whom Soloveitchik speaks is himself: "It is not the plan of this paper to discuss the millennium-old problem of faith and reason," he wrote in the opening paragraph. "I want instead to focus on a human life situation in which the man of faith as an individual concrete being, with his cares and hopes, concerns and needs, joys and sad moments, is entangled. Therefore whatever I am going to say here has been derived not from philosophical dialectics, abstract speculation, or detached impersonal reflections, *but from actual situations and experiences with which I have been confronted.*"

Even Soloveitchik, in short, is searching for a Judaism that responds to his personal needs. True, his solution is to submit humbly to God's will, as expressed in Halachah—to establish a "covenantal relationship" with God and thereby with his fellow human beings. But not all Jews can make that leap of faith, nor can they simply disregard modern biblical scholarship, as Soloveitchik does. If the starting point for contemporary theology is the "actual situations and experiences" with which each individual has been confronted, there are bound to be almost as many theologies as there are situations and experiences.

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This degree of pluralism involves certain risks, of course. The emphasis on self can slide all too easily into narcissism—a worship of the self that Judaism can see only as another form of idolatry. Among those recently returned to Judaism, moreover, as well as among the members of the *havurah* community, there is another danger, which might be termed idolatry of the group—a preoccupation with the specialness of one's own small community that inhibits or even precludes concern with the larger Jewish community or with individuals outside the group. Because finding like-minded, compatible peers plays such an important role in overcoming the alienation from Judaism of returning Jews, there is a tendency to equate the group with Judaism itself. "I can't imagine *davening* [praying] with any other group" and "I couldn't be comfortable anywhere else" are frequently heard remarks, and *havurah* members are sometimes unwittingly cold, even rejecting, to newcomers who are not at their particular stage of Jewish development.

Although the problem of individual and group narcissism is real, it is kept in check by young Jews' growing self-consciousness about it and by their deepening concern with Jewish peoplehood. There is an increasing recognition among liberal Jews, moreover, that they must find some way to reconcile their insistence on personal autonomy with traditional Jewish notions of authority—of externally given *mitzvot*, or commandments. There are almost as many approaches to reconciliation as there are "new Jews," but there is a wide agreement on several key points: it is essential to define what is authentic (or authoritative) in Judaism; authenticity involves some notion of *mitzvot*—of externally given rules; and that definition of the rules cannot be left entirely to individual preference or choice. Even the most latitudinarian Jews, Carl Scheingold reports, see Judaism "not just as large, but as larger than themselves—not just as something positive and rich, but as a tradition that commands respect and elicits feelings of awe." The result is a tendency to penetrate more deeply into the tradition—to be respectful of traditional laws, whether one accepts them or not—and to feel an obligation to base decisions about what to observe on substantive knowledge.

"What we need more than ever, or at least as much as ever," Franz Rosenzweig, one of the principal architects of modern Jewish renewal, wrote some sixty years ago, "are human beings—Jewish human beings." The Jewishness of which he spoke, Rosenzweig added, "can be grasped through neither the writing nor reading of books. . . . It is only lived." What makes the current Jewish renewal so significant is precisely the fact that it is not just being talked or written about, it is being lived.

# Emancipation—The Challenge of Living in Two Worlds

W. GUNTHER PLAUT

THE BI-CENTENARY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION serves as a convenient point for a fresh look at the continuing challenge of Enlightenment. Its importance is unquestioned, for it marked the first massive breakdown of inherited political and, eventually, religious and cultural arrangements. It is well to remember, however, that the French Revolution neither began the process of Jewish emancipation nor did its advent assure or define its success.

That process had already begun, albeit in unstructured form, during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. What the Revolution and, especially, the Declaration of Human Rights, in 1792, did was to give it momentum and the aspect of irreversibility. (It would take the Nazis, 150 years later, to attempt a murderous and ultimately futile rewriting of this history.)

The three groups targeted by the Revolution were the third and fourth estates—the middle class and the bottom layer of society—and the Jews. But while the first merely aimed at political and economic integration, Jews had different needs: they wanted to be politically and economically integrated and yet have the privilege of being religiously and culturally separate. That would prove to be difficult, and that difficulty has not disappeared even today. In fact, the Jewish desire to live, so to speak, in two worlds at the same time is inherent in Diaspora living, and so are the problems that come with it. This, alone, will be the focus of our essay.

By definition, Jews who expect to remain in the Diaspora have (and had) two basic choices: they can cease to be Jews, or they can make an effort to live both as full-fledged participants in their society and, at the same time, as practitioners of a separate way of life. There are those who believe that this choice is essentially flawed, and that it is not possible to live in two worlds without short-changing one or the other. Usu-

<sup>1</sup> Formerly, this meant conversion to the majority faith (whether based on conviction or otherwise), but today it would usually be characterized by religious neglect, non-interest in Jewish learning of any kind, disaffiliation, mixed marriage, raising one's children as non-Jews, non-support of Jewish causes—in other words, total assimilation.

"What the people did  
made a movement -  
443-445"

ally, it will be the Jewish aspect which is diminished and which will, inevitably, be decreased and eventually end in total assimilation. This is the concept of *shelilat ha-golah*, which proclaims the essential impossibility of continuing a meaningful Jewish life outside of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

This essay will attempt to show how, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the "two-worlds" syndrome of Diaspora life was met in two different parts of the Jewish world, in Germany and North America. Thereafter, we will turn to an evaluation of present-day Diaspora Judaism in the light of these historical experiences.

### 1. *The German Foundation*

We look first at Germany,<sup>3</sup> because it turned out that emancipation developed most rapidly there (and not in France as might have been expected) and brought in its train what we have come to know as the Reform movement. This development was not a function of the Gentile environment alone, but of the Jewish community as well.

A few sources provide us with some information about the condition of pre-emancipatory German Jewry. Among them are the travelogues of David Azulai and the responsa of Jacob Emden.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, another source which hitherto has not been exploited sufficiently. It is a collection of sixty-odd small volumes of missionary reports that were rendered to a Protestant institute in Halle. The head of the institute was a Rev. Johann Heinrich Callenberg, who managed to send missionaries all across the countryside with the specific task of contacting Jews and acquainting them with the teachings of the Gospels. The emissaries wrote reports to the mother institution and Cal-

2. To be sure, there are those who choose to solve this dilemma by isolating themselves as much as possible from their environment, which they use only to earn a livelihood. Otherwise, they encapsulate themselves in a Jewish cocoon where, from childhood to the grave, they live and learn as they once did in the *shtetl*—and to emphasize this point will even dress in the old Polish garb which now assumes the role of a religious uniform. This small segment has achieved heightened importance through its political stature in Israel, but even in the Diaspora it has had its own growth factor. Many Orthodox Jews who otherwise belong to the so-called mainstream and are part of the two-world syndrome, are sending their children to *yeshivot* that belong to the "separatist" element, where learning is defined entirely in traditional, medieval terms. Yeshiva graduates of this kind will often serve as rabbis in mainstream Orthodox congregations and thereby move them to the right. Even so, say the proponents of the *shelilat ha-golah* concept, the pressure of the Gentile environment will eventually crack the walls of even the most isolated.

3. That is, at German speaking lands, because a Germany in the modern sense did not come into existence until 1870/71.

4. Azulai's *Sefer Ma'agol tov* appeared from 1753 to 1778; it was later edited by Aaron Freimann (Jerusalem, 1934). Emden's *She'lat Yavets*, first published 1738 to 1759, was reissued in Lemberg in 1884. See also Boas Cohen, *Kuntres Ha-Teshuvot* (Budapest, 1930), and Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648-1806)* (Cambridge, MA, 1971).

lenberg (and, later, his successors) published extracts from their letters in annual collections which cover some sixty years.<sup>5</sup>

The missionaries (whose names were not published, nor were the places about which they reported usually identified) visited larger cities as well as remote villages. The Jews spoke Judaeo-German among themselves, which enabled them to communicate more or less adequately with other Germans and, thus, with the missionaries.<sup>6</sup> But, especially in cities, the missionaries found Jews who spoke German well and whose general education was surprisingly advanced. There were Jewish doctors and even an innkeeper acquainted with Latin; and in Bielefeld they found a family who spoke Hebrew, French and Italian, and elsewhere even met a Jew who knew Greek. Increasingly, Jewish children were sent to German elementary schools, although not all schools would admit them. *Yeshivot* on the eastern model were few and the knowledge of tradition, therefore, often spotty, though it should be emphasized that even in the smallest villages there was still strict adherence to traditional Jewish ways. What appears to have taken place during the eighteenth century can be described as a cleavage between Jewish practice and Jewish knowledge.

German Jews spoke some form of German long before Moses Mendelssohn published his German translation of the Torah. However, their knowledge of the language was more often than not restricted to the local dialect which was all they needed in order to do business with their Gentile neighbors. Few Jews knew High German, and even fewer could decipher the Gothic characters which would enable them to read it—hence Mendelssohn's *Biur* rendered the German text in Hebrew letters.

There were exceptions of course. We are told of a Jew who was graduated from the University of Göttingen in 1739 and of others who were said to have attended the universities of Strassburg and Heidelberg.<sup>7</sup> While there were still Jewish burghers who read Hebrew books,<sup>8</sup>

5. *Bericht an einige christliche Freunde von einem Versuch das arme jüdische Volck zur Erkänntnis und Annehmung der christlichen Wahrheit anzuleiten*; 2nd ed. (Halle, 1730). Successive volumes were published every year until 1791.

6. Judaeo-German, sometimes referred to as Western Yiddish, was characterized by a large number of expressions not known in Eastern Yiddish, but was not, like the latter, a complete literary tongue. After 1800, Jews in Germany learned to speak High German and their use of Judaeo-German diminished. (A dictionary of its terms and expressions that were still spoken at the time of the Nazi destruction was published by Werner Weinberg, *Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen*, [Stuttgart, 1969]). Weinberg objects to the term "Western Yiddish" for Judaeo-German as inaccurate.

7. Lest this description lead the reader to think that, generally speaking, German Jews were living in a state of limited acceptance, let it be quickly added that there were many fiefdoms and localities where Jews were not even permitted to live; others where they required permission to get married; and still others where a Jew had to pay a head tax to be admitted to the city (like young Mendelssohn in Berlin).

8. Most popular were *Semahot ha-nefesh*, *Kaf ha-yashar*, *Orhot ha-hayyim*, *Menorat ha-ma'or*, as well as Joseph Bezalel's *Sefer ha-musar* and Ibn Daud's *Shalshet ha-kabbalah*.

there were increasing numbers who began to read German. The barriers which existed in France and Eastern Europe, where the language of the land was fundamentally different from Yiddish, did not exist in Germany, and this provided the ground for a much more rapid process of integration. Michael Meyer writes:

For a growing percentage of German Jewry secular interests, whether material or intellectual, were pushing aside religious ones. At the same time, Jewish institutions were becoming ever weaker. Higher Jewish education virtually ceased in Germany; rabbis as well as teachers soon came almost exclusively from Poland and the gap in world view between them and the German Jews they instructed widened more and more.<sup>9</sup>

Added thereto were more and more restrictions on Jewish communal autonomy. With controls by the *kehillah* thus lessened, Jewish religious behavior now became increasingly voluntary and, therefore, it was no wonder that some Jews escaped into the larger world altogether, leaving the Jewish community behind. Still, such defectors were only a small minority; the majority stayed within the fold and struggled as best they could with the new and uncharted challenge of living in two worlds: as Jews and also as participants in the opportunities now available beyond the old ghetto.

In this endeavor, Moses Mendelssohn played a key role, which has been described and evaluated in startlingly different ways. Since he was both a famous philosopher whose works were read by an admiring Gentile elite and, at the same time, an observant as well as learned Jew, he would seem to have been beyond any criticism from the traditionalists. This, however, was not the case. While his philosophical writings received no Jewish comment of note (probably because few rabbis could read German) and his staunch defense of Jewish rights earned him widespread praise, his translation of the *Humash* got him into deep trouble with the rabbinic establishment. It would not have been so bad, the latter reasoned, if his translation has been printed in Gothic script (which most Jews had not yet learned to read), but he had it printed in Hebrew characters that were familiar to every Jewish person. This aroused the palpable fear that reading the Torah in the German language would lead to further neglect of Hebrew studies, and Mendelssohn was, therefore, pilloried as one who sought to undermine Judaism and Jewish study. Even two generations later, Peretz Smolenskin, *maskil* and journalist, considered Mendelssohn as the arch reformer who, wittingly or otherwise, caused widespread defections from Judaism.

This is a flawed conclusion, because it ascribes to the savant from Dessau a historical role that he did not have. Later detractors of the Reform movement nonetheless drag this cliché out of the closet and point to the numerous conversions in Berlin's upper echelon and in

9. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York: Oxford, 1988), p. 12.

Mendelssohn's own family after his death. What can, and must, be said about Mendelssohn is that he was the first intellectual among German Jews who had a high profile and enjoyed widespread admiration in the leading Gentile circles. *His major contribution was that he served as a role model and encouraged Jews to think that they, too, could achieve the status to which they aspired.*<sup>10</sup> The impact of his German translation with Hebrew characters no doubt taught young and old something about High German and thereby facilitated their integration—but he neither originated it nor would the absence of his translation have made a significant difference in this process. Its key factors were the close link of Western Yiddish with German, and the liberal climate then prevalent in German intellectual circles.

This explains why only a relatively few years after Mendelssohn's death, when Napoleon's brother Jerome had become the king of Westphalia, there had already come into being an intellectual Jewish class who were familiar with both Jewish tradition and German ways—and, not surprisingly, they were, at first, mostly lay persons and only a few rabbis, the latter (as was pointed out earlier) being largely foreign born. These men faced a major challenge: how to stem the growing tide of defections from the Jewish faith.

With rare exceptions, their rabbis were no help to them; they were out of touch with the new realities. Israel Jacobson, however, was a leading exception. He followed his father-in-law, Hertz Samson (who died in 1795), as district rabbi in the Weser region, and he and his associates attempted to bring traditional Judaism into the modern world without disturbing the halakhic process.<sup>11</sup>

Among their innovations were the use of German in *derashot*, occasional hymns in the German language, the omission of some late *kabbalistic* insertions in the prayer book, and the introduction of greater decorum in synagogue services. Thus, on Sukkot, the widespread levity existing during the *hakafot*, when paraders used their *lulavim* as objects of play, was prohibited in order to reinstitute greater sanctity in the service. Another innovation was moving the *bimah* from the center of the synagogue to the eastern side, near the *aron ha-kodesh*.

Crucial to the whole new approach (which none of the participants perceived as a reform movement) was the education of boys and girls who were to be instructed in halakhah as well as in specific moral precepts and, in due time, were to be "confirmed." The redoubtable scholar,

10. It is noteworthy that his *Jerusalem*, the one work in which he set forth his religious philosophy, had no impact whatever on his own or on succeeding generations.

11. Historians have generally described Jacobson as a lay person because, for one, he was a successful business man and, also, because during the crucial years of the Westphalian consistory, which he headed, he acted much as a chairman of a modern board and not as a chief rabbi. See details in Meyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.

Leopold Zunz, was a product of this system; he was confirmed in Wolfenbüttel in 1807.

Amidst such modest beginnings was the Reform movement born. Its initial stage, it must be emphasized again, was to proceed with utmost caution and to find for each step a plausible halakhic permission. Its continuing goal was to keep Jews Jewish by making Jewish practice and education such that people would consider them compatible with their modern sensibilities. These adjustments were a response to a development which had begun two generations earlier but only then, in the wake of the French revolution and its spread through Napoleon's influence, could it find proper expression.

To be sure, it could be anticipated that, once such minor innovations were deemed permissible, other more far-reaching changes would be in the offing. Leaders in the rabbinic establishment were, therefore, adamant that not a single innovation could, or should, find approval, not even the use of German for the sermon. Mendelssohn's *Humash* translation was banned and, in Berlin, the Orthodox<sup>12</sup> leadership used the police power of the government to close down the Reform temple.

Still, whatever changes were proposed by the reformers were first meticulously examined for compatibility with halakhic precedent or principle; arguments and counter-arguments were published; and the early rabbinic conferences, in the 1840s, were replete with halakhic discussions. Zunz and his successors created the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which applied scientific standards of research to Jewish historical, theological and liturgical studies. In time, as in all such endeavors, there developed a more radical wing which pressed for greater and bolder innovations, and which, in turn, also coalesced more conservative forces into an opposing group. Abraham Geiger and Zacharias Frankel, respectively, represented these two poles, and after some decades their adherents created the foundations of what today are the Reform and Conservative movements. They both stem from the identical desire of meeting the challenge of modernity and though, for many decades in the twentieth century, they appeared far apart, their ideological commonality was always present and, recently, surfaced most strongly in the debate over the proposed amendments to the Law of Return.

It should be underscored that, in Germany, the question of historic precedent was always asked and halakhic considerations were never out of sight (except for a small radical segment.) By North American standards of today, German Jewry remained, in this respect, staunchly "conservative" even in its liberalizing tendency, to the extent that ideo-

12. We use the term anachronistically, for it was then not yet in use. Quite often the word "conservative" doubled for what we today call orthodox. In turn, "conservative" did not attain to its present-day meaning until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.



logical dividing lines were largely blurred. How was one to categorize a synagogue whose *ritus* was strictly traditional but which had an organ (played by a Gentile)? Not surprisingly, the right-wing traditionalists eventually separated themselves from the general community and established their own *Austrittsgemeinde*, while, at the other end of the spectrum, the ultra-liberals (who were much fewer) also created their own structures. Until the days of the *Shoah*, the majority of German Jewry belonged to a centrist body politic which included Orthodox Jews of the school of Samson Raphael Hirsch, Conservative adherents of the school of Zacharias Frankel, and Liberals of the school of Ludwig Philippson and Leo Baeck.

Ideologues like to think that they create movements and, in certain cases, they do. But, while ideologues played a role in *shaping* the Reform movement in Germany, they did not *create* it. Political, socio-economic and demographic factors did. Once the sluice gates of emancipation had opened, Jews poured through them while the ideologues of the movement tried to channel their lives in such a fashion that one could comfortably live in two worlds at once. The movement that they built step by step was, in a manner of speaking, a catching up with reality. It was, thus, a replay of a process well known to the teachers of Mishnah and Talmud, who had suggested a rule of thumb: first see what the people do. It is noteworthy that the Mishnah rarely gives its rules any scriptural foundations—these were adduced later when talmudic teachers asked: What was the reason for the Mishnah to state the law in this fashion? In similar manner did Reform scholars provide an evolving practice of acculturation with a progressive-halakhic basis and set limits beyond which one should not go. They also created a philosophical and theological framework which served as a guide to future challenges.

In sum then, Germany was the natural ground in which the consequences of Enlightenment first played themselves out. Its roots go back to the middle of the eighteenth century and, until the Nazis destroyed the community, German Jewry provided a remarkable success story in Jewish history. This success has been largely devalued in more recent Israeli and North American perceptions, to the extent that German Jewry has been described as having been largely assimilated and culturally ignorant. Quite the opposite is true—though, of course, there were plenty of assimilated Jews, especially in the large cities, and *ammei ha-arez* like everywhere else.

The real facts are that, while German Jewry grew in a basically conservative political soil and, therefore, never abandoned its traditional moorings, yet it proceeded to institute moderate reforms which were generally accepted by the broad majority. In the course of a century and a half this community created extraordinary institutions and movements: from Reform and Conservatism on one side, to Modern

Orthodoxy and the Agudath Israel on the other; from political Zionism to the Jewish National Fund; from day schools<sup>13</sup> to modern rabbinical seminaries; and from the theories of *Wissenschaft* to a plethora of creative Jewish scholarship. In a way, German rabbis perfectly expressed the possibility of living meaningfully in two worlds: the great majority obtained a doctorate from a university before they took up their rabbinical posts and they were expected to make some contribution to Jewish scholarship.

Wherever German Jews went when they emigrated, they brought with them a belief that it was possible for them to live in two worlds. Translated into terms of religious development, that usually meant a propensity for Reform modes of worship and of lifestyle, and nowhere did this become more evident than in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. *The American Experience*

America's social and political environment displayed its liberalizing and egalitarian tendencies long before the French Revolution, and the War of Independence increased their momentum and actualized them quickly. In addition, the effects of the French Revolution were felt in America as well, in part because many new settlers from Europe came precisely in order to experience the realization of hopes which Emancipation had raised but had not fulfilled. Full civil liberties for everyone became the norm, except for some marginal disabilities in some states which, as in Maryland, were removed in the early part of the nineteenth century. Thus, almost from the outset, living in two worlds was the context of the American Jewish experience. Freedom created a challenge which had never before faced Diaspora Jews as it now did in America.

Spanish-Portuguese Jews could cope with it in traditional terms as long as they lived in large cities, primarily New York and Philadelphia, where they could create close-knit communities. But in smaller cities, they, too, began to look for ways which would preserve their Judaism in the midst of new American opportunities. Thus, the earliest reformist tendencies had already developed before the German Jews came en masse after the 1840s.<sup>15</sup> But once they arrived and spread across the

13. Day schools existed even in the smallest villages. Thus, in Merzhausen and Willingshausen, two adjacent villages in the backwoods of Hessen, the Jewish children did not go to public school. Instead, the ten or twelve families engaged their own teacher who taught civic as well as Jewish subjects.

14. And, much later also in Israel and South America. But where German Jews were few, as in Canada, Reform Judaism was slow to develop. The one major exception was Great Britain, where Progressive Judaism (in its Liberal and Reform manifestations) was essentially indigenous.

15. The Charleston, SC, reforms date from 1824/25. The city then boasted of the largest Jewish population in the United States, some 600 souls. For a full description see Meyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 228 ff.

country, and often did so as pioneers, Reform Judaism became the dominant form of Jewish worship and thought outside of the Eastern coast—and there, too, its adherents assumed a leading role in their communities.

The American experience was not, however, a replay of its German antecedents. For here, there was no immobile social structure to stultify individual progress, and there were vast stretches of land with new and growing settlements, where previous privilege was absent and Jews had an equal chance for success. Moreover, while Reform in Europe remained within certain traditional boundaries, in America these restraining influences were absent. The New World did not grow within rigid legal parameters, and the right to bear arms, which every citizen enjoyed by dint of the Constitution, was the clearest expression of a subterranean stream of antinomianism that flowed through America's veins.

No wonder, then, that traditional forms and inherited norms assumed a different cast. Where in Europe the Reformers had always referred to a halakhic precedent and had, so to speak, asked *Mah yomru ha-avot?* (What would tradition say?), in America they asked a different question. Here, the *avot* were far away and surfaced primarily in the *Shemoneh esreh*. In the minds of the new immigrants the Ancestors were somewhere in Europe, far away from the American experience. In Europe, Jews were living in ameliorated bondage, but bondage nonetheless; in America, the Gentiles seemed ready to accept Jews as neighbors and fellow citizens. It was vital, therefore, (or so it appeared to the Jews) to wrap oneself in the mantle of this new and exciting society, which was easing the task of living in two worlds at once. No longer did they now refer to halakhic precedent but, rather, to American need and opportunity. Customs began to reflect the American ambience: prayers and songs were increasingly in English; religious services were made shorter; and here and there worshippers began to remove their head-coverings. In the newly developing states and territories, *kashrut* was difficult to maintain, especially when not enough Jews lived in the vicinity to provide slaughtering facilities; traditional *shabbat* rest created a palpable hardship for retailers (a substantial segment of the Jewish community), and the prohibition of travel on *shabbat* and holy days was breached by many who were otherwise, because of long distances, excluded from joining a community on its chief days of prayer.

For a while the rabbis tried to view the flow of change in traditional terms, relating it, where possible, to some precedent, but, thereafter, the more radical reformers (most of them of German origin) based their permission to institute changes, or justify them where the people had already made them, on the "spirit of the age" or "the American way."

Ideology most often became a handmaiden to reforms that the people had already instituted in their lives: it approved change, and America was the land of changing and overturning the old. Reform

radicalism, dubbed "classical" by many (though that is hardly an appropriate term), found its purest expression in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. It was also the decade in which the first large contingents of East European Jews began to arrive and, within a few years, the face of American Jewish society would be radically altered. The newcomers, with their memories and sentiments, joined Reform congregations and soon began to change them, giving the old "classical" Reform new form and content.

The rise of anti-Semitism and the shock of the Holocaust destroyed the belief of the Reformers that the "two-world challenge" had been successfully met. The task of facing the challenge remained as urgent as ever, but it became evident that the old and easy answers would not do. There was Israel now, presenting the possibility of abolishing the Diaspora altogether; the concept of the American melting pot was challenged by new multi-cultural and multi-ethnic realities which made cultural integration less urgent for Jews.

By the advent of the nineteen-eighties, *mizvah* had returned to the vocabulary of Reform; Jewish education advanced, as did Jewish scholarship; traditional forms marked the worship service, but worship itself was not high on the agenda of most American Reform Jews. The vitality of Reform seemed unabated, though its direction and thrust had changed, and it was not always clear where the movement was headed. That question was increasingly asked, and the asking highlighted one of the persistent features of Reform: its constant self-criticism. Where *was* it headed on the eve of the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution?

### 3. *Living in Two Worlds*

Until fairly recently the challenge of two-tiered existence that faces Diaspora Jews was met on the proving grounds of *practice*. Were the demands of halakhah met or were they not? And if not, where was the departure? How great was the discrepancy between the old and the new?

With all of the developing differences, however, the danger of schism did not arise; Reform Jews might seem, at times, to resemble Karaites in their critique of talmudic rules, but this did not lead the Orthodox to doubt their legitimate membership in the Jewish people. In fact, the prime impact of Enlightenment on Western Jewry had been the emergence of personal autonomy, which challenged the hitherto unquestioned authority of tradition. Just how and when the privilege of personal choice entered the thought of Reform is uncertain, but there can be little doubt that it has today become entrenched in its halls.<sup>16</sup>

16. One other important facet of the Revolution also remained compelling: the drive for social justice. Reform Judaism, basing itself on the biblical Prophets, made it a cornerstone of its moral edifice.

In this respect, Enlightenment continues to have its direct impact on the movement and distinguishes it from the other branches. Neither Orthodoxy, nor Conservatism has (with negligible exceptions) elevated personal choice to a role of legitimacy.<sup>17</sup> The latter diverges from Orthodoxy only in the way that it *interprets* halakhah, but, in principle, it adheres to the halakhic system. This has generally been a matter of degrees, for, in many instances, Conservative congregations, and especially some of their rabbis, were, in practice, quite indistinguishable from their Orthodox counterparts.

But, of late, other considerations have come to the fore which pit all non-Orthodox against adherents of the old way. One may call this a delayed reaction of Enlightenment. For what the latter brought in its train, along with the profound upheaval of established authority, was a belief in the *supremacy of human reason*. For several generations the more mundane tasks of rearranging national and personal lives constituted the prime agenda of political as well as religious institutions, and ideology retreated into the background. It moved into the foreground again when scientific advances, positivism, and modernist thoughts of various kinds swept Western universities.

Again, Germany became the seedbed of many of these developments. Here, biblical criticism flowered from the middle of the nineteenth-century on, and its major premise was slowly adopted by all non-Orthodox Jews. Torah (certainly not in its present form) was not *mi-Sinai*, but was the result of hundreds of years of development. Judaism was a changing, always evolving religion. Tanakh, Mishnah and Gemara were its major expressions in antiquity, but, while one needed to base oneself on these sources, inspiration had not necessarily ceased nor had human reason shriveled since those days. There was little question that non-Orthodox Jews of all stripes took Torah to be the result of historical development.

Where was God, then, in this process? How could one still say *Barukh she-natan Torah le-ammo Yisrael*?

In his "General Introduction to the Torah," the writer met the question this way:

While God is not the author of the Torah in the fundamentalist sense, the Torah is a book about humanity's understanding of and experience with God . . . Torah is ancient Israel's distinctive record of its search for God. It attempts to record the meeting of the human and the Divine, the great moments of encounter . . . God is not the author of the text, the people are; but God's voice may be heard through theirs if we listen with open minds.<sup>18</sup>

17. Reconstructionist teaching is not clear in this matter; at times it seems to lean in the direction of giving personal choice a role in the decision making process.

18. *The Torah—A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. G. Plaut, 5th ed., 1988, p. xviii f.

Even so, this view is unacceptable to the Orthodox. It is either literally *Torah min ha-Shamayim* or nothing. One either believes it or one does not, and no circumlocutions will do. On this level of discourse any bridging of the gap between Orthodox and non-Orthodox appears impossible, at least for the foreseeable future. If there is to be a rapprochement it would have to be based on the agreement that inquiry into a person's belief is unhelpful. What counts is a common ground of practice, at least in those essentials that affect the whole people.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, ideology, which, after the early days of Enlightenment followed popular practice and gave it a belated underpinning, has now become the battle ground that it once was. Two hundred years after the Revolution the drums are beating again and Jews are taking sides once more.

In one sense this may be regretted, because it appears to threaten the unity of our people. But, in another, it may be a blessing in disguise, for, after several generations who disregarded principle in favor of practice, the roots of our religion are once more exposed. The Orthodox are aligned on one side and all non-Orthodox on the other. That is the way it was more than a hundred years ago, and we survived that struggle. I have every confidence that we will do it again, for, after all, it is a controversy waged *leshem Shamayim*.

But intra-religious tension is only one aspect of Diaspora living. Its freedom also provides the possibility to be a maximal or minimal Jew, to do much or nothing, or anything in between. While all branches of Judaism try to persuade their adherents to live as much of a Jewish life as possible, Reform faces perhaps the greatest challenge because it embraces the two-tier condition of Diaspora living as a desideratum. That was the genesis of Reform's existence and that, in its way, makes it hard to be a Reform Jew. The movement has experienced spectacular successes but also serious failures, for the greater the freedom of the Jew, the greater the challenge. We would not wish it any other way.

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19. I would reckon *ishut* amongst these but would insist that, as long as its practice is acceptable, ideology must not be at issue. The *Mi hu Yehudi* controversy is an illustration of the present impasse: It does not matter that non-Orthodox rabbis follow the practice of *giyyur* meticulously; the Orthodox will, at present, not accept the authenticity of those presiding at the ceremony. What is at stake is not the latter's learning (especially since *musmakhim* are not even required) but their ideological stance. Yet it is here, also, that I see a glimmer of future accommodation. The Orthodox might come to say, in the words put by the Talmud in the mouth of the Almighty: What they think about Me is less important than what they do.

W. GUNTHER PLAUT

# THE GROWTH OF REFORM JUDAISM

American and European Sources until 1948

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Foreword by RABBI JACOB K. SHANKMAN

*The Pittsburgh Platform*  
pp. 31-41

*The Columbus Platform*  
pp. 96-100

See  
p. 37 (Pitts.)  
p. 96, 97, 100 (Col.)

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and of the solution of various practical and religious questions, especially in the field of marital law. In deciding these questions it is frequently the Shulhan Arukh and not Reform principles which are decisive. Therefore the undersigned make bold to issue an invitation to their theologically trained colleagues who make religious progress their banner, to attend a rabbinical conference which will be held after the next High Holy Days. We would ask that you write to one of the addresses listed below and let us know of your decision, and should you agree to come to inform us of your desires regarding place and time of the Conference.

New York, June 1st, 1869

Dr. S. Adler, rabbi of Emanu-El  
Congregation

Dr. D. Einhorn, rabbi of Adath  
Jeshurun Congregation

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

RESOLUTIONS (*From the Protocols of the Conference*)

Article 1. The Messianic goal of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a son of David, nor the continued separation from other nations, but the union of all men as children of God acknowledging His unity, and the oneness of all rational beings and their call to moral sanctification.

Article 2. We do not consider the fall of the second Jewish commonwealth as a punishment for the sinfulness of Israel, but as a sequence of divine intent first revealed in a promise to Abraham and then increasingly manifest in the course of world history, to send the members of the Jewish nation to all parts of the earth so that they may fulfill their high priestly task to lead the nations in the true knowledge and worship of God.

Article 3. The priestly service of the Aaronites and the Mosaic sacrificial cult were only preparatory steps for the true priestly service of the whole people which in fact began with the dispersion of the Jewish nation. For inner devotion and ethical sanctification are the only pleasing sacrifices to the All-Holy One. These institutions which laid the groundwork for higher religiosity went out of existence once and for all when the second Temple was destroyed. And only in this sense have they educational value and may they be mentioned in our prayer.

Article 4. Any distinction between Aaronite and non-Aaronite in relation to religious rites and obligations has therefore become inadmissible, both in ritual and in life.

Article 5. The selection of Israel as a people of faith, as a bearer of the highest idea of mankind, is to be emphasized as strongly as it has been in the past, but only to the accompaniment of equal emphasis on Israel's universal mission and of the equal love of God toward all His children.



Article 6. The belief in bodily resurrection has no religious foundation, and the teaching of immortality is to be expressed exclusively in relation to continued spiritual existence.

Article 7. The cultivation of the Hebrew language, in which the divine treasures of revelation have been couched and in which the immortal monuments of our literature have been preserved (the commanding influence of which extends to all educated nations), must in our midst be considered as the fulfillment of a sacred obligation. However, this language has in fact become incomprehensible for the overwhelming majority of our present-day co-religionists, and therefore in the act of prayer (which is a body without a soul unless it is understood) Hebrew must take second place behind a language which the worshippers can understand insofar as this appears advisable under prevailing circumstances.

## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

### 2. PITTSBURGH

PROCEEDINGS (From The Jewish Reformer's "Authentic Report")

No other meeting had as profound an effect on the development of Reform as had the gathering of a mere fifteen rabbis in Pittsburgh, in the fall of 1885. Their deliberations resulted in the adoption of what came to be known as the "Pittsburgh Platform," and these principles remained the foundation of the movement for fifty years.

No official transcript of the conference is extant. We owe the faithful recording of the proceedings to the editorial foresight of *The Jewish Reformer* which published much material *in extenso*.

Pursuant to the call issued by Dr. K. Kohler, of New York, the following rabbis assembled to meet in Conference at Concordia Hall, Alleghany City, Pa., Monday, November 16, 1885, at 10 o'clock A.M.: Isaac Aaron, Fort Wayne; Bloch, Youngstown, Ohio; Dr. Guttman, Syracuse, N.Y.; Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, Chicago; Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, New York; Joseph Krauskopf, Kansas City; Dr. Adolf Moses, Louisville; Dr. L. Mayer, Pittsburg; Dr. David Phillipson, Baltimore; Dr. Sale, Chicago; Dr. M. Schlesinger, Albany; Dr. S. H. Sonnenschein, St. Louis; M. Sessler, Wheeling, W. Va.; Samuel Weil, Bradford; Dr. Isidor (Isaac) M. Wise, Cincinnati, Ohio.

A permanent organization was effected electing the following officers: Dr. I. M. Wise, President; Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf, Vice President; Rabbis David Phillipson and [Adolph] Guttman, Secretaries.

Letters and telegrams expressing regret of inability to attend and wishing the Conference success in its contemplated work, were received from the following rabbis: Dr. M. Landsberg, Rochester, N.Y. (who above other things urged the adoption of a platform as a basis of cooperation); Joseph Silverman, Galveston, Texas; J. S. Goldammer, Nashville, Tenn.; H. M. Bien, Vicksburg, Miss.; James K. Gutheim, New Orleans, La.; Joseph Stolz, Little Rock, Ark.; S. Hecht, Montgomery, Ala.; Henry Iliowizi, Minneapolis, Minn.; H. Berkowitz, Mobile; Isaac Moses, Milwaukee; Louis Grossman, Detroit; M. Messing, St. Louis; W. J. Messing, Indianapolis; Dr. J. Schwab, St. Joseph, Mo.; Dr. Emanuel Schreiber, Los Angeles, Calif.; M. Spitz, St. Louis; J. Wechsler, St. Paul, Minn.; Dr. L. Wintner, Brooklyn.

Dr. Mayer, in brief but hearty words welcomed the brethren who had come from a distance to attend the Conference. It was moved and seconded that Dr. Kohler's circular should head the minutes of the Conference. Carried.

As a basis whereon to work Dr. Kohler read the following paper, setting forth the aims and objects of the Reform work incumbent upon the representatives of Progressive Judaism and offering ten different propositions to the Conference.

#### PREPARING OUR PLATFORM (*Kaufmann Kohler*)

Kohler had begun his career in Germany where he was born in 1843. While he was a pupil and life-long admirer of orthodox Samson Raphael Hirsch, his intellectual position may be traced to the influence which Abraham Geiger had over him. In the United States where he moved in 1869, he became the leading theoretician of classical Reform. Gifted with great learning and the power of precise expression, he was the natural choice to succeed I. M. Wise as President of Hebrew Union College. Kohler's *Jewish Theology* became the standard work in the field. He died in 1926.

The following is excerpted from his address to the Conference.

First of all, in order to show that Judaism is a religion of life and not a matter of the past, a system of living faith and practice which offers the guarantee of endurance and strength, it seems to me, we ought to unite on a platform which excludes none of the most radical Jews, which countenances and recognizes every honest opinion and does not denounce modern research, whether on the field of science or on the field of comparative religion, ethnology and Biblical criticism, but at the same time positively asserts the Jewish doctrine, a platform broad, comprehensive, enlightened and liberal enough to impress and win all hearts, and also firm and positive enough to dispel suspicion and reproach of agnostic tendencies, or of discontinuing the historical thread of the past.

We can no longer be blind to the fact that Mosaic-Rabbinical Judaism, as

based upon the Law and Tradition, has actually and irrevocably lost its hold upon the modern Jew. Whether they have justificatory reasons for doing so or not, the overwhelming majority of Jews within the domain of modern culture disregard altogether the Mosaic-Rabbinical laws concerning diet or dress, concerning work or the kindling of light on Sabbath, or any other ancient rite.

A Decalogue-Judaism will not do, for it is either too vague or too narrow; in fact, both. Too vague, for it fails to include some of the most genuine and most important Jewish laws. Christianity also stands upon the Decalogue, and, as far as the same presents the laws of morality and humanity, it is the universal religious truth, implied in pre-Israelitic history. On the other hand, it is too narrow, for as an authentic record of Divine Revelation it is like the entire Bible too much subject to critical inquiry to form a firm and lasting basis for our entire religious system. For have we not a double version of the Decalogue? Or do the various historical and moral reasons given for its commandments to-day offer the highest standard of morality? Judaism is a historical growth, and we must find the focus for all its emanations and manifestations, the common feature in all its diverse expressions and forms. We must accentuate and define what is essential and vital amidst its ever changing forms and ever fluctuating conditions. We must declare before the world what Judaism is and what Reform Judaism means and aims at.

#### THE PITTSBURGH PLATFORM

In view of the wide divergence of opinion and of the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism today, we, as representatives of Reform Judaism in America, in continuation of the work begun at Philadelphia in 1869, unite upon the following principles:—

First—We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

Second—We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the One God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age and at times clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives.

Third—We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and to-day we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such, as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization. (AmJ)

✓ Fourth—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.

✓ Fifth—We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

Sixth—We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam being daughter-religions of Judaism, we appreciate their mission to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who co-operate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

Seventh—We reassert the doctrine of Judaism, that the soul of men is immortal, grounding this belief on the divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (hell and paradise), as abodes for everlasting punishment or reward.

Eighth—In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

#### DISCUSSION AT PITTSBURGH

After the reading of the Platform, the President, Dr. Wise, said: "Gentlemen, what are you going to do with this Declaration of Independence?"

*Dr. Moses:* I hail with great joy this able and wonderfully liberal declaration. The platform is admirable and I accept it with both hands, and I move its adoption by this meeting.

Dr. Wise then put the question and the platform as a whole was accepted unanimously, with the understanding that it should be subjected to careful examination by the convention, sentence by sentence. The re-reading of the platform then took place and various amendments and verbal corrections were accepted.

To paragraph 2 of the platform Dr. Kohler moved that his original words "of Divine Revelation and" be inserted before "consecration."

*Dr. Hirsch:* I would not use the word, for it stands for an idea which I do not hold. I do not believe in revelation, if thereby is meant what is generally supposed to have occurred at Sinai. Nor does my congregation. They have been taught by myself as well as by my predecessors, that religion is the result of evolution.

*Dr. Moses:* The word revelation leads us into the domain of mysticism.

Dr. Hahn also objects to the term, stating that the various Jewish philosophers were not clear on that term. "It is a philosophic question which ought to have no place here. The recognition of our priestly mission implies the idea of revelation."

*Rabbi Weil:* If Judaism is not a revealed religion, what is it?

Dr. [Michael] Machol wants a definite expression on revelation.

*Dr. Kohler:* I confess, I am an evolutionist, but I believe in revelation, and I am bold enough to say that *Torah min ha-shamayim* which is revelation, must always remain one of the foundation stones of Judaism. Of course, I do not believe that God stepped down in person from heaven and spoke on Mount Sinai, but when a new truth, instead of being sought for, seeks its instrument taking hold of a single person or a people and impelling them to become its herald, this is revelation, and in this sense I want to have it understood and accepted.

*Dr. Sonneschein:* Revelation is, like socialism, a tabooed word, truly beautiful in significance, but poorly understood, and for this reason it should be avoided in the platform.

*Dr. Hirsch:* Revelation through genius, individual or collective, organically developed, none of us rejects, but the technical term does not convey this meaning.

*Dr. Kohler:* Seeing that the question is not a matter of principle, but that all agree as regards the acceptance of the idea of revelation, and that only the

use of the word is disliked in the platform, I withdraw my amendment, stating expressly, that we agree in the principle of a successive Divine revelation as an historical fact.

Paragraph 2 was accepted unanimously, on motion of Dr. Sonneschein the names being called from the roll.

To Paragraph 3, which first read *Mosaic Laws*, Dr. Hirsch objected to the distinction made between moral laws and ceremonial laws. "Though sanctioned by so great a man as the sainted Dr. Einhorn, it presents difficulties. Are not the holidays ceremonial laws, and would we abolish them? Let us embrace the opportunities to declare openly against legal Judaism. I, for my part, am an adherent of Dr. Sam. Hirsch's view; Judaism is a *Lehre*; what is called ceremonial laws are symbols representing the ideal. Symbols die; those that are dead and, therefore, no longer intelligible we abolish; those that are still imbued with life, we, of course, retain. Among the former I class all purity and dietary regulations; as laws they are certainly not of Jewish origin. Among the latter I class the holidays. As such, I opposed their transfer to Sunday in my own congregation!

Whereupon Dr. Kohler moved to substitute the word legislation. Carried.

Paragraph 3 was then accepted unanimously with roll-call, and so was Paragraph 4.

To Paragraph 7, referring to immortality, Dr. Hahn raised objection as being too dogmatical, and too much savoring of Sadduceism.

Dr. Falk wished to have Reward and Punishment accentuated as an indispensable Jewish dogma.

Dr. Wise referred to Maimonides' *Yad Hachasaka* (Hilch. Theshuba) as the best authority corroborating the spiritual conception of Retribution expressed in the platform.

*Dr. Hirsch:* Resurrection was already rejected by the Philadelphia Conference, but eternal punishment and Paradise pleasure must also be discarded. Let our modern Kadilish Jews be reminded that the twelve months burning in Gehenna is probably of Parsee origin. We cannot urge too strongly that righteousness is its own reward, and wrong-doing carries with it its own punishment, and that work is the aim of life.

*Dr. Kohler:* The word "forever" implies eternal readjustment of man's doings throughout all epochs or evolution of the life of the soul, the soul's ascending from stage to stage with its bliss or its woe. We need no actual or localized rewards and punishments. This is no Sadduceism. It is the view of Antigonus of Socho in the Mishnah: "Be not like servants who work for their master only in view of wages!"

Paragraph 7 was finally carried, and so was Paragraph 8.

Upon acceptance of the platform as a whole, the meeting adjourned until the afternoon.

CONSERVATIVE COMMENT (*Editorial in The American Hebrew*)

An unsigned editorial in *The American Hebrew* set forth the prevailing reaction of the conservative elements to the Pittsburgh Conference. The paper was published in New York, from 1879 on.

When we read in the report of the proceedings at the Pittsburgh Conference that Rev. I. M. Wise as its presiding officer spoke of its set of resolutions as a "Declaration of Independence," we thought that he had only given vent to another specimen of his elephantine jocularity. When Dr. Kohler caught up the phrase, and used it as the title of a lecture, we thought that it was to serve only as a rhetorical purpose. We find now however that the phrase stands for more than a mere joke. Rev. Mr. Wise's view of the significance of the phrase may be gleaned from the following paragraph extracted from a lengthy editorial in the last number of the *American Israelite*:

That "Declaration of Principles" presents a particular feature which must not be overlooked. It declares, by its tone and position, that we, the much abused reformers, radicals, decried, defamed and debased by the men of the minority who usurped for themselves the titles of conservative and orthodox, or rather the Jews par excellence—we ARE the orthodox Jews in America, and they WERE the orthodoxy of former days and other countries. We can see no good reason why we should ogle you, allow you to act as a brake to the wheel of progress, and confirm you in your pretensions. You do not represent the ideas and sentiments of the American Jews, this phase upon which Judaism entered in this country, you are an anachronism, strangers in this country, and to your own brethren. You represent yourselves, together with a past age and a foreign land. We must proceed without you to perform our duties to our God, and our country, and our religion, for WE are the orthodox Jews in America.

As the writer of that paragraph is the inspiring element of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and is the President of the Hebrew Union College, it becomes a matter of interest to the conservative congregations supporting those institutions, to consider whether it is consistent with their self-respect, to say nothing of their principles, to continue their connection with the UAHC and their support of the College. No words can more explicitly and more definitely mark the breach cut between Radicalism and Conservatism than the defiant and arrogant words "We must proceed without you to perform our duties to our God, and our country, and our religion."

When the conservative Rabbis are told that they "do not represent the ideas and sentiments of the American Jews"; that they "are an anachronism, strangers

in this country and to their own brethren"; and that they "represent themselves, together with a past age and a foreign land"; when such language is used towards such men as Jastrow, Szold, Liebman Adler, the Mendes, Jacobs, Hochheimer, Schneeberger, Kohut, Morais, and a host of others who failed to attend the Pittsburgh conference, then it is time that the congregations represented by these Rabbis should protest against the baseless assertions made against them.

The most effectual reply to the insult paid to the conservative Rabbis of this country, would be for the conservative congregations which are yet connected with the UAHC to sever that connection. This step is called for not only as a defence of the Rabbis against absurd charges, but to squarely meet the challenge which Radicalism made at Pittsburgh. The resolutions there adopted, the debates which there were held, and the literature of the subject since then, make it evident that Radicalism wishes to erect itself into, or rather sink into, a sect. A sect with its own creed, its own doctrines, its own laws.

The UAHC and the Hebrew Union College are both identified with and guided by the leaders of that sect, so that it is impossible for any congregation which does not wish to join that clique in its sectarian movement, to remain affiliated with the Union, or to support the College which should educate disciples of that new party. Then will follow the need for forming a Union of American Hebrew Congregations which shall not be dominated by one man, or any clique of men. Then we shall no more regret as we do now, that we are forced to counsel disunion; but the Union is now a Radical closed corporation, and not a Hebrew union which neither unites nor seeks to unite the Jewish elements of this country.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF ETHICAL CULTURE (*Felix Adler*)

The founder of the Ethical Culture movement (1851-1933) was the son of Reformer Samuel Adler (see Vol. I, p. 189) and was trained for the rabbinate. He considered Judaism too narrow and he rejected its theism in favor of a broad humanistic universalism.

In 1885, after the issuance of the Pittsburgh Platform, he engaged in a public discussion of the Reform position and challenged his former associates to draw the ultimate radical conclusion of their liberalism. They should, he said, become Unitarians if they were not ready—as only few Jews were—to join his Ethical Culture Society.

The following is an excerpt from his lecture.

The leaders of the Reformed Jews were anxious to find a warrant for the changes which they considered necessary; they sought authority for their innovations; they endeavored to harmonize the old with the new, and cutting off what they deemed ephemeral and transitory, they were only the more solic-



ious to preserve the things which in their estimation were essential and fundamental in Judaism. But have they succeeded in so doing? If we contemplate the history of Reform Judaism during the past fifty years, we perceive a process of disintegration like that in liberal Christian churches. As in liberal Christianity one element of faith after another has been eliminated, so in liberal Judaism one layer of the law after another has been removed. At first the rabbinical laws were rejected, and the authority of the Talmud was often invoked for so doing. Then the Talmud was put aside, and the cry was raised for a return to the pure, unadulterated religion of the Bible. At last it became evident that the Biblical standard, too, is no longer applicable to modern conditions; the authenticity of the Books of Moses was doubted; it was denied that a Law had ever been revealed on Sinai, and a final appeal was made from the letter to the spirit of the Bible, and this is all that is left of Judaism in the hands of the Reformers—the spirit of the Bible. But the "spirit of the Bible" is an elastic phrase which may mean a great deal or nothing at all. Among the Reform Jews it means practically the belief in one God and the belief that the Jews were elected to be the standard bearers of monotheism.

But in attempting to found Judaism on doctrine, the Reformers have departed entirely from the old basis, and here their weak point is exposed and here the cause of the breaking down of their efforts is revealed. The basis of Judaism never was doctrine, but law—divine law.

In taking away the law of Sinai, in declaring that there never was a law directly revealed by God, Reformed Judaism has taken away the underpinning of the whole system of the Jewish religion; and in endeavoring to put Doctrine in the place of Law, it has acted contrary to the received traditions, contrary to the history, contrary to the spirit of Judaism. The Reformers when they took away the old Law should have substituted a new Divine Law in its stead. But where is the new Law which they have to offer in place of the old? Where are the new institutions which they have founded? Where is the new practice which they have created? Where are the new rules of conduct which they have formulated? Reformed Judaism has been impotent to accomplish any of these results. In every religion we must distinguish two elements: the metaphysical idea, which is too abstract to be practically efficient, on one side, and the embodiment of that idea on the other, the flesh and the blood in which it takes shape. Reformed Judaism has retained the idea, the abstract idea, the spirit, as they say of the Bible, *the ghost*, one might be tempted to say, of the old religion, but it has not been able to give a new embodiment to the Jewish idea, to clothe it anew in flesh and blood.

And what has been the consequence of all this? Look at the condition of the Reformed Jewish Temples at the present day, and you have the answer. There is a brave show of externals; there are beautiful and magnificent houses of worship; but the life that once animated the Jewish house of worship is departed. There are heard in the pulpits large phrases concerning progress and humanity, but they fail to bear visible fruit. There is religious instruction given to the young, but it is of such a kind for the most part it creates neither a deep impression nor a lasting one. It is not my purpose to denounce. I did not rise today merely to point out what seem to me to be the errors of Reformed

Judaism. But I cannot help expressing a sense of profound regret; aye, and of sorrow that a great religion should have come to such a pass.

The great change, which follows as a logical consequence from the position of the Reformers, is the wiping out of the lines of separation between Reformed Jews—I will not say and the rest of the world—but at all events between Reformed Jews and Unitarians. The Reformers themselves declare that they no longer consider the Jew a distinct nation, but only a religious community. Religious communities, however, are held together by common religious beliefs, and all who hold the same beliefs belong of right to the same religious body. Why then do not the Reformers labor to bring about a fusion between themselves and Unitarians? What possible reason is there why this step should not be taken—why this logical outcome of the principles of Reformed Judaism should not be clearly stated? The old lines of separation must be wiped out.

A DEFENSE OF REFORM (Gustav Gottheil)

Gottheil (born in Germany, 1827; died in New York, 1903) had been assistant to Samuel Holdheim in Berlin, had served in Manchester, England, and had been a member of the Leipzig Synod (see Vol. I, p. 181). In New York he had succeeded Samuel Adler as rabbi of Temple Emanu-El. He was one of the Reformers active in the Zionist movement from its very beginning.

Gottheil replied to Felix Adler's critique in a series of four sermons, which attracted wide attention, and from which the following is excerpted.

What is the pith of that "strong case" against us? Not that we have gone too far, but not far enough; that even the new platform stands too near the old one, and ought to be shifted further to the left until we reach the Unitarian Church (and this is one of the counsels given to us by the lecturer) in this alliance move forward still until we stand side by side with the agnostic pulpit at Chickering Hall. But whatever the motive—we were put in possession of our indictment. What is our defence? Have we any at all? Or must we plead guilty?

Our friend pronounces us dead and this Temple a mere sepulchre, and very feelingly says Kaddish over us. Inasmuch, however, as he has not been inside a Jewish house of worship for a goodly number of years, he has given his verdict without viewing the body, which is an illegal proceeding and invalidates it. Moreover, the dead man himself protests that he does not at all feel like dead; on the contrary, there are times when his deepest life is stirring in his veins and the springs of his innermost heart are touched.

Is life really extinct and the time come to call our friends together and ask them kindly to bury us? Life, in any house of worship, consists in two things:

Devotion is one, Instruction the other. Where these are, there is life; where not, there is death, no matter how frequently people gather in it, how long the prayers, how often repeated.

Now, as to the first—is it not to be found in our Temples? Not more so, than in the older ones?

By the shortening of our liturgies, by expurgating them from ideas and petitions no longer in harmony with our beliefs; by the use of the vernacular; by the introduction of the voluntary prayer, answering more closely to the wants of the worshipers than the stated ones; by hymns and anthems, and the improvement of the musical accompaniment we have breathed new life into the old forms; indeed, it is we who have recalled devotion to the House of God, whence it had almost departed. If we were as lifeless as we are painted, how is it that even strangers, not of our faith, feel the touch of life on them when they visit us? Who that has witnessed our confirmation or memorial services can doubt that we have found the way to the life-springs in the heart of the present generation!

Next our schools rise to view. In this field we are surely entitled to some credit. The religious schools are altogether the creation of modern Judaism. They are in great favor with all parents; children love to go to them, and both ministers and congregations bestow all possible care on that part of their work. That they are above improvement, no one ever maintained. What human institutions are so? And, we may ask—ought the "impression" of religious teaching indeed be measured by more or less attention to the forms of religion alone, or even primarily so, and not also by the *moral* conduct of the pupils? Ethical Culture surely ought to give all prominence to the latter. So measured, we have no reason to blush for our former pupils, nor to confess any failure. With few exceptions they have grown into honorable men and women, faithful in their stations and successful in their lives.

Yet, suppose we grapple successfully with the great obstacle to communal life in our way, and create a weekly Day of Worship and instruction which all can and do attend—will that make us find favor in the eyes of our friend? Not at all—for it is delivered by the oracle: "That when the influence of a religion is expressed in one day only in the week, this is enough to condemn it." Is it indeed? Well, then Ethical Culture stands doubly condemned; for it "expresses its influence" during six months of the year "once only in the week"; which is no more than one half of what we claim; nay, reckoning our festivals and our Friday evenings, not one third; of other influence on the Ethical Culturists outside Chickering Hall services the world knows as little as it does of the modern Jew outside his Temple. Or will charitable work and general culture be claimed as the special religious exercises of the former, unknown to the others? This cannot be; for has not their spokesman declared "that the idea of a monopoly of religious truth, and especially of moral truth, is repugnant to every educated mind?"

they forget the human being, save that they disregard the commandment regarding man. We do not oppose them as long as they do not dispossess morality, as long as they would not have the depths of religion sealed. We know what history has spoken to us and what we have to say. We fight the Jewish fight, this fight for the world of men, the world of God's children, fight for it with the strength of what is ours. Therefore we must be Jews, must hold the ground, must keep the way, must widen the outlook. That is our task in the post-war world, the task of Progressive Judaism.

### 3. THE COLUMBUS PLATFORM

#### AMERICAN JEWISH

Fifty years after the Pittsburgh meeting the world of 1885 had irrevocably disappeared. America was now the center of the Diaspora, Zionism was a spiritual and political force, Hitler was in power, one World War had been fought and a second was in the making. Most Reform Jews had moved away from their anti-Zionist position (see p. 144). The new "Columbus Platform," adopted in 1937, although it avoided a clear-cut pro-Zionist position, reflected the new thinking of American liberals. The Jewish people and its traditional ways had once again become significant factors in the ideology of the movement. Felix A. Levy presided over the conference, the first avowed Zionist to occupy the chair.

#### GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF REFORM JUDAISM

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 Central Conference of American Rabbis makes the following declaration of principles. It presents them not as a fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry.

##### A. JUDAISM AND ITS FOUNDATIONS

1. Nature of Judaism. Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people. Though growing out of Jewish life, its message is universal, aiming at the union and perfection of mankind under the sovereignty of God. Reform Judaism recognizes the principle of progressive development in religion and consciously applies this principle to spiritual as well as to cultural and social life.

Judaism welcomes all truth, whether written in the pages of scripture or

declared from the records of nature. The new discoveries of science, while replacing the older scientific views underlying our sacred literature, do not conflict with the essential spirit of religion as manifested in the consecration of man's will, heart and mind to the service of God and of humanity.

2. God. The heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love. In Him all existence has its creative source and mankind its ideal of conduct. Through transcending time and space, He is the indwelling Presence of the world. We worship Him as the Lord of the universe and as our merciful Father.

3. Man. Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image. His spirit is immortal. He is an active co-worker with God. As a child of God, he is endowed with moral freedom and is charged with the responsibility of overcoming evil and striving after ideal ends.

4. Torah. God reveals Himself not only in the majesty, beauty and orderliness of nature, but also in the vision and moral striving of the human spirit. Revelation is a continuous process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the people of Israel, through its prophets and sages, achieved unique insight in the realm of religious truth. The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and of the moral law. It preserves the historical precedents, sanctions and norms of Jewish life, and seeks to mould it in the patterns of goodness and of holiness. Being products of historical processes, certain of its laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth. But as a depository of permanent spiritual ideals, the Torah remains the dynamic source of the life of Israel. Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism.

5. Israel. Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body. Living in all parts of the world, Israel has been held together by the ties of a common history, and above all, by the heritage of faith. Though we recognize in the group loyalty of Jews who have become estranged from our religious tradition, a bond which still unites them with us, we maintain that it is by its religion and for its religion that the Jewish people has lived. The non-Jew who accepts our faith is welcomed as a full member of the Jewish community.

In all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.

Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of

God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal.

#### B. ETHICS

6. Ethics and Religion. In Judaism religion and morality blend into an indissoluble unity. Seeking God means to strive after holiness, righteousness and goodness. The love of God is incomplete without the love of one's fellowmen. Judaism emphasizes the kinship of the human race, the sanctity and worth of human life and personality and the right of the individual to freedom and to the pursuit of his chosen vocation. Justice to all, irrespective of race, sect or class is the inalienable right and the inescapable obligation of all. The state and organized government exist in order to further these ends.

7. Social Justice. Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safeguarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.

8. Peace. Judaism, from the days of the prophets, has proclaimed to mankind the ideal of universal peace. The spiritual and physical disarmament of all nations has been one of its essential teachings. It abhors all violence and relies upon moral education, love and sympathy to secure human progress. It regards justice as the foundation of the well-being of nations and the condition of enduring peace. It urges organized international action for disarmament, collective security and world peace.

#### C. RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

9. The Religious Life. Jewish life is marked by consecration to these ideals of Judaism. It calls for faithful participation in the life of the Jewish community as it finds expression in home, synagogue and school and in all other agencies that enrich Jewish life and promote its welfare.

The Home has been and must continue to be a stronghold of Jewish life, hallowed by the spirit of love and reverence, by moral discipline and religious observance and worship.

The Synagogue is the oldest and most democratic institution in Jewish life. It is the prime communal agency by which Judaism is fostered and preserved. It links the Jews of each community and unites them with all Israel.

The perpetuation of Judaism as a living force depends upon religious knowledge and upon the Education of each new generation in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

Prayer is the voice of religion, the language of faith and aspiration. It directs man's heart and mind Godward, voices the needs and hopes of the community, and reaches out after goals which invest life with supreme value. To deepen the spiritual life of our people, we must cultivate the traditional habit of communion with God through prayer in both home and synagogue.

Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value, the cultivation of distinctive forms of religious art and music and the use of Hebrew, together with the vernacular, in our worship and instruction.

These timeless aims and ideals of our faith we present anew to a confused and troubled world. We call upon our fellow Jews to rededicate themselves to them, and, in harmony with all men, hopefully and courageously to continue Israel's eternal quest after God and His kingdom.

#### DISCUSSION AT COLUMBUS (*From the Transcript*)

*Rabbi Samuel Schulman:*\* I rise to speak on the substitute motion that instead of adopting the report as presented by the Chairman of the present Commission the Draft of Principles drawn up by the former Chairman of the Commission together with the draft drawn up by the present Commission be recommitted to a new Commission to be appointed by the President. If this motion prevails my draft of the Platform would then be officially before the Conference which now it is not. The reason I believe this substitute motion should carry is my strong conviction that unless you send forth a stronger statement than the one which is at present before the house, you should not send forth any statement at all.

If we are going to make a statement it should be a ringing challenging statement on the living issues of the day. First, we must courageously confront the issue of absolute and unlimited individualism in our own body; but if there are such absolute individualists, then let us continue without a platform because platforms, while they seemingly unite, also divide if they are written with strength. Therefore, I wrote the paragraph on authority. Individualism had to be met; therefore I said that science is not self-sufficient, that it does not cover the whole of life, it is not the whole of truth.

I felt that a ringing word should be proclaimed against the humanity-demoralizing theory of the worth of man based on blood and on race. The whole theory of race and blood as deciding the worth of a human being is wrong. I contrast spirit and religion with race all through my document. I am a lover of my people—I know what the people of Israel means but I felt

\* Then Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Emanu-El of New York. He was one of the most respected and scholarly liberals of his time. In 1907 he first used the term "melting pot" to describe America. He was born in Russia in 1864 and died in 1955.

that on these resurgent waves of brutal racialism, we Jews have something worthwhile to say. If the Jewish church speaks and it has nothing to say, let it be silent; to speak weakly in a time like this is worse than nothing and when I spoke of spirit, I pointed to America as a nation that organized itself on the dignity of the human spirit. When I say that the paper that the Commission presented is weak, it is because I feel that the real need is for something that will stir the Jewish heart and will tell the world in clear language where we stand today.

I tried to make clear that Reform Judaism does not center the Kingdom of God in the belief of a personal Messiah. Reform Judaism eliminated from the Prayerbook the thought of a personal Messiah. But why should we omit the statement that Israel was chosen by God to witness to God and His Torah? Why is the word "chosen" omitted? I am not afraid of the word. It was the men of the Pittsburgh Conference who outgrew it. And I have put two new ideas into my outline. The first is the ecclesia, the Kenesseth Israel, and the second is a new interpretation of Torah, the Torah of the prophets which was the creative principle of Judaism, and so I say definitely the essence of revelation is the moral law which I have defined by Torah.

I expect this Conference to act in this unique situation, a situation unparalleled in the history of the Conference, as leaders of Jewish thought and Jewish ethics should act.

*Rabbi David Philipson:* I am now the only man living who was at the Pittsburgh Conference. I was not in favor of a new Declaration of Principles but the Conference wanted it and since there seemed to be so great a desire especially on the part of the younger men, I was willing to consider it. There are some things in this Declaration that do not entirely please me but I know there are certain things that require compromise. For the sake of historic continuity, I should like to be the one to move the adoption of this Declaration of Principles.

*President Felix Levy:* Those who wish to record their vote in the negative may do so and those who do not report as voting in the negative will be reported as having voted favorably. The Secretary informs me there are 110 members present as the vote is being taken.

✓ With 110 members present, five members asked that their vote be recorded in the negative.

#### 4. FRONTIERS AND FAILURES

The founding of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (p. 89) showed that Reform had spread to most countries where Western



influence was at work. But outside America progress was slow except where, as in South Africa and Australia, a frontier atmosphere prevailed.

#### FRANCE (*Louis-Germain Lévy*)

Lévy (1877-1946) was rabbi of the Union Libérale Israélite in Paris when he rendered this report to the World Union in 1928. For more than a generation he was France's leading exponent of Reform.

The Grand Sanhedrin which was called into session by Napoleon in 1807 established the happy distinction in Judaism between religious and political laws, but it did not dare to draw all consequences from this principle. For this reason that assembly did not have the impact on the spiritual destiny of Judaism which it could have had. If the Grand Sanhedrin had had the courage of proceeding to the end of the tasks which the hour demanded, Judaism would not have experienced the decadence into which it has since fallen. Who knows, with the effervescence of ideas which then obtained, a large part of Europe might have been won for the religion of Israel.

Thereafter voices were raised which demanded modification in ritual, but they remained isolated and did not create a significant undercurrent. In 1856 a conference of the French Grand Rabbis under the presidency of Rabbi Ulmann took place in Paris.\* The conference expressed itself first on the question of *piyutim*. It declared unanimously that these prayers could be revised and, with a majority of 7 to 2, that the revision was desirable in the interests of the service. Concerning the organ the conference affirmed that legally speaking it was permitted to install this instrument in the synagogue and to have it played by a non-Jew on Sabbaths and holidays. The conference instituted the ceremony of confirmation and gave the Grand Rabbi of the Central Consistory the task of formulating a catechism.

It appears that everyone should have applauded these efforts to improve the service, to render it more dignified and more aesthetically pleasing. But the assumption does not reckon with the mentality of fanatics. A "Commission of the Preservers of Judaism" was formed which violently attacked this modest attempt at modification. It had been hoped that a rabbinic re-union would take place every five years, but in the face of this avalanche of Orthodox outcries the resolution was not carried through.

However, someone was found to issue a vigorous rejoinder to the campaign of the Orthodox. This was Gerson-Lévy, a publicist of great erudition who wrote a series of articles in the *Archives Israélites*.\*\* Encouraged by Albert Cohn, S. Munk and Rabbi S. Dreyfuss of Mulhouse he collected his articles in a volume called *Organs and Piyutim*, which appeared in 1859.

\* See above, p. 40.

\*\* See Vol. I, p. 104.

# Haven and Home

A History of the Jews in America

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Abraham J. Karp

Chapter 15:  
"Survival in a Free Society"  
pp. 360-373.

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SCHOCKEN BOOKS • NEW YORK

1. Before the world, we are a religious community.
2. In our self-identity, we are a unique people, possessed of our own civilization - land, language, culture, history - in addition to religion.

# 15.

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## Survival in a Free Society



IN AMERICA, THE JEW HAS EXPERIENCED EMANCIPATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT to their furthest reaches. A common citizenship tended to erase distinctions of creed and nationality in the unfolding social and cultural scene. Whereas in the European community, assimilation had demanded an act of disassociation from one's own group—usually apostasy—in America one would become assimilated into the larger community unless he or she expressed, in word or deed, identification with the community into which he or she was born.

Assimilation was facilitated by many factors in America: No governmental designation of "Jew," small isolated communities, continued movement of immigrants uninhibited by communal or family restraints, no ancestral memories evoked by neighborhood, no webs of social relationships extending over generations. The maverick spirit, the social mobility of a frontier society and the overriding ideology of a unified America, which later observers termed the melting pot, further facilitated smooth entry into the larger society.<sup>1</sup> In the context of such an America, the Jews who wished to retain their Jewishness had to fashion an identity which would be acceptable to America and which would prove vital to themselves. In this enterprise, they could look to the solution to the similar challenge worked out by Jews in Europe entering the modern world.

### EUROPEAN PRECEDENTS

Jews of Western Europe learned early in their experience of enlightenment and emancipation that the society which was beginning

to open its doors to them was asking that they justify their continued corporate existence; and that the national state which was haltingly extending civic and political rights was asking for a public group identity which would fit comfortably into the body politic and would be compatible with fullest loyalty to the nation. These twin demands were given dramatic expression in the Swiss clergyman Reverend Johann Casper Lavater's challenge to Moses Mendelssohn in 1769 to refute Christianity or to accept it, and by Napoleon's twelve questions to the Assembly of Jewish Notables convened in 1806, which asked: Can Jews abiding in their Jewishness be full participants in the life of the modern state? More pointedly, Lavater suggested the need for Jews to justify their continued existence, and Napoleon pointed to the need for a new definition of Jewish corporate identity. The response to the latter challenge was direct and immediate. Abraham Furtado well expressed it: "We no longer are a nation within a nation." Joseph Marie Portalis *fits*, a commissioner of Napoleon, described it: "The Jews ceased to be a people and remained only a religion."

Their new definition as a "religious community," the emancipated Jews felt certain, would make their status more comprehensible and more acceptable to their neighbors. But the need to explain, to justify continued Jewish existence persisted. Of what benefit is it to the nation, of what value to the Jew? Why should the modern world tolerate Jewish survival? Why should a Jew remain a Jew?

Ideological justification for Jewish survival in the modern world was formulated by Reform Judaism in Germany early in the nineteenth century. Seizing upon the then popular theory—which nationalism made emotionally acceptable and intellectually respectable—that each people is endowed with a unique native genius, Rabbi Abraham Geiger applied it to the Jews. The ancient Greeks, he noted, possessed a national genius for art, philosophy and science. The Jewish people, he asserted, are likewise endowed with a religious genius, which it is obligated to use in service to mankind. Rabbi Samuel Holdheim, among others, expressed what came to be known as the Mission Idea.

It is the destiny of Judaism to pour the light of its thoughts, the fire of its sentiments, the fervor of its feelings, upon all the souls and hearts on earth . . . It is the Messianic task of Israel to make the pure law of morality of Judaism the common possession and blessing of all the peoples on earth.<sup>1</sup>

The Mission Idea, which held that Israel is a *religious community* charged with the divine task to bring the knowledge of the One God and the message of ethical monotheism to the world, made Jewish group survival acceptable in the modern national state. It provided the ideological justification for continued communal existence: the world needs

this "priest-people" and its "God-ordained mission" of spiritual service; the Jew, as a Jew, in undertaking this divine mission fulfills the noblest of purposes in life, service to mankind.

### THE MELTING POT

The challenge posed by emancipation and enlightenment was altered in the New World by the new context of Jewish existence. In the European experience emancipation was the end product of a long struggle, in part a victory won, in part a gift granted. The declaration which announced American nationhood proclaimed liberty not as a gift but as an unalienable right. In the unfolding social and cultural climate of the New World there were, in theory, no doors barring entry into mainstream America; one assimilated into the larger society, unless one chose voluntarily to retain his group identity.

Throughout the nineteenth century the melting pot concept (though the term was used only in the twentieth) demanded cultural assimilation of immigrants. As early as 1782, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur had noted:

He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.

In 1845 Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his Journal: "In this continent-asylum of all nations . . . all the European tribes . . . will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state."

Later, the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, in his play *The Melting Pot* (1908), would apply this concept to the Jewish experience in America. A young Russian-Jewish composer is writing an "American" symphony, celebrating an America where a new nation is being forged. The symphony completed and performed, David Quixano speaks his vision:

America is God's crucible, the Great Melting Pot, where all races of Europe are melting and reforming . . . Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, black and yellow, Jew and Gentile . . . How the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! . . . Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Peace, peace unto ye unborn millions fated to fill this giant continent—the God of our children give you Peace.<sup>2</sup>

This was America as perceived by immigrant Jews. It demanded of them that they divest themselves of their distinctive ways, and absorb and adopt the language, the values, the ways of native American culture.

It was an enticing invitation, an opportunity to rise above minority status and become members of God's new Chosen People—the American nation. If it was difficult for the immigrant to cast off the known and the habitual which provided them with stability in the new and threatening environment, it was easy and alluring for their children to wash away the marks of Old World peculiarity and become *Americans*.

The same America which called for ethnic and cultural assimilation accepted religious differentiation. The retention of a particular religious identity was viewed as a contribution to the well-being of a nation which was a gathering of peoples. The sense of continuity and security which the immigrants needed to feel at home in their new home could be provided by a transplanted church. "The immigrants thought it important," Oscar Handlin noted, "to bring their churches to the United States." For the sake of national unity, the nation willed the immigrant to take on new political loyalties, new cultural ways, but for the sake of social well-being it permitted religious diversity.

Organized religion was esteemed in nineteenth-century America because, as Louis B. Wright concluded, it was the most effective "of all the agencies utilized by man in maintaining traditional civilization on the successive frontiers in America."<sup>3</sup> It was not lost on the Jews, newly arrived in America, that here churches and other religious institutions were favored, those who supported them respected, and that the synagogue was viewed as an American religious institution. They therefore maintained the synagogue not only in support of their own Jewish interests, but also as an expression of patriotic obligation. Dr. Jacob De La Motta expressed it at the dedication of the Mikveh Israel synagogue in Savannah, Georgia in 1820: "Were we not influenced by religious zeal, a decent respect to the custom of the community in which we live should actuate us to observe public worship."<sup>4</sup>

Building a house of worship in America was not so much an act of piety as an expression of good citizenship; maintaining it was bearing witness to America as a land of freedom and opportunity.

Identity as a religious community established the appropriate corporate status for Jewish survival in America; justification for that survival required an ideology with roots in Jewish ideals and experience, as well as a promise of service to America and the world. The Mission Idea of Reform Judaism served well the West European immigrant Jew. It lifted the difficult and anxiety-filled experience of relocation to an enterprise of high, selfless purpose. It fit in well with the rhetoric used to vindicate America's national expansion in the language of "mission" and "manifest destiny."

The rabbinic conferences which formulated the ideology of Classic Reform affirmed these emphases. The Philadelphia Conference of 1869 stressed the messianic goal of Israel, defining the dispersion of the Jews in terms of divine purpose; the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885 proclaimed: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community." Such a status enabled the Jews to retain communal identity, while becoming integrated into the American nation.

The Jewish religious community proclaimed itself a partner and co-worker with other religious denominations in "doing God's work," and allied itself with progressive forces outside the religious establishment. The Pittsburgh Conference stated:

We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who operate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness of men.<sup>5</sup>

As a religious community whose dominant ideology was the Mission Idea, and which sought alliances with the forces of "broad humanity," it was closer in spirit and practices to liberal Christianity than to traditional Judaism. There were, of course, factors which bound Jews of all persuasions one to another, factors such as national and historic identity, but these were precisely those which Reform chose to suppress. By the end of the nineteenth century American Jews had evolved a public identity which, they were certain, America would understand and accept: a religious community in a larger setting of cultural assimilation.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, it became apparent that, while such an identity might be acceptable to America, it could not serve Jewish survival needs. It deprived Judaism of the cultural-national vitality which gave it viability, and it made no provision for the growing number of Jews who defined their Jewish identity as cultural rather than religious.

The first serious call for a redefinition of identity came from a venerated leader of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal. In his "Fundamental Principles of Judaism," published in the first issue of the Zionist periodical *The Maccabean* (November 1901), he states:

*Judaism and Jewish Religion are not synonymous . . . Jewish religion is only part of Judaism . . . Judaism is the sum of all ethnological characteristics which have their roots in the distinctively Jewish national spirit . . . The Jewish People is the fixed, the permanent, the necessary substratum, the essential nucleus. Judaism is not a universal religion. There would be no Judaism without Jews.*<sup>6</sup>

Felsenthal shifted the definition of identity from religious concepts to the living community of Jews. To be sure, Judaism contains "certain universal elements, certain absolute and eternal truths," but "Judaism does not limit itself to these universal elements." It requires "a certain characteristic ritual, certain established national days of consecration, certain defined national symbols and ceremonies." Survival demands an acceptance of Jewish distinctiveness and the fostering of those elements of culture and nationality which constitute the "national Jewish religion." How does a national religion serve larger humanity? Felsenthal suggested that as each national religion strengthens its inner wisdom and truth, and "exerts beneficial influence upon its particular nation, it also adds to the adornment of all humanity."

The realities of American life led Felsenthal to accept the organization of American Jewry as a religious community, with the synagogue as its central institution. But, he reminded, "The Jews are not only a religious community, and Judaism is not only a religion."<sup>7</sup> As implementation of his broader definition of Judaism, he urged commitment to Zionism and greater emphasis on Jewish culture and folkways. What was crucial to him was that the Jews organized as a religious community accept a broad cultural-national definition of Judaism, and that this be reflected in the life—purpose, programs, activities—of the congregation and community.

From the camp of traditional Jewry in the first decades of the twentieth century came a voice calling for reassertion of national Jewish identity. Israel Friedlaender, professor at the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, and a founder of the Young Israel movement in Orthodoxy, argued that a religion divorced from nationality and culture was false to authentic Judaism, and could therefore neither save nor survive.<sup>8</sup> If Judaism is to continue in America, he argued,

it must break the narrow frame of a creed and resume its original function as a culture, as the expression of the Jewish spirit and the whole of Jewish life. The Jew must have the courage to be different, to think his own thoughts, to feel his own feelings, to live his own life. . . . but with the consciousness that only in this way does he fulfill his destiny, for the benefit of mankind.

Friedlaender envisioned a Judaism "that does not confine itself to synagogues and hospitals, but endeavors to embrace the breadth and width of modern life." He urges a reassessment of the possibilities of Judaism in the American environment—a Judaism comprised of national and cultural as well as religious elements. "The true American spirit," he observes, "understands and respects the traditions and associations of other nationalities." The American idea of liberty "signifies liberty of



conscience, the full, untrammelled development of the soul." Judaism owes it not only to itself but to America to become the center "of the spiritual life of the Jewish people in the dispersion," for in doing so it will become "a most valuable and stimulating factor in the public and civic life." Friedlaender questioned the melting pot concept as being truly reflective of the American spirit, and rejected the implication that "Americanization" demands cultural assimilation. He laid the foundation for what was later termed cultural pluralism by pointing to the receptivity of America to national cultures, and to the contribution which an ethnic culture, sustained and developed, would make to American civilization.

Both Felsenthal and Friedlaender recognized that the realities of American life mandated that American Jewry be organized as a religious community, but they argued for a definition which was based not on American models but on the Jewish historic tradition. Religious leaders could plead for attention to inner Jewish spiritual and cultural needs, but immigrant Jews and their children had a higher priority, the need to be accepted by America—an America still conceived as a melting pot. What was needed was a new image of America—an America which would approve of a distinctive Jewish identity and welcome Jewish cultural creativity and expression.

### CULTURAL PLURALISM

The danger to Jewish survival in the melting pot vision of America was attacked by two secular ideologists, Chaim Zhitlowsky and Horace M. Kallen. Each, from his own viewpoint, called the concept inimical to American civilization.

Zhitlowsky, the leading proponent of secular Yiddish cultural life in America, argued that the melting pot was neither desirable nor possible, for it robbed American civilization of the richness which variety bestows, and the ethnic groups in response to their own needs would turn from such an America. He called upon America to harbor the "united nationalities of the United States." He proposed a "nationality-brotherhood," where "each individuality unfolds and brings out into the open all the richness with which its soul may be blessed by nature."

Such a peaceful, creative unity of national cultures would lead to mutual enrichment. The individual nationalities would become channels which would carry to their homelands, and thus to the world, the most precious gift America could give, a model for a United States of the World. His is a secular restatement of the mission idea in the context of America. To the Jews it proclaimed that retaining their cultural national identity was a service to America, helping America to fulfill

its world mission.<sup>9</sup> Zhitlowsky failed, for he made the vehicle of national expression the Yiddish language, but he prepared the immigrant generation for acceptance of the practical application of cultural pluralism.

It was Kallen, Harvard-educated disciple of William James, who gave currency to the concept "cultural pluralism." His article "Democracy *Versus* the Melting Pot" appeared in *The Nation* on February 18 and 25, 1915, its argument that true democracy demands a vision of America other than a melting pot. Kallen concluded his seminal essay with "the outlines of a possibly great and truly democratic commonwealth":

Its form would be that of the federal republic; its substance a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously through common institutions in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind. . . . "American civilization" may come to mean . . . multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind. As in an orchestra every type of instrument has its specific *timbre* and *tonality* . . . so in society, each ethnic group may be the natural instrument, its temper and culture may be its theme and melody and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all may make the symphony of civilization . . . and the range and variety of the harmonies may become wider and richer and more beautiful.<sup>10</sup>

As Kallen later stated, his vision of America grew out of his Jewish cultural milieu. In his 1910 essay, "Judaism, Hebraism, Zionism," he had declared his commitment "to the persistence of a 'Jewish separation' that shall be national, positive, dynamic and adequate." Critical of those who would take from the Jewish group its group identity and uniqueness, he rejected Reform's recasting the nature of corporate Jewish existence. Kallen's concept of cultural pluralism, his vision of an America enriched by its distinctive ethnic groups, provided justification for continued Jewish communal life. What Zhitlowsky was saying to his immigrant, Yiddish-speaking, European-oriented audiences, Kallen was advocating for the "Americanized" Jew: the individual's need of life-giving cultural sustenance within his own ethnic group, and the benefit of such corporate cultural activity to the nation.

In American Jewish life, the period between the two world wars was the era of cultural pluralism, in which Jewish life underwent significant change. The "Americanizing" settlement houses were replaced by Jewish community centers. The communal Talmud Torah became the most prominent and successful Jewish educational institution. Hebrew, Zionist and Yiddish culture found expression in synagogue, center, school and summer camp programs. In response to the new definition

of Judaism and the new understanding of American democracy, synagogues began to transform themselves from "houses of worship" to "synagogue-centers," offering a broad spectrum of activities "for every member of every family."

### JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION

The chief philosopher of the redefinition of Judaism was Mordecai M. Kaplan and the title of his magnum opus, *Judaism as a Civilization*, sums up his definition.

Judaism is "the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people." The Jewish people is the enduring, creative constant. Civilization includes "peoplehood, history, language, music, literature and art." The motive force of this civilization is religion, and like the civilization itself, religion is evolving, growing, changing. Yet basic forms persist: "The conservation of form with the reconstruction of meaning has been the history of the Jewish civilization."<sup>11</sup> The citizen of a modern state, Kaplan argued, "is not only permitted but encouraged to give allegiance to two civilizations; one, the secular civilization of the country in which he lives, and the other the Christian which he has inherited from the past."<sup>12</sup> Thus the American Jew lives at one and the same time in two civilizations, that of America and that of his group.

Kaplan felt no need to offer justification for Jewish group survival, because, "if Jewish life is a unique way of experience, it needs no justification."<sup>13</sup> But the need for justification was felt, nonetheless, and it was provided by Kaplan's most gifted disciple, Rabbi Milton Steinberg. In *To Be or Not to Be a Jew*, Steinberg made an eloquent plea for living in two civilizations. He recognized that Jews "are accustomed to the circumstance that Americans will be identified with minority churches. After all, every religious denomination in our country is of such a character *vis-à-vis* the total population." But the Jew, he argued, is "associated with a cultural tradition as well." Thus, the American Jew has two cultural traditions, the primary American and the ancillary Jewish. To the question: "Can a person live happily, without stress and strain, in two cultures?" Steinberg answered, "Yes," and proposed that "Out of such husbandry of the spirit may well emerge a cultural life richer than any the human past has heretofore known." Steinberg offered yet another justification for Jewish group survival, one which foreshadowed the emphasis on the fulfillment of the individual that would characterize American society in the 1970s.

If the only effects . . . were to bolster the shaken morale of the Jews and to enrich their personalities with the treasures of a second heritage, the whole effort would have justified itself from the point

of view of American interests. Quite obviously America will be benefited if its Jews, who constitute one segment of its citizens, respect themselves, if they are psychologically adjusted rather than disaffected, if they are richer rather than poorer in spirit."

Kaplan's concept of Judaism as a religious civilization came to be accepted as "normative" in Conservative Judaism. It also influenced Reform's own redefinition of Judaism, as "the historical religious experience of the Jewish people." From Felsenthal, Friedlaender and others, the survivalist American Jew had learned that Judaism demanded a definition deeper in tradition and broader in meaning than a "religious community." The concept of cultural pluralism made the broader definition proposed by Kaplan acceptable in the American context.

Kallen concluded his essay with the query: "But the question is, do the dominant classes in America want such a society?"

With the wisdom of hindsight, we can assert that the more relevant question would have been, "Do the ethnic groups want such a society, which would continue their ethnic identity?" Hindsight permits us also to provide the answer: The children of the "ethnic" immigrants did not want to remain "ethnics."

Cultural pluralism had its able ideologists and zealous devotees, but it was becoming clear that America as a "nation of nationalities" was being rejected by those most affected. The proponents of cultural pluralism then seized upon a felicitous sentence of the historian of immigration, Marcus L. Hansen, and gave it the status of a sociological law: "What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember." If the second generation rejected cultural pluralism and ethnic identity, the third generation, more secure and at home in America, less in need to "Americanize," would retain or reestablish ethnic identity. C. Bezael Sherman points out, however, "Alone of all the white ethnic groups do American Jews supply proof for the correctness of the Hansen thesis. Only among them do the grandchildren manifest a greater desire to be part of the community than the children of immigrants."<sup>15</sup> Will Herberg offers an explanation.

We can account for this anomaly by recalling that the Jews came to this country not merely as an immigrant group but also as a religious community; the name "Jewish" designated both . . . When the second generation rejected its Jewishness, it generally, though not universally, rejected both aspects at once . . . The young Jew for whom the Jewish immigrant-ethnic group had lost all meaning because he was an American and not a foreigner, could still think of himself as a Jew, because to him being a Jew now meant identification with the Jewish religious community.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the "religious revival" which marked American life in the decades following World War II, third-generation Jews did not return to the *folkways* of their immigrant forefathers, but they did return to the *faith* of their grandparents.

Sherman noted, "Contrary to secularist prophecy, America has manifested no desire to become a nationality state and religion has shown no inclination to die, a lesson not lost on the acculturated Jew."<sup>17</sup> Quite the opposite, "acculturation" spurred Jews to retain their particularistic identity, to affiliate and participate in that which the American culture esteemed—their religious heritage.

The melting pot still operated, but not as had been theorized. As minorities entered it, their ethnic distinctiveness was indeed melted away, but their religious tradition—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish—was stressed. America became as Herberg termed it the land of the three great faiths.

No one accepted this terminology with greater alacrity than did the Jew. American Jewry, viewed as a religious community, was lifted out of the constellation of ethnic minorities: from the status of 3 percent of the population to one-third of the nation. Symbols of this new status abounded. A minister, a priest and a rabbi sat on the dais at every civic function, including the inauguration of a president; radio and television apportioned time equally to each of the three faiths. Small wonder that American Jews accepted once again the identity of a religious community. (They delighted most of all in the use of the term "Judeo-Christian heritage." This concept raised the Jew to full partnership—and senior partner at that!)

It was noted, however, that the posture of a religious community did not reflect a true religious revival, such as transforms the life of the individual. It was more an expression of organization and form than a way of life or commitment.

American Jewry designated itself a religious community, while at the same time holding on to its own self-identification as a people. The establishment of the State of Israel, and the ready identification of American Jewry with its destiny, indicated an identity beyond that of a "faith" group.

### DUAL-IMAGE IDENTITY

What had developed was a new corporate posture which we may term a *dual-image identity*. Having neither an initiator nor an ideologist, it was fashioned by the folk wisdom of the people. In simple words it says: Before the world, in our relationship with the larger society and with other groups, we retain the identity of a religious community. Internally, in our understanding of ourselves, in assessing our needs, in

ordering our priorities, in fashioning our institutions, we are a people, possessed of our own unique civilization. When we address America, we do so as one of its religious communities, in relating to other Jewish communities, we do so as a component segment of a world people and civilization.<sup>18</sup>

This dual-image identity persisted into the new image of America which emerged in the sixties and seventies, a land of *ethnic identity*.

Once again, the Jewish community seems to be the exception. In the midst of a serious crisis which beset the Christian religious establishment, Jews retained the posture of a religious community. Jewish seminaries expanded their student bodies and a new one, the Reconstructionist, was founded; synagogues have retained their membership to a remarkable degree. There was little evidence that American Jews were anxious to call themselves an ethnic minority. There was a significant increase in the influence and activities of local Jewish federations and community councils, and of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds on the national scene. This might have seemed a move from religious to communal identification. But, as in the 1920s the congregations became miniature communities in function, so in the 1970s the community councils were becoming expanded congregations. In their relations with the larger community they present the posture of representing a religious group, and they sponsor programs of culture and education which heretofore had been deemed the province of the synagogues. The dual-image identity was maintained in the "decades of the ethnics." American Jews utilized structure and symbols recognized as religious to express their national, "peoplehood" identity.

Some might agree with the sardonic observation that the children of the immigrants wanted to be like Gentiles, without becoming Gentiles, while the grandchildren of the immigrants want to be like Jews, without becoming real Jews.

American Jews, whose life span has been in the era of emancipation, have attempted to fashion a corporate identity which would make for their full integration into the American nation, while at the same time retaining their identification with the people-civilization called Israel. They drew optimism for the possibility of such an identity from America's commitment to political federalism, which posits multiple political associations and loyalties. They saw this as giving legitimacy to a pluralistic society, and argued that religious, ethnic, cultural pluralism is not only permissible but mandatory if America was to be a truly democratic society. Their quest for a corporate identity which would make for group survival began with all emphasis on "objective public identity," but has become increasingly influenced by the need to give fullest expression to "self-identity."

Practical viability has been given higher priority than ideological

consistency—as in the separation of form and content in the dual-image identity. Long-range hazards have been mitigated by apparent present well-being. American Jews have been so intent in their faith that "America is different," that they have rarely sought to assess their situation in the context of world Jewish experience, or consider seriously lessons which could be drawn from the accounts of other communities in similar quest. They continue to believe, buoyed by the historic memory, as Arthur A. Cohen noted, that the American tradition and the American environment "made it possible for the Jew to become an American without ceasing to be a Jew."

American church historian Winthrop S. Hudson notes that for two thousand years Jews have been faced with the challenge, "to maintain the integrity of their faith while meeting demands for coexistence within a non-Jewish culture and society." It was a difficult task to accomplish, especially in the modern era of emancipation and enlightenment, but it was done, "even in America where the temptation to abandon a dual allegiance was greatest."

Because American Jews are heirs to a two-millennial experience in the world, and a tricentennial experience in America of bearing "the burden of both commitments," they can make a signal contribution to America. Says Hudson:

\* Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of Judaism to the United States will be to help other Americans understand how the United States can be a truly pluralistic society in which the pluralism is maintained in a way that is enriching rather than impoverishing, a society of dual commitments which need not be in conflict but can be complementary. . . . From the long experience of Judaism, Americans of other faiths can learn how this may be done with both grace and integrity."

There has been in America a turning away from group concerns to the needs of the individual. Formerly, the group, be it ethnic or religious, would justify its existence by demonstrating its worth to American institutions; today, a group is esteemed to the degree by which it enhances the life of its individual members. The sentiment is abroad that America's real strength is rooted in the well-being, psychological as well as physical, of its individual citizens.

The pledge and promise of America was *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*. The first was secured by economic expansion and opportunity; the second was assured by democratic institutions; the third, the pursuit of happiness, remains the continuing challenge. There is a growing feeling that this challenge can best be met by religioethnic groups that nurture the well-being of the individual. To the extent, then, that the Jewish community in America provides its members those

components of religious vision, cultural expression and group association which strengthen purpose and fulfillment, it contributes to the preservation of a pluralist and democratic America. To strengthen such a group, to enhance its effectiveness, can only contribute to America's well-being. American Jews can thus view their participation in the Jewish enterprise as both a response to their own individual and community needs, and a civic contribution to the nation in which they have found both haven and home.





## I. ENLIGHTENMENT - 17TH & 18TH CENTURY

1. Isaac Newton - laws of physics opened physical universe
2. John Locke - mind working through reason.
3. Immanuel Kant - mankind assume responsibility (not God) through intellect and reason.

Fierce Wars of Religion - 1560-1648 - Catholics vs. Protestants

Relative Peace - 1648-1789 (French Revolution)  
Liberté Egalité Fraternité

Enlightenment proposed:

Religious toleration  
Economic growth  
Peace  
Development of states

## II. HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR JOSEPH II - EDICT OF TOLERATION - 1781

Offered toleration to Jews in return for regeneration, which meant: occupational restructuring (minimize money-lending and go into useful occupations); speak vernacular languages; change social manners, dress, etc. provide secular education; give up self-government (schools, courts, taxes, welfare system).

## III. MOSES MENDELSON - MOST FAMOUS JEW

Accepted this contract; worked for equal rights for Jews; 1781 wrote "On the Civil Amelioration of the Condition of the Jews"; translated Torah into German

## IV. FRENCH REVOLUTION & EMANCIPATION FOR JEWS - 1789-1791

1. In National Assembly, Count Clermont-Tonnère:  
"The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals.
2. Voltaire opposed.
3. On 27 September 1791 Jews gained rights of citizenship, and next day The National Assembly stipulated that the Jews had renounced their own self-government, and also passed a law against Jewish usurers.

## V. NAPOLEON & JEWS

1. Passing through Strasbourg in 1806, Napoleon was appealed to by City Council to solve problem of Jewish usury, and foreclosure of much land in Alsace by Jews.
2. He decided to convene Assembly of Jewish Notables to ascertain whether Jews could be loyal citizens of France.
3. He propounded 12 questions.
4. In 1807, a Sanhedrin was convened to give religious sanction to the answers.
5. It was not until 1831 that the Parliament accorded equality to Judaism with Christianity, and a rabbi-centered "consistoire" was set up, following model of Catholic church.

## VI. TURNING BACK THE CLOCK ON EMANCIPATION

1. Out of frustration and disappointment in the German states, which did not follow the French example, new forms of Judaism began to develop between 1815-1848.
2. First, reform; then neo-orthodox; then conservative. New type of rabbi-educated secular university, not only in Yeshiva. First modern rabbinical seminary in Breslan in 1854.
3. Jews fought in liberal and national movements, but these were not strong enough to win real power.

## VII. ACHIEVEMENT OF FULL EMANCIPATION IN EUROPE

Austria	1867
Germany	1869
Italy	1870
England	1845 (except for a seat in Parliament)
	1858 (Lord Rothschild finally seated after the oath "as a Christian" was altered).