The Reform Advocate

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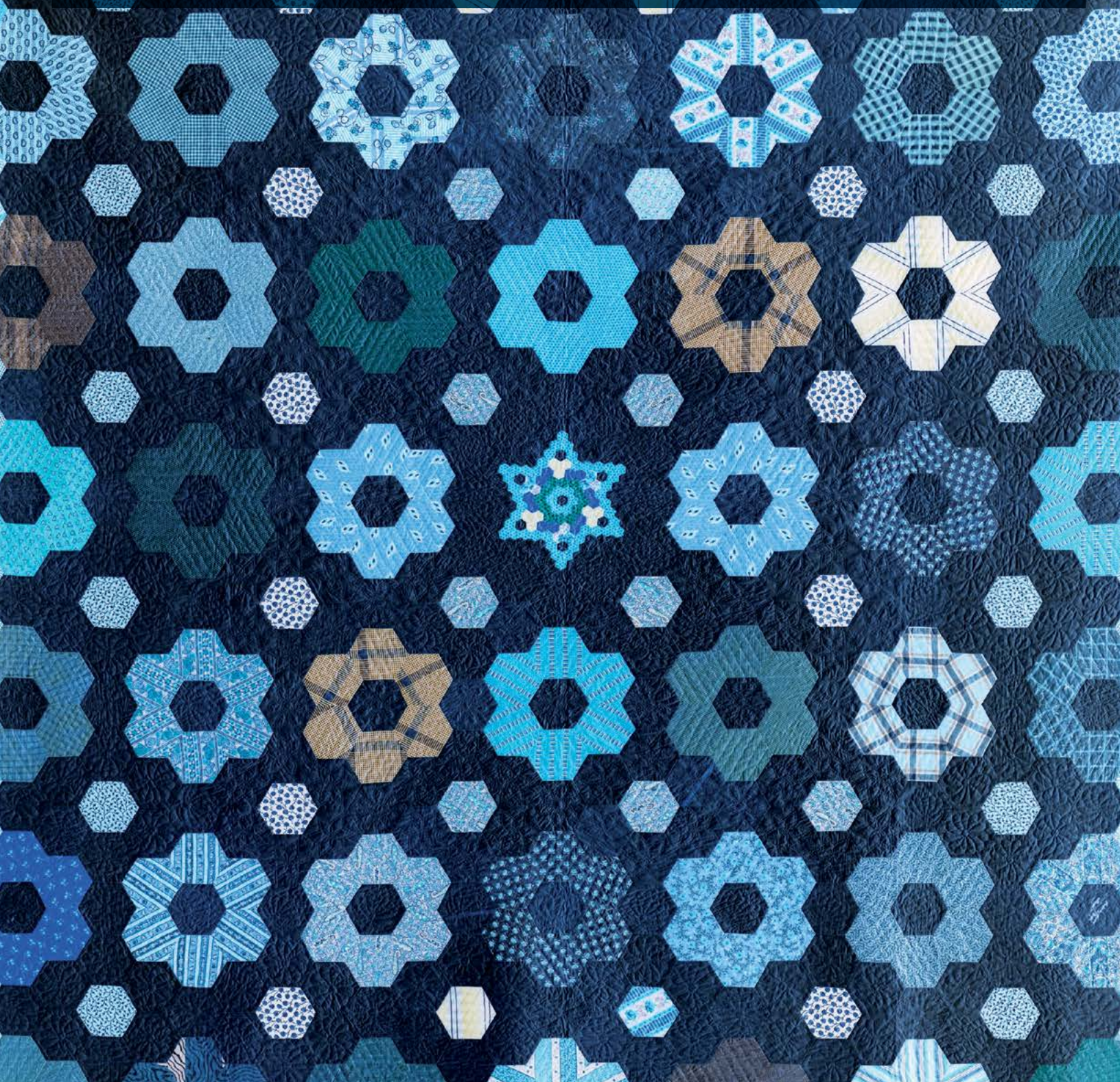
Jill S. Silverstein, Ed.D., Editor

ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

Inspired by the past, embracing today, shaping tomorrow



The Past | The Present | The Future

Dear Friends of Roots of Reform Judaism,

I don't know how many times you may have received and read our *Reform Advocate*, a journal of Jewish thought, events, scholarship, and information. At the top of every issue, you have found our RRJ logo and banner, "Inspired by the past, embracing today, shaping tomorrow." The *Advocate* you are about to read represents those words directly.

Looking to the past, we pay tribute to a man whose passing a few months ago we recognize. Rabbi Howard Berman was a founder of this organization in its earlier iteration, the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (SCRJ). Howard was a scholarly, dedicated, intensely committed rabbi who served some of the most iconic congregations of our Reform movement – from New York's Temple Emanu-El to Chicago Sinai Congregation, ending with a small, unique congregation in Boston, Central Reform Temple. In this issue you will find tributes from Rabbi Berman's classmates, congregants, and colleagues. In a notable way, Howard played a role in my beginnings as a rabbi, as he was one of the first two students I met when arriving in Cincinnati for my admissions interview at HUC. I was honored, forty-plus years later, to follow him in my role as Rabbinic Director of the SCRJ transforming its direction to reflect a wider reach. It began with our name change to *Roots of Reform Judaism*.

We are grateful to have a significant essay from our Senior Scholar, Rabbi Lance Sussman. His insights and erudition provide the foundation of every issue. His contribution to this *Advocate*, identifying today's challenges to Reform Judaism, is thought-provoking and important. He is joined by a noted scholar, theologian, and professor Dr. Justin Miller. A longtime professor at the University of Chicago, Justin has been a dear friend of mine since we met in Jerusalem fifty years ago at the beginning of our Rabbinical school training. He left the seminary to enter academics, where he flourished. His essay is both a broad history lesson and a personal vision of where liberal Judaism may be going. We thank them both for their foundational interpretations of liberal Judaism of the past, present, and future.

We are so appreciative of the outpouring of interest in our Fall 2024 issue, "People of the Books." To follow on that theme, we have a conversation with one of our authors who was featured in that issue, Rabbi Lance Sussman. Lance was interviewed by Rabbi Ari Lorge, a rabbi at Central Synagogue in New York City, providing interesting insights into his recently published book.

The third section features intriguing perspectives on Reform Judaism of the future from younger and very creative rabbis. Through their unique rabbinates, they present alternatives to traditional rabbinic roles, offering their "prophetic" visions of a Reform Judaism in a moment of enormous change and opportunity. In this challenging time, the next generation of Jews is looking for something that is existentially different than the traditional "bricks and mortar" synagogue of the 20th century, but spiritually engaging and meaningful. We are grateful to be part of their search.

Devotedly,

Ken

***Rabbi Ken Kanter** is the Rabbinic Director of Roots of Reform Judaism.*

Rabbi Howard A. Berman – Reform Judaism's "Kol Bo"

By Dr. Gary Phillip Zola

In contemporary parlance, the terms "Renaissance Man" or "Renaissance Woman" are used to describe those who possess broad intellectual interests having mastered numerous fields of study. Our ancient sages had their own distinctive terminology for those we nonchalantly label a "Renaissance Man." They referred to those who possessed unhemmed intellectual curiosity as an *Eshkol* – a cluster of grapes – which they proceeded to interpolate as an *Ish sh'ha-kol bo* – one who loves study and learning.

Rabbi Howard Berman was widely known for his love of Reform Judaism's liturgical heritage, and his deeply felt passion for the pioneering contributions of Reform Judaism's "classical" period. His scholarly and literary attainments, however, have not been fully recognized. He left a legacy of publications and teachings that will enrich future students of the American Jewish experience for years to come.

Rabbi Berman became the Founding Executive Director of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism in 2008. Some have intolerantly dismissed the Society as a Jewish Flat Earth Society – an effort to live in a bygone past. Howard Berman had no such ambitions, and his rabbinate was dedicated to renewal, not retrogression. From its founding, Rabbi Berman envisioned a two-fold mission for the Society. First, he pushed the Society to position itself as a champion of the wonderful diversity that characterized Reform Judaism from its earliest manifestations. To prove the accuracy of this idea, Rabbi Berman urged the Society to reissue W. Gunther Plaut's two-volume documentary sourcebook on Reform Judaism – *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (1963) and *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (1965). In his thoughtful introduction to the republication of this important work, Rabbi Berman underscored the rich medley of viewpoints that characterized the historical development of Reform:

> The characteristic diversity within Reform Judaism is underscored on virtually every page of Plaut's volumes. For every major issue raised, dissenting positions are included, reflecting the ongoing dialogue – and often vehement debate – on the nature, scope, and practical expression of liberal Judaism. These debates broadly encompass both the "radical" and the "moderate" approaches to theological and liturgical innovation – the ongoing tension between tradition that is at the heart of any progressive understanding of religious belief and observance.*

Second, Rabbi Berman urged the Society to renew and revitalize Reform Judaism's "distinctive liturgical heritage." He loved "the lyrical cadences and the majestic phrases of [Reform's] earlier prayer books and haggadot" with all his heart.† Similarly, he esteemed the grand musical efflorescence that characterized Reform Jewish worship in the 19th and 20th centuries still merited a place in the rich pluralism that typified the evolvement of the Reform Jewish prayer experience. The Society did not try to resuscitate that which was no longer relevant. It resolved to educate, to inspire, and to remind Reform Jewry that "each voice has a vital role to play in reaching and inspiring an enormously diverse Jewish community."‡

Under Rabbi Berman's direction, the Society republished a modernized version of the Union Prayer Book and, subsequently, the New Union Haggadah. While retaining their essential character, Rabbi Berman sought to "enhance them with a greater response to the concerns and perspectives of our contemporary culture." The anachronistic language was expunged and replaced with gender sensitivity and inclusive language that breathed new life into prayers that were composed during the 19th century. For many 21st century Reform Jews, these publications provided a meaningful "balance of continuity and change."§

Howard Berman's talents, interests, and abilities vis-à-vis Reform Jewish life were nearly inexhaustible. He loved Jewish art, music, and theater. He was an avid collector of Jewish cultural art, artifacts, and memorabilia.

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* See Revised Edition of W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of Its European Origins* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), p. viii.

† Ibid., p. xiii.

‡ Ibid.

§ See *The Union Prayer Book: Sinai Edition* (Chicago: Chicago Sinai Congregation, 2000), p. x. See also *The New Union Haggadah: Revised Edition* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2014).

(continued on next page)

Thanks to Rabbi Berman's unquenchable love of history, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives now possesses one of the center's most whimsical treasures: a Hebrew Union College sports pennant that once hung on the wall of a rabbinical student more than eighty years ago!

Future historians and students of turn-of-the-century American Reform Judaism will study Rabbi Berman's career with admiration and respect. In addition to the pivotal role he played with the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, history will note his fruitful years in the pulpit of historic Sinai Congregation, the oldest Reform synagogue in Chicago. Rabbi Berman arrived at a critical crossroad in the congregation's storied history. Would it remain anchored in its beautiful, massive, historic building in Hyde Park, or should it move to a new site in hopes of revitalizing the congregation. Howard Berman's deft leadership skills helped the congregation choose life, and he oversaw the move from Hyde Park to its current modern building in the heart of downtown Chicago. This move revitalized and renewed the congregation. In 2004, Rabbi Berman helped to birth to a new congregation in Boston – the Central Reform Temple – which pledged itself to embrace "the historic, liberal expression of Reform Judaism in America."[¶]

Finally, Howard Berman did not advocate a fossilized vision of Reform Jewish ideology. The Reform synagogue was, for Rabbi Berman, a "house of living Judaism." His publications, his essays, his sermons, and his creative liturgical compositions champion the liberal Jewish ideals to which he was unmovably devoted: spiritual relevance, egalitarianism, inclusivity, and an unflagging conviction that the critical study of Judaism renders this noble tradition more, not less inspiring.

During the Covid pandemic, for example, he composed a brief supplement to the Haggadah text titled "The 11th Plague":

> On this sacred night, our world faces yet another Plague . . . more lethal than the pestilence that came upon Egypt, with the death of the first-born . . .
>
> The pandemic we are now confronting, does not respect birth order, nor nationality . . . and no sign over our doors will cause it to "Pass Over" our homes.
>
> And so, just as we have poured a drop of wine from our festive cups, symbolizing the diminishing of our celebration, as we recall the sufferings of any of God's children – even of those who enslaved and oppressed us, so do we now pour out Two Drops of wine . . . to remind us that in our common humanity, we are all diminished by the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world at this time. As we join with our neighbors in celebrating this shared Holy Season of Liberation and Rebirth, we pray for "Next Year in a world healed and restored to new life and health!"[**]

The sages of yore left us a memorable legend about Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the towering Judean scholar whose life spanned the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century of the Common Era. At the end of his life, the rabbi raised both of his arms and lay them on his chest, and then he spoke these words: "Oy, these two arms of mine are like two Torah scrolls that will vanish from the world! For if all the seas were ink, and all the reeds were quills, and every person was a scribe, they still could not write down everything that I have read and taught."[††]

Like the parable of Rabbi Eliezer, it would be nearly impossible to inventory all that Howard Berman read and taught on the heritage of the liberal religious movement in Judaism. He loved every facet of Reform Jewish life, and this passion enabled him to become the leading champion of its legacy among his peers. His life and career constitute an eloquent and venerable reminder that "we cannot authentically ground ourselves in [our] liberal Jewish commitment unless we study and understand [Reform Judaism's] historical sources."[‡‡]

***Dr. Gary Phillip Zola**, Executive Director Emeritus, The Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati OH.*

¶ See the "Mission of Central Reform of Boston": https://www.crtboston.org/about.html

** Rabbi Howard Berman, "Passover 2020 – The 11th Plague" (A Reading for the Seder, following the Recitation of the Ten Plagues") in The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, SC-17818d.

†† *Avot DeRabbi Natan 25* (see https://www.sefaria.org/Avot_DeRabbi_Natan.25.4?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en)

‡‡ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, p. xv.

Thoughts on the Passing of Rabbi Howard A. Berman

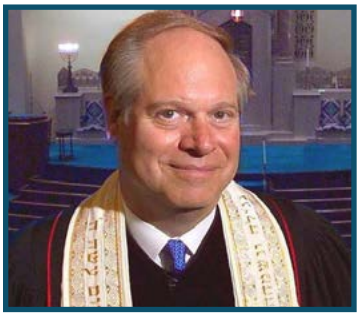
By Rabbi Edward Paul Cohn

For those of us who were born Classical Reform Jews, but didn't know it until we were lucky enough to personally discover its loving embrace and uplifting spiritual message, Howard A. Berman became our "Rabbi" in every sense of that honored title. From 1967 to his passing on October 23, 2024, Howard taught, preached, authored, debated, and authentically lived the essence of Classical Reform Judaism. As Howard joyously acknowledged, he had been "called" to the Reform Rabbinate almost from his birth. Throughout his distinguished ministry of 50 years, Howard Berman, "Zelig"-like, was on the scene offering a compelling argument for the continued relevance of Classical Reform Judaism for 20th and 21st century Jewry, not only in the United States, but in Europe and in Israel as well.

Howard was firmly grounded in the evolution of the theology and liturgy of American Reform Judaism, from its German roots to the rabbinic personalities whose labors resulted in the national prominence of major American Reform congregations. He taught us all about the foundational contributions of Rabbi Isaac M. Wise and his ardent disciples. During his rabbinate, many of us came to appreciate the beauty and the genius of Reform Judaism.

There could not have been many distinguished pulpits from which Howard did not speak. He was at home preaching and teaching in Cincinnati, Baltimore, New York City, Boston, and Chicago, as well as in Liberal and Reform congregations in London, Berlin, Hamburg, and Jerusalem. Perhaps nowhere was Rabbi Howard Berman's rabbinic presence and leadership more profoundly felt than in the Chicago Sinai congregational family, at a crucial moment of decision in their temple's history. Their "new" building in downtown Chicago testifies to the influence their Rabbi made toward the betterment of the congregation and the greater Chicago area.

Howie was not only work, but he was also fun to be with and had a terrific sense of humor. He was a world traveler, loving beautiful sights, concert and symphony halls, and great restaurants. He treasured a 20+ year marriage to his husband Stephen and their precious puppies. Retirement had provided them with ample time for living the good life by Provincetown in summer and Coral Gables in winter. All of this, and so much more, has come now to an abrupt end way too soon. Rabbi Howard Berman's works and endeavors will live on, not only in the organizational and congregational communities to which he devoted himself, but in the hearts and minds of so many of us for whom he was an original and unforgettable friend and teacher. His memory will forever be an abiding benediction and blessing.



Rabbi Edward Paul Cohn,
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ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

Please visit our website www.rootsofreform.org often and follow us on social media.

"Re-rooting" Classical Reform in Israel

By Rabbi Naamah Kelman

Rabbi Howard Berman had a unique ability to both affirm the tradition and change those traditions. With the founding of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (now Roots of Reform Judaism), he brought back the spirit, aesthetics, and values of the founding fathers (yes, fathers only) of Reform Judaism, while at the same time, knew that he had to renew them. Perhaps the most powerful example of this was his connection to Israel. While early Classical Reform Judaism rejected the Zionist Movement, Howard wanted to find a way to "re-root" his efforts in Israel, to connect the students at the HUC-JIR campus in Jerusalem to the Society. So, he travelled to Israel to meet with me, when I was the Dean.

I will never forget that first meeting. We met in my office where he presented his vision of the work of the Society. He spoke of bringing back Classical worship and preaching the Prophetic, universal values of Judaism. I pointed to the Rabbinic Ordination Certificate of my grandfather that hung on my wall. Rabbi Felix Levy was ordained in 1907 by the Hebrew Union College. Even back then, my grandfather had embraced the founding of a Jewish State and at the same time preached the Prophetic traditions, using the *Union Prayerbook*. I joked that I was a "blueblood" Classical Reform Jew and reminded him that our beloved prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, walked and preached in the Land of Israel and the streets of Jerusalem. A deep bond was forged that day as we both shared an abiding love for the Jewish people, for pursuing a Judaism of equality, inclusivity, and seeking peace and justice.

We built a multi-year program that supported the Year in Israel students, as well as our Israeli Rabbinic students. During his annual visit, we offered a Classical Reform concert to the Israeli public, prepared by our Cantorial students with the participation of Cantors Eli Schleifer and Tamar Havilio. (One year we took our annual concert to Reform Congregation Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv). He addressed the Israeli rabbinic students to reinforce their knowledge of the universal values of Judaism and wanted our students exposed to these beautiful traditions beginning their first year. The Society offered prizes for outstanding sermons that emphasized these values. Howard also established a strong relationship with Congregation Har-El in Jerusalem. They produced a supplement of meditations from the *Union Prayer Book*, translated from the English, that they brought to their worship, along with the great Cantorial traditions.

It is the light that emerges in the darkness, the beauty and abundance of our ritual objects across time and space, that gives us hope and perseverance.

Howard Berman understood that he was not going to bring back Classical Reform Judaism, but he wanted to remind us that these roots nurture our current expressions of Reform in the US and Israel. When our relationship began, there were those who voiced concern that the Society was "anti-Israel." I recall telling a "concerned" colleague that if "anti-Israel" means, scholarships for our Israeli students, prizes for all our students, a concert in Hebrew etc., as well as annual visits to Israel, then we need to rethink what "anti-Israel" means. Howard was indeed critical of Israel's growing fundamentalism and messianism, as I still am. He affirmed pluralism and deplored any form of racism, sexism, or homophobia, and worried about Israel's future and America's as well.

Howard was a steadfast cheerleader and booster of younger Israeli rabbis who he identified as embodying the Reform Judaism he promoted. He developed a special relationship with my daughter, Rabbi Leora Ezrachi-Vered. He celebrated her achievements, worried about her professional challenges, and was her champion, as he was for many others, including Rabbi Ada Zavidov. Howard loved the old/new of Israeli Reform Judaism. He "got it." He was the real deal in so many ways – honest, caring, passionate, thoughtful, and a true friend.

I thank the God that he loved so well and served so well, that he lived so many of his dreams and hopes. This included marriage with life partner, Steven Littlehale, his Rabbinic positions over decades, his rekindling the spark of the Classical Reform legacy, his collaborations, and his collections of *Chanukiyot*. That collection is a perfect metaphor for his life well lived (albeit too short). It is the light that emerges in the darkness, the beauty and abundance of our ritual objects across time and space, that gives us hope and perseverance. All these eternal and everlasting – so too, the soul of Howard Berman.

Rabbi Naamah Kellman-Ezrachi, *retired Dean of HUC-JIR Jerusalem Campus*

Rabbi Naamah Kelman was the first woman ordained by the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem from where she retired as Dean last year.

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Eulogy for Rabbi Howard A. Berman

By Rabbi Fred N. Reiner

November 11, 2024, at Chicago Sinai Congregation

We should not be here today. Rabbi Howard Berman had so much more to do, to teach us, to share with us, to collect and curate. So much more life to lead. His untimely death has cheated all of us of an outstanding rabbi, colleague, friend, and soulmate.

Two thousand years ago, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was the leader of the Jewish community in the land of Israel under the Romans. He once asked his disciples what is the best path that one should follow in life. One student said that one should have a good eye. Another said one should be a good friend. A third said one should be a good neighbor. A fourth said that one should have a good heart. (Avot 2:9)

A good eye; a good friend; a good neighbor; a good heart. How well these qualities define the life and the rabbinate of Howard Berman, in whose memory we gather today. Rabbi Berman was a colleague of outstanding vision, who cared deeply about the people and the religious communities he served. He promoted the best of values and served God with all his heart.

Howard was blessed with an amazing eye. With his acute visual sense, he created spaces in his offices and homes that reflected history and beauty so important to him. I marveled at how he found the articles and artwork that he arranged and displayed with such skill. Perhaps he inherited or learned from his mother, a gifted interior designer. But the work was invariably his, shared with his beloved Steven for the last 20 years.

And somehow, he found the best places to live. His homes in Cincinnati, Chicago, and Washington, DC, and the homes he shared with Steven in Provincetown, Boston, and Florida were all classics. Each was chosen with an eye toward history and location and filled with treasures that he had found over many years. We saw this in his display of Chanukah menorahs every year. We saw this in how he set up his study. And we see it in this synagogue and sanctuary.

I recognized years ago that Howard had a "collector's gene." We always marveled at his unique ability to collect artifacts and memorabilia, establish relationships with other collectors and dealers, and build world-class and museum-worthy assemblages. His collections of materials from the Pilgrims to Washington Irving to Princess Diana were deep and rich. One of our colleagues has pointed out that he received a menorah from Anne Frank's father; he bought a *mizrach* plaque that he later learned was the oldest example of Jewish Americana; and, as a student, he acquired a Bible from a book dealer that he realized had belonged to Nelson Glueck, the president of our seminary. When Howard returned it to him, Dr. Glueck told him, with tears in his eyes, that he had lost it when **he** had been a student at Hebrew Union College decades before. In a time when so many people don't care about history, when some might read history, Howard Berman collected history and brought it to life and enriched all of us with his collections.

Howard was a steadfast and caring friend. I first met Howard when I arrived at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1968, a year after he arrived. We became close friends and maintained that friendship for over

56 years. After my ordination in 1973, we worked closely together in admissions and planning programs in his senior year at Hebrew Union College.

On the 50th anniversary of his ordination he wrote about his seminary experience:

> My path to HUC-JIR and the rabbinate began at the age of nine, when I wrote my first letter of application to the admissions department, asking what I needed to do to prepare for what was, even then, very clearly—and what remains—a sacred calling. I began in 1967, the last year of the old undergraduate program, immediately after high school, and when we were ordained in 1974, I was 24 years old, the youngest ordainee in the College's history, aside from Nelson Glueck.

Unlike most rabbinical students, Howard knew early the path he wanted to follow, and he had the vision that guided him. As the Reform movement was moving to a more traditional style, Howard was drawn in the opposite direction. He explained:

> . . . my Cincinnati classmates who remember my stubborn advocacy of Classical Reform during our student days, will at least see a thread of unwavering consistency in the path my rabbinate has taken since then. It began with my . . . student internship at Har Sinai in Baltimore, a legendary 19th century Classical Reform congregation, and then on through my first position at Temple Emanu-El in New York. [These were] followed by my twenty years at Chicago Sinai Congregation, bearing the mantle of Emil G. Hirsch, and then over the past twenty years, my time as Founding Rabbinic Director of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (SCRJ). The last chapter has been the subsequent organization of congregations in Boston, all embracing a contemporary vision of our Movements' historic *minhag* [customs] and heritage. Through each of these milestones, I have devoted my career to the preservation and renewal of our shared spiritual tradition as a vital and viable option within the diversity of today's Reform.

He loved the rich language and the vision of the earlier Reform texts, the universal values, the nineteenth-century optimism in the roots of Reform. After his retirement, he continued advancing this understanding of Classical Reform through his teaching on the Cincinnati and Jerusalem campuses of Hebrew Union College.

In 1984–85, my family and I moved to Hyde Park for a year, and I served as Adjunct Rabbi at this congregation, and Rabbi Berman (We called him "Uncle Howard" in our family) and I worked together again for the year. As a Chicagoan myself, I knew the great challenges of changing neighborhoods and populations. Over the year we worked together, I saw firsthand the challenges of Chicago Sinai Congregation that Howard met; bringing this historic congregation a new sense of direction, confronting the fact that most members no longer lived in Hyde Park, near the synagogue, melding together the proud history of Sinai with the realities of current needs. Rabbi Berman was a master at leading the congregation, creating a vision, celebrating the history, setting goals, and finding new promise for the future.

More than colleagues, we were dear friends. We had different styles and approaches in our rabbinates, and we teased each other all the time. I would wish him "Shabbat shalom," and he would respond wishing me a "Sabbath of Peace." I would wish him "*Chag Sameyach* at Passover, and he would wish me a joyous Feast of Liberation. How much we all loved the joy he had in his life and brought to all of us. We felt his personal warmth and respected his passion for the highest ideals.

Our friendship continued after Rabbi Berman retired and moved to Washington, and then in Provincetown, Boston, and then Coral Gables. Howard loved the history of all these places. He reveled in the values they represent to him and teach us in our own day. His homes and his neighborhoods echoed another time and resonated with the values that still guide us today. How wonderfully he was able to understand those values, incorporate them into his work, and teach them to all of us. Howard was not only a student of history. He lived history. He was a devoted anglophile, an expert on 17th century America, and a lover of the 20th century art movements in Provincetown, which he shared with Steven.

Howard was a good neighbor. His interfaith work in each of his congregations was remarkable. He

(continued on next page)

continually engaged in interfaith dialogue and full pastoral support of interfaith families from the beginning of his career. He was so committed to them as he was to working for same-sex marriage equality. He was proud to be the first rabbi to be married in a same-sex ceremony when they were legalized in Massachusetts in 2004. He established deep and lasting relationships with Christian clergy and congregations wherever he was and found those relationships so meaningful.

His work with others also led him to publications he wrote or edited: the introduction to the 50th anniversary edition of Gunther Plaut's *Rise and Growth of Reform Judaism*; co-edited the *Union Prayer Book*, Sinai Edition, with inclusive language; and prepared *The New Union Haggadah*, a contemporary inclusive-language revision of the beloved 1923 classic, by the CCAR Press.

Above all, Howard had a good heart. His depth of devotion to his family and friends was extraordinary. He was a loving husband to Steven, who shared so many of his passions. He was a dedicated son and brother. How deeply he cared for his congregants and was so generous with himself and his wisdom and insights. He was courageous in advocating for many of his beliefs.

Sometimes I wondered: what was the source of his strength and his energy, his love and his caring? I believe it came from his belief in God. It was this strong belief that guided his life and his actions. It was this belief that led him to his deep religious commitments and to his love of history and the values they teach us.

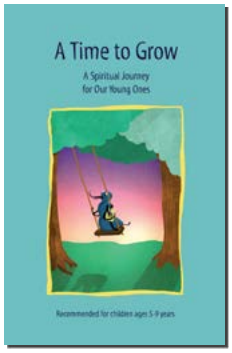
It is so rare, indeed, for rabbis of our generation to be able to speak of their beliefs and to advocate so consistently for their understanding of Reform Jewish values. Yet, as he wrote, he was consistent and, as a p erson, always there as a friend and colleague. He wrote, "I am grateful to our loving God for the privilege of having been able to touch many lives, and hopefully, making a difference in Jewish life over the past fifty years. My greatest support has come from my beloved husband of twenty years, Steven."

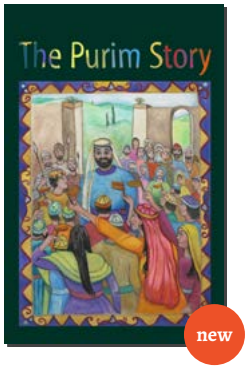
Today, we share our grief with Steven and with Howard's brothers and their families, as well as all of us whose lives were touched and changed by this extraordinary man. The world is less bright now that his light has gone out. He was blessed with a good eye; was a good friend and a good neighbor; his passionate heart and his beliefs that guided him should be a model to all of us. So, may his memory be a blessing.

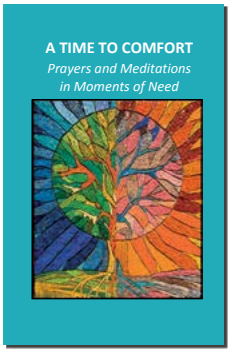
***Rabbi Fred N. Reiner**, Rabbi Emeritus*
Temple Sinai, Washington, DC

Roots of Reform Booklet Project

In these challenging and uncertain times, you can still celebrate the Sabbath and festivals at home or virtually through the Roots of Reform Booklet Project. In contemporary language, primarily in English, with Hebrew and transliteration for key prayers.







A Man of Many Facets

By Vicki Woolner Samuels

Rabbi Howard Berman served as Chicago Sinai Congregation's rabbi from 1982–2002. I worked with him as a Board member and as Board President for over a decade. He was also our "family rabbi" for life-cycle events, from bar and bat mitzvah to confirmation to funerals. He was forward-thinking – a builder and a creator. He was the first rabbi in Chicago to officiate at interfaith weddings and was committed to making Sinai a welcoming place for people of varied backgrounds, helping them build meaningful connections to Jewish life and tradition. He made people feel part of a sacred community.

Howard had deep knowledge and understanding of both Judaism and architecture which shared that with others. He lead Chicago Sinai Congregation on its path from Hyde Park to downtown Chicago, building a beautiful new temple and growing the congregation. He was instrumental in planning and implementing that move, working closely with the Building Committee to select and work with an architect. He was deeply involved in the details of our new home, including the inscription over the entrance – "My House Shall Be A House Of Prayer For All People."

Following the 1997 move into our new home, Rabbi Berman, working with our other rabbi and a group of congregants, revised the *Union Prayer Book, 1945 edition*, for the congregation. *UPB I, Sinai Edition* was published in 2000, and I had the privilege of being a part of that group. This revision modernized the language, making it gender-neutral and more contemporary. It dealt with changing points of view on social issues in the late twentieth century like civil rights, interfaith marriage, the women's movement, and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. Chicago Sinai's *UPB II High Holy Days* followed in 2001. *UPBI1 Sinai Edition* was revised again in 2010 and published in collaboration with the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (now Roots of Reform Judaism). By then, Rabbi Berman had become Emeritus at Sinai and was the Society's Founding Director.

Howard could be both formal and relaxed and casual. He was imposing leading services on the *bimah*, with his rabbinic robe over suit and tie. But I also remember walking into the lobby of our new home on Delaware Place to find him on a ladder, in jeans, changing a light bulb. He was a man of many facets.

***Vicki Woolner Samuels** is a Board Member and Immediate Past President of Roots of Reform Judaism and is a long-time congregant of Chicago Sinai Congregation.*

These booklets offer a path for many to find a way into the beauty of our heritage. To order, visit ***www.rootsofreformjudaism.org*** for more information.

Remembering Howard Berman

By B.H. Levy, Jr.

Rabbi Howard Berman and I first crossed paths twenty-one years ago. He was one of several Reform Jewish leaders I helped interview for the Executive Director position of American Council for Judaism. In that interview, Howard articulated his love of Classical Reform Judaism, which clearly was the very essence of his being. After serving as the Council's Executive Director for four years, the organization, now known as Roots of Reform Judaism, was spun off from the Council. Shortly before the spinoff took effect, Howard prevailed upon me to serve as board president of what was initially called Society for Classical Reform Judaism. Howard relinquished his position with the Council to become the Society's founding Executive Director.

My life's trajectory was substantially altered by the opportunity to work closely with Howard on an almost daily basis during my eight years as founding president of the Society. Howard was the consummate Classical Reform Rabbi. He served as Classical Reform Judaism's most ardent proponent in modern times. His love for the poetic style of the *Union Prayer Book* emanated from the very core of his soul. I can still hear him reading its pages, lingering over and savoring each syllable of every word. Howard's visionary work for the Society enabled congregants of mainstream Reform congregations to attend worship services rendered in an elegant style and featuring Judaism's prophetic teachings. Our fond memories of Howard bring comfort to our hearts and souls.

***B.H. Levy, Jr.** is Chairman of the Board of Roots of Reform Judaism, and is a member and Past President of Congregation Mikve Israel, Savannah GA.*

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Then and Now: Major Trends in Reform Judaism

By Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

I was confirmed at Temple Oheb Shalom in Baltimore in 1970. My class was very large, probably just shy of 200 students. The *Union Prayer Book* was still in play. The rebellion against the formality of services was just beginning. The clergy wore robes and sermons were long and well delivered. The music was majestic, the choir hidden, and cantors operatic. Debbie Friedman was nineteen years old and had not yet recorded her first album. On the High Holy Days, not only was the huge sanctuary full, but the congregation filled the entire auditorium plus the stage at the far back of our cavernous sacred space. Ushers wore boutonnieres and every seat was ticketed. "Friday Night was Temple Night" and our youth group staffed the coatroom and accepted cash tips. The Gift Shop was also open for business and the *Oneg Shabbat* was fancy. No one wore a *yarmulke* or had ever heard of the word *kippah*. There were very few *Bat Mitzvahs*.

Fast forward to 2025. *Oheb,* as it was called, has merged with a sister congregation, *Har Sinai*. I moved from Maryland and permanently settled just outside of Philadelphia. My sister moved to Florida. Services are informal. There is no expectation that the rabbi, if male, wears a tie, let alone a robe. Confirmation classes are considered large if they exceed ten students. We are several generations removed from the *Union Prayer Book,* and, in fact, most congregants prefer to watch services on the large screens above the *Bimah,* if not remotely on a screen in their home. There is no clergy receiving line after services and the congregation does not even fill the sanctuary on the High Holy Days.

Not only has the culture of Reform Judaism changed dramatically, but it is now on a demographic decline. The Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) reports on "Reform identified," not "Reform affiliated," to keep its numbers up. There is a shortage of rabbis. The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) is sunsetting the original Cincinnati campus and decreasing its space in New York and Los Angeles to realign itself with the population of Reform Judaism. The URJ has suspended its formerly spectacular Biennials, closed its regional offices, and terminated its quarterly magazine, *Reform Judaism,* at one time possibly the largest Jewish publication in the United States. Interfaith activity has declined, and intra-faith dialogue is almost impossible.

Not only has the culture of Reform Judaism changed dramatically, but it is now on a demographic decline.

I could go on, but to be fair, there are also pockets of strength in the Movement as well. Some Reform synagogues are thriving and have developed handsome endowments. Our summer camps remain popular. Reform has seen some progress in Israel and there is even a Reform rabbi in the Knesset. Women are now on the *Bimah* and in the Board Room. Reform has generally become more inclusive, especially with respect to sexuality, but it remains overwhelmingly White, including the significant presence of converts and non-Jews in our congregations. Most Reform congregations sponsor social action programs, often related to food insecurity. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) has grown, become stronger and more complex as a professional organization, with a remarkable book press. The Religious Action Center (RAC) in Washington, D.C., is well-known both for its lobbying efforts and its youth education programs.

The changes in Reform Judaism are spectacular. However, they are not inexplicable. The Vietnam War sparked a sweeping change in American culture, especially the space in that culture occupied by Reform Jews. Liberal religion, in general, is in decline and right-wing religion is on the rise across a spectrum of different faiths. The national fertility rate continues to decline, with exceptions especially in the Orthodox

Jewish community. Feminism has redefined the place of women in American society but is now a major part of the culture wars being fought in the United States. Marriage generally takes place later in life in the Reform Movement and intermarriage, that is, people marrying out of the faith community of their youth, has increased nationally. The growth of the suburbs, home to much of the Reform Movement in the post-World War II period, has slowed and the culture of belonging to an organization, other than youth sports, has diminished. The number of single-parent households has grown and most two parent households depend on at least two incomes. The expense of belonging to a Reform or Conservative synagogue is high in comparison to Orthodox Judaism, which prioritizes day school or *Yeshiva* education. Church affiliation is generally less expensive than it is for synagogues. Chabad has created completely new models of synagogue finances and membership, with tremendous success. As a faith community, we are generationally further and further removed from our generation of immigration and new immigrant communities, such as Russian, and Israeli Jews in America are not attracted to Reform Judaism.

Technology has revolutionized society around the world. At first, mostly used in business, technology has become a dominant factor in life in nearly all of its dimensions. In the world of religion, worship services and education programs have become hybrid. In the wake of Covid, the use of technology has become central to retired and older populations previously resistant to cellphones and computers. An expectation of the free delivery of online services is widespread, further challenging the "pay to pray" business model of the American synagogue.

The place of faith in American life has also changed dramatically since World War II. Bolstered culturally by the Cold War, religion began to yield to ethnicity in the 1960s and was then replaced by "spirituality," often with an anti-institutional bias. Capturing new modalities of spirituality has been particularly challenging to Reform Judaism, with its deep roots in nineteenth-century religion.

The impact of Jewish Studies in universities on the American Jewish community is hard to assess. On the one hand, a class of Jewish scholars has developed in the United States. On the other hand, integrating their work into the mainstream of Jewish life has proven challenging and the town-gown gap remains wide and nearly unbridgeable. In the last fifty years, synagogue scholar-in-residence programs have become very popular in Reform Judaism, but frequently the guest speaker is not a scholar but rather an activist of some kind, an artist, or a non-academic promoting his or her own brand of spirituality from outside the Reform Movement. Furthermore, the formation of a class of university-based Jewish scholars has redefined the non-Orthodox rabbinate and weakened the rabbi-scholar nexus. Within academia, Holocaust Studies has become increasingly comparative and less centered on the Nazi war against the Jews. With respect to the Holocaust, various observances today are held outside the confines of the synagogue as communal events.

Technology has revolutionized society around the world . . . In the world of religion, worship services and education programs have become hybrid.

On university campuses, nothing is more contentious than the politics of Israel and Zionism. Reform Judaism itself, historically struggled with the issue of Zionism, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. Reform shifted from anti-Zionist to non-Zionist to Zionist. When I was confirmed in 1970, Reform Judaism was approaching the peak of its pro-Israelism, while Reform Judaism in Israel was still in its infancy. However, in the last fifty years, the relationship of Reform Judaism and Israel has become complex for many reasons, including the legal status of Reform Judaism in Israel, and the recentering of the Arab-Israeli conflict from Arab states to the Palestinian people, as well as the understanding of the role of Iran in the larger picture of Middle East politics. A litmus test for the place of Israel in American Reform Judaism could be seen in the tepid reaction by the Reform Movement to the moving of the American embassy to

Jerusalem by President Trump, in great contrast to the reception of the embassy move by Israelis.

A related issue to the place of Israel and Zionism in Reform is the role of Hebrew in American Reform Judaism. Under the influence of the widespread American view of the United States as a one-language country, as well as the shrinking place of Hebrew in earlier expressions of Reform Judaism, the Reform Movement has had difficulty in increasing knowledge of Hebrew in its own ranks. The development of a HUC-JIR campus in Jerusalem and the presence of many non-Reform Israeli Americans as teachers in Reform religious schools initially strengthened the place of Hebrew in Reform education and worship. However, Hebrew generally remained limited in the Reform Movement and was largely understood to be of liturgical value and not nationalistic. Curiously, while the amount of Hebrew in Reform worship has increased since my Confirmation, it is still rarely taught as a spoken language in Reform Judaism in America.

The horrific invasion of Israel by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023, and subsequent war in Gaza profoundly affected Reform Jews, who have carefully calibrated their support for Israel with their disagreements with the Netanyahu government. Of even greater significance for Reform Jews has been the intensification of antisemitism and anti-Zionism in the United States. In 1970, domestic antisemitism was largely understood to be waning, except for fringe elements both on the American left and right, as well as among American Black nationalists. Today, antisemitism is much more vigorous in the United States, testing the basic Reform idea that the future of Judaism in this country lies with a synthesis of American culture and Judaism.

Today, Reform Judaism in America is existentially challenged by its own internal dynamics, the decline of liberal religion in general, the revitalization of Orthodox Judaism, changes in American society, and the deepening of the place of technology in America and around the world. The major longitudinal trends in Reform Judaism suggest that our Movement will continue to shrink in the years ahead, although pockets of great strength will remain. Personally, I believe Reform needs to develop a nationwide, integrated strategic plan involving the URJ, HUC-JIR, and the CCAR. Most likely, that plan will involve a rational retreat from the current institutional expression of Reform. What is most challenging is the culture of the rising generation of Reform and potential Reform Jews and how to house that culture in the institutions and organizations of the Reform Movement. Indeed, the need to reform Reform Judaism from the pew up is more urgent today than ever. My basic recommendations are to draw on the deep wells of historic Reform Judaism itself and to improve how we teach and use the Hebrew language.

Reform Judaism began, as historian Michael Meyer framed it, as a "response to modernity." What we have discovered is that the terms of modernity constantly change and at this moment has brought the Reform Movement to a genuine inflection point in its history. It will require commitment, vision, and faith to transmit Reform Judaism successfully to the rising generation. Our mission today is no different than in the past, except that the challenge is now more urgent than ever.

***Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.**, is Rabbi Emeritus of Reform Congregation Keneseth Isrrael in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, Senior Scholar for Roots of Reform Judaism, and a past Chair of the Board of Gratz College, the oldest non-denominational Jewish institution of higher learning in the United States. A specialist in American Jewish history, Sussman has taught at Princeton, SUNY-Binghamton, and Hunter College. A prolific writer, his most recent book, third in his "Portrait" series with Lynda Barness, is entitled "Portrait of a Rabbi-Historian: How Did We Get Here" and includes a Foreword by Professor Jonathan D. Sarna of Brandeis University.*

(continued on next page)

A Conversation with Rabbi Dr. Lance Sussman

By Rabbi Ari Lorge & Rabbi Dr. Lance J. Sussman

Rabbi Ari Lorge (**AL**): It is wonderful to have a chance to speak together after this major achievement. This book, *Portrait of a Rabbi-Historian*, is the third book in a trilogy. Can you give an outline of all 3 books and how this project came about?

Rabbi Dr. Lance J. Sussman (**LJS**): With retirement from the pulpit, I distinctly remember I went to a CCAR seminar, and they said, "don't retire from something, retire to something," so I had to define my first project. I quickly decided I wanted to gather things that I had written in the 22-year period I was at KI in Philly, plus the forty years I've been in the rabbinate, and get them in some kind of permanent shape.

All the way back to my rabbinic thesis in Cincinnati I had studied the sermons of Isaac Leeser, and he had multiple published volumes. So, I had this model in front of me for what to do. I knew I had to get my written work in more of a permanent print. It was a pretty big pile of paper, to say the least, and it ended up falling into three categories.

The first category reflected my congregational work in the last 20-some years at Keneseth Israel, which in essence gives you the narrative of the early 21st century, because rabbis are interpreters and narrators of our times. The book was called *Portrait of an American Rabbi*. I chose the term American, because in this country, we embrace Judaism, especially Reform and Conservative Judaism, differently compared to, let's say, in Europe or in Israel. It's not meant as anything nationalistic.

The second book is a collection of essays that I had written and published, mostly in books and journals, on the state of Reform Judaism, and a little bit on the history of Reform Judaism. So, the second volume was called *Portrait of a Reform Rabbi*.

The third book is called *Portrait of a Rabbi-Historian*. I stayed after rabbinic school for a PhD. I had a two-track career and published a great deal in different journals and newspapers. I took that work and aggregated it into this anthology. It so happened that I was the first PhD student of Jonathan Sarna, and he graciously wrote the foreword. This new book is organized chronologically into three major sections: the first up to the Civil War only in America; then from 1865 to the present, a little more global; and then the last section contains communal studies. I have written the histories of various places where I've lived and worked, so that gave me my third section.

AL: You know, those of us who love history often look back and find certain role models and exemplars. Are there certain rabbinic models that you look back on as people who helped shape the contours of your rabbinate?

LJS: I grew up at Oheb Shalom, now merged with Har Sinai in Baltimore. Our senior rabbi was the late Abraham Shaw. He had an assistant, Marty Weiner, who went on to be president of CCAR. Marty happened to be particularly close to our family. Between Shaw, who had the perfect FM-broadcasting voice, and Marty, who was a great big guy with a huge pulpit presence, I had these wonderful exemplars of pulpit rabbis in front of me, who gave solid messages every single Friday night. I was in one of those families. We had a TGIF magnet on our refrigerator. Friday night was Temple night, and I didn't miss it. Those two, in particular, were models of the rabbinate.

Then, one year, they invited Jacob Rader Marcus to speak at Oheb Shalom. Up to the pulpit comes this very distinguished rabbi historian, who spoke for a good long while without a single note in front of him. And I was mesmerized.

Halfway through rabbinic school. I approached him and said, summer's coming, and I would love to do an independent study with you. He was happy to take me on. He invited me to work at his house with his private archives, and I was hooked. Here I am, fifty years later, still doing the same thing, piling up archival materials and obscure books, and trying to make sense of them and create new narratives. I was very fortunate. I found exemplars and mentors, and it has given me a very rich life.

AL: We know from doing archival work that history is often written based on the accident of preservation. Did that inform any of the desire to put these three books together? Was it about shoring up a record of your rabbinate?

LJS: Yes. Very much so. In the sense for you and I, as modern rabbis, our written material is literally scattered across the cosmos. Some of our work is never recorded. So, how do you put together a package which represents your career? It can never represent the totality of your work. But how can you do something representative? Maybe in fifty or a hundred years, some graduate student will stumble upon it while trying to figure out early 21st-century American Judaism, and I could help give voice to that. That would be my fondest hope.

AL: What do you hope future generations will take from these sources that you've put together in these volumes.

LJS: Primarily, the necessity of studying history, which is, I think, unfortunately, on the wane. I think it's a terrible mistake not to know where you're from. I think that's a personal need – we want to reconstruct the history of our family. I think it's a congregational need, that you need to know where your synagogue came from, and you know how it got to where it is today and where it might go tomorrow. Knowing your history roots you more deeply. Unfortunately, there's been a general contraction of interest in history, and specifically, on American Jewish history, and very specifically on Reform Judaism and its history. I think that is a tremendous intellectual mistake that needs to be rectified. I want to leave behind materials so that when the world wakes up again to the need to emphasize the study of history, it will have some good documentation, or at least honest documentation of a certain period – a certain slice of American Jewish life.

There are all types of sayings about, if you don't know the history, you might repeat it. If you *do* know history, on the other hand, you become more sensitive to what the trends are. You can't necessarily control them, but you can be more attuned to what the actual trends are.

AL: Well, jumping off from there, I'll pose two questions. What worries you about the American Jewish future? What excites you about the American Jewish future?

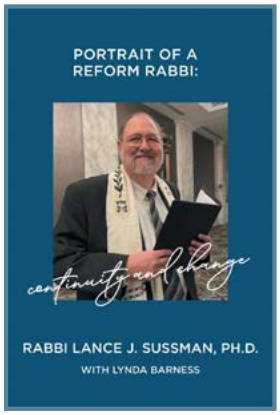
LJS: We are Jewish. So, we have to start with worry. The United States is sponge-like, and we are living in a very powerful consumer-based culture. We have an essential freedom of religion here. But it includes the right to not practice our Judaism. The majority of American Jews came from Russia at the time of the Revolution. This was a community that was drifting away from Judaism. But then America, with its strong Protestant culture, reintroduced Judaism to a lot of these East European Jews. That is no longer the case. So, on the worry side, it's the process of secularization. There's a continuum between acculturation and assimilation. And we're out of balance right now, swinging towards assimilation. One of the largest growing groups in the American Jewish community are the "nones". The rate of affiliation has dropped precipitously, and the length of affiliation is shorter than it was. The fertility rate is low. So, we have all of these elements that are at work gnawing away at the core of the American Jewish community. That's the big worry - that it is going to shrink over time, especially in the non-orthodox sector.

What's good is that, both in Judaism and in religion in America, there are patterns of decline and revival. It ebbs and flows all the time, and the possibility of renewal or an awakening is high, because there is this cyclical nature to it. The history here does teach us not to give up. The new generation will make a new path and find their own paradigms.

Notably nobody knows at this point what the impact of October 7, 2023, is going to be on this generation of American Jews. My Bar Mitzvah took place one week after the conclusion of the 6-Day War. I never recovered Jewishly. It touched me so deeply. October 7 is a much more complicated moment, but I think it's deepening Judaism and Jewish engagement.

The excitement of seeing new technologies incorporated into Jewish life and practice also gives us a lot to look forward to with hope.

***Rabbi Ari Lorge** is Rabbi-Senior Director of Clergy Study at Central Synagogue in New York City.*



***Rabbi Dr. Lance Sussman** is Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park and serves are RRJ's Senior Scholar.*

From a Driven Leaf

By Justin Miller

Will Herberg was born in 1901 in a *shtetl* in Belarus, not far from the enclave in Minsk from which my great-grandfather emigrated by 1880. Over the course of decades, Herberg traveled the now-familiar path from Marxist atheism to both political and theological conservatism, contributing to the *National Review* while co-founding the quarterly *Judaism* and writing *Judaism and Modern Man*, a striking rejection of the abstract, impersonal deity one might imagine when someone says they are "spiritual, not religious." However, Herberg is probably most remembered for *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955).

Though *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* was a sociological study, with a strong, underlying focus on the impact of waves of immigration on the American polity, I think of it as a watershed for a reason Herberg would have rejected: the powerful symbolism of its title.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, one might have easily slipped into thinking of the United States as something of a bland "united religions of America," a tripartite, social entity with three co-equal branches—Protestant, Catholic, Jew—with theological differences abounding, but with an essential underlying commonality as different colors of Americans. (Perhaps this is the origin of the patronizing portmanteau "Judeo-Christian," the nominal inclusion of Jews subtly subsumed into an overwhelmingly Christian ethos.)

From the cultural, almost anthropological, perspective of the "Protestant, Catholic, Jew" palate, there might be, say, Catholic or Jewish suburbs, but their significance is that they are ultimately little more than subsets of mainline Protestant America. In that mélange, Catholics and Jews might look no more like mainline Protestants than those Protestants resemble Appalachian snake-handlers, Catholics resemble Spanish-speaking pentecostalists, or Reform Jews resemble shtetl-circumscribed Ashkenazi Jews.

In this world, a Reform Jewish temple in midtown Manhattan has more in common with a liberal Catholic Church in Montclair, New Jersey, or an Episcopalian church in Danbury, Connecticut, than with *chabad* or a yeshiva. We were all, in this view, enroute to something like Ethical Culture or Unitarian Universalism, albeit holding on to sociologically defined remnants of European identities.

And then came the re-awakening of the 1970s. The 1960s had not brought us universal love and peace, but division, protest, even hatred, and a revival of the centrality of theological differences. And so, it was in the mid-1980s; I was a Jewish professor at a university in Oklahoma. Many Roman Catholics there saw me as an ally of sorts, an "other" in a sea of newly revived Protestant conservatism.

Invited to speak at a half dozen Roman Catholic churches, I always took questions after delivering remarks. After polite congregants asked a dozen respectful, gentle probes—my hosts were way too nice to bring up Jews as deicides—someone would eventually get around to the only question that really mattered: "If you don't believe in Jesus, how are you going to be saved?"

The answer, that we have a different religion altogether, makes no sense in a world of "Protestant, Catholic, Jew" as variant hues on the palette of America. And the question was, I think, not an accusation, but reflected a sincere concern. Is it possible to be good, decent, a neighbor—an American—and not be Christian? The underlying assumption of America as "Protestant, Catholic, Jew" is that all religions are different paths to the same truth, each a different road, but all with a common goal. So perhaps, my interlocutors feared, Jews believe we have an a-Christological path to salvation.

My response, at first an improvisation, but eventually a *spiel*, was to say that each religious tradition and its theology answer different questions. The Jain does not

have a Zoroastrian solution because each has its own problem to solve.

The special Christian problem arose from the fertile stew of a 1st-century Roman province where there was an unstable mix of a Jewish sect with an eschatological fixation (complete with potential martyrdom), Neo-Platonism infused into mystery cults, Roman variants of Hellenistic philosophies ranging from the Stoic to the Epicurean, and likely subcurrents from everywhere within the Roman Empire, Ephesus to Petra and beyond. From that rich stew came the orthodoxy which evolved over the first 400 years CE into what we now think of as Christianity.

(This, of course, is confusing, especially to those who think that Christianity was born whole and complete by the time of Jesus' death around 29 CE A portion of that confusion is easily dissolved by suggesting a thought experiment, that one imagine a religion whose only text was one gospel, say Mark, and then imagine a religion whose only text was John. The contrast would be stunning.)

So, I explained as best I could; "You are asking me a Christian question because you are Christians. I don't have an answer because that is not one of my questions. Unlike many of you, I do not think of a spiritual realm as being better than the created world we all see around us. Instead, my question as a Jew is how to be faithful to 3,000 years of history and tradition, law and ethics, liturgy and ritual practice, while participating fully in the modern world. And that is a question that every Jew answers differently."

I have learned since then that I was wrong. Our first challenge is how to *feel* faithful to our history and tradition while *feeling* honest with ourselves. Yes, that is all emotion, not theology or philosophy, but then I have to plead intellectual poverty because I spent half of my life studying psychology of religion. (Folks outside academia used to ask if that meant I was "very religious." I would reply, "Only insofar as entomologists feel very like ants . . . but they do learn to appreciate both the ants' power and point of view.")

As a subspecialty at the intersection of social and behavioral science, psychology of religion has been largely dependent on Jewish atheists from Durkheim through Freud, Einstein, and well beyond. Why? For them, the first part of the Jewish question, how to participate fully in modernity, can outweigh or even overcome the latter part of the question about fidelity to tradition.

To understand Freud as a Jew, a project which occupied much of my scholarly life, it is necessary to read him in German, not in the Strachey translation into English. The quality of his prose earned Freud the only award he ever received from the German-speaking world during his lifetime. But, as important, in the context of Freud's beautiful German, even the word for the humanities, *geisteswissenschaft*, takes on a Jewishly colored meaning, utterly missing in the authorized translation.

Now, almost forty years after I left Oklahoma, I stood by my mother's bedside while she was interrogated by a nurse at a hospital in Louisville. Mother had fallen and thus tested for subcutaneous injury. In thrall to dementia, she could recognize and name only three people, and none of those were the President of the United States. But then, I overheard this conversation:

> Nurse: "It says here that you have expressed a religious preference, that you are Jewish. Is that right?"
>
> Mother: "I don't know that I prefer it, but it is a fact."

Not long after, my uncle died. At his funeral, his daughter said that her father had loved Judaism. He did not worry about believing in God, but he loved the temple, the music, and the sound of Hebrew prayers, even if he did not know what they were saying. In short, like my mother, he may not have preferred it, but it was a fact.

On October 8, 2023, another relative, one who had converted to Christianity years ago, told me that the horrors of the previous day had impelled her to imagine revising her will to make AIPAC and the ADL her eventual legatees. Why? She had long since "preferred" to be Christian, but her being a Jew, in some fundamental sense, was a fact.

These three episodes have left me with a glimmer that helps me feel that perhaps I understand a little bit more about Freud, Einstein, and even myself. It does

(continued on next page)

not really matter if I "prefer" Judaism or being Jewish; that I am a Jew is a fact.

Speaking only for myself, this helps answer the question of participating fully in modernity while remaining faithful to tradition. I have to acknowledge the facticity of being a Jew as central to the peripheral questions of Jewishness, of both religiosity and custom. My being a Jew is only fully my own when I participate fully in modernity.

Yes, of course, that sounds like a conundrum, perhaps even an oxymoron. But our survival in all of our forms, from *haredi* to humanist, bears testimony to the fact of being a Jew, irrespective of compliance with any compulsory or obligatory strictures.

The world of *Shulchan Aruch* is foreign to me, as it requires obedience rather than questioning, compliance rather than interrogation, living in a mid-16th-century interpretation of Talmudic reality rather than the Enlightenment environment of doubt leading to possibility.

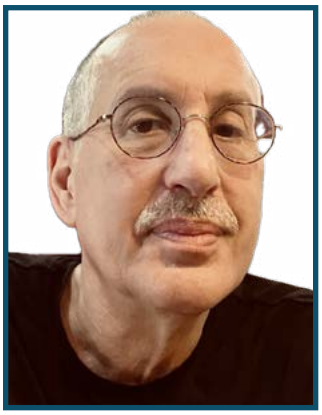
Perhaps I am dead wrong, but I gather that the first tentative Jewish approaches to modernity—*Haskalah* in the 18th century and *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* in the 19th—are now largely considered archaisms, perhaps made tragic by the Holocaust and then rendered peripheral by the modern State of Israel. But these attempts to incorporate true scientific curiosity and the philosophical roots of liberal democracy into the warp and weft of Judaism are, to me, foundational for my life as a Jew, not merely by preference, but in fact. They were the context in which Freud or Einstein could profess atheism concurrently with proclaiming, without hesitation, they were Jews.

Today, we all live in an America increasingly ruled by evangelical Protestant dominionism, a political philosophy only slightly masked by a variant of Christianity bearing little relation to any "old time religion" and utterly rejecting the equal temperament of the glib "Protestant, Catholic, Jew." For me, there is pleasure, sometimes even delight, in *preferring* to be Jewish but, whether I like or not, it would still be a fact.

Now, today I donned a ballcap I designed and ordered after October 7, 2023. It simply says עם ישראל חי ("the People Israel live"). It does not say "I am a Jew" but rather, references the nation or the people Israel. It is not about me nor even the "people *of* Israel," the population, but identifies the people as the nation. It is intended not as an aspiration, but as a factual statement.

Aside: I could not have explained this to my Catholic brethren in Oklahoma. They, like my Muslim friends, emphasize what they believe, not who they are. They are only Christian or Muslim so long as they consent, assent, affirm, and insist upon the sole truth of their faith. Perhaps that is why I bridle every time a politician refers to "faith-based" institutions. Other than the two doctrinal religions, those based on creeds, Christianity and then Islam, very few religions are "faith based." This phrase is like the once common understanding of "Protestant, Catholic, Jew" that assumes everyone is just a variation on the dominant white, mainstream Protestant that popular culture imagines as the American Christian.

In contrast, Israel is, in this sense, not an "it" but an "us." Within that "us" I can be a Jew of any stripe or shade, I may even despair of Zionism (which I do not), but that I am a Jew is still a fact. It is this identity that permits an *epikoros* (skeptic) like me to be just as much a Jew as a Hasid. Given that I then consent to being Jewish from within the freedom to be agnostic, perhaps there is an extra bit of oomph, added emphasis as a Jew, that is not the same as—but no less than—that of the observant but unquestioning.



***Justin Miller** earned a B.A. in Religious Studies at Yale under Jaroslav Pelikan, who, reviewing a chapter of his senior paper, wrote "Your documentation is sound. Your reasoning is cogent. I am not convinced." This high praise from Professor Pelikan drove Justin to the University of Chicago. While there, he taught psychology of religion at several colleges and seminaries and earned successive fellowships to the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion (now the Martin Marty Center) while writing a dissertation on the influence of 19th century German Jewish social thought on the origins of psychoanalysis.*

Navigating a time like no other in my lifetime

By Rabbi Karen Thomashow

"Physician Heal Thyself" is perhaps an unlikely quotation to begin a Jewish article. In the Christian Bible,* it is offered as a proverb, referring to a physician who is unable to heal himself. In part, it is a reminder that no human being is omnipotent. In part, it is a prompt to address one's own ailments before tending to others' needs. If you prefer, multiple centuries later than its Christian origins, the Midrash (or creative interpretation) we know as Genesis Rabbah uses its own version in "Physician, physician, heal thine own limp."†

I have been thinking quite a bit about this ancient injunction since October of 2023. In fact, I began thinking about this in March of 2020. As the reality of lockdown initially sank in, and the proportions of the world-wide crisis came into view, I had an epiphany: As a rabbi/clergyperson, I was uniquely prepared to lead individuals and a community through a crisis. There was just one hitch—in my training and experience, I was especially prepared to help others through *their* crisis—that is, the death of a congregant's loved one, a long-term or even acute illness, a divorce, etc. What I hadn't prepared for is helping others through *our* crisis. In other words, with Covid came a time that was fragile and fraught for all of us. It was much more challenging for a rabbi to "Heal Thyself."

As the Covid fog lifted for the majority of our populace around the summer of 2023, there were barely a few months in-between the pandemic to endemic transition, when October 7th struck and hence, another crisis began. This crisis has shifted the sands of Jewish identity, tried American Jewish-Israeli relations, and stoked an increase in anti-Semitism. I don't know a Jew who has been untouched. I don't know a rabbi who has not been rattled.

If this weren't enough, the social and political fabric of the United States is changing so rapidly under our feet that, while our heads are swirling, our feet are unstable. Historians call this convergence of crises, *polycrisis*. As I prepare to conclude the 18th year of my rabbinate—which I recognize is the equivalent in Judaism of a "lifetime"—I recognize that my clergy colleagues and I are navigating a time like no other in our lifetimes.

In practical terms, this means the need to take breaks along the way, to keep one's head out of the sand as we simply can't wish these complexities away, to engage in dialogue/study and action on the very topics that threaten/challenge us, and to offer deep kindness and grace towards one another.

In spiritual terms, this means the humble realization that rabbi and Jewish participant have more in common than not. *Our* community is in crisis. *We* have a great deal on our shoulders. Being a rabbi at this moment, which is likely to last well into our near future, is to simultaneously tend to our own needs and those of everyone else.

In faith terms, I trust that *we* will get through this.

***Rabbi Karen Thomashow** is Senior Rabbi at Temple Isaiah in Lexington MA.*

* Gospel of Luke 4:23
† Genesis Rabbah 23:4

KEIRUV: Answering the Call of the Unaffiliated and Underserved

By Rabbi Marshal Klaven

Clergy have different callings. Many of these selfless souls have been called to serve congregations, which – until the last couple of decades – were the major hub of American Jewish life and communal identity. Others have been called to serve academic institutions as scholars and teachers, or hospitals, prisons, and the armed forces as chaplains, or camps and other Jewish non-profits as programmers and directors, or even for-profit ventures as innovators and entrepreneurs.

Even before ordination (HUC-JIR, Cincinnati) in 2009, my calling has been to serve within the proverbial *tzitzit* (the fringes) of the American Jewish fabric: to those on the frontlines of freedom and democracy as a USAFR Chaplain; to the 110 micro-sized congregations of the American South as the ISJL Director of Rabbinic Services; and to those who have found themselves isolated in institutions on account of age or illness as a Healthcare Chaplain.

This was a failure of Jewish communal organization, which by prioritizing congregations and membership, often leaves gaping holes through which our fellow Jews are falling *en masse*.

To me, this call can be traced to an ethical obligation within our spiritual heritage: "*kol yisrael aravim zeh bazeh* / all Israel is responsible for one another." (BT Shavuot 39a) Originally understood as the responsibility to stop another Jew from sinning, this instruction has been expanded to encompass the responsibility of ensuring all Jews – regardless of affiliation – to have access to the basic physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance that makes life capable of being lived.

In the fall of 2020, that call rang for me again. At the time, I was serving as the Acting CEO for a JCC. A man on the other end of the line said his friend was actively dying and wished to speak with a rabbi after having distanced himself from his Jewish community some 30 years prior. When the call came, I was in my hometown of St. Louis, MO, burying my grandmother who had died from COVID. I told the man I would call the rabbi of the only nearby congregation to see if he was available.

What I heard broke my heart. The rabbi shared that he would like to but, due to contractual limits, he could not. He could only serve members. After pleading for an exception, the rabbi apologized and explained that if he served this one non-member this one time, he would set a precedent by which he would be expected to serve all non-members all the time. The truth he laid before me was: "There just isn't enough time in a day for one rabbi to fulfill the needs of all members, let alone non-members." He isn't wrong.

I called the man back to break the news. As I was flying back the very next morning, I promised the man I would go directly to his friend upon landing. I did so. By the time I arrived, the friend was no longer responsive. Alive. But he was no longer able to speak, no longer able to express whatever might have been weighing upon his heart, and no longer able to feel the care and compassion our beautiful faith tradition could have brought to help him lift that weight in his final moments.

This was a failure. But it was not a failure of any one rabbi or congregation. This was a failure of Jewish communal organization, which by prioritizing congregations and membership often leaves gaping holes through which our fellow Jews are falling *en*

masse. As was brought to light in the 2020 survey of the American Jewish population conducted by Pew Research, nearly two-thirds of American Jews no longer affiliate with congregations.

This is where KEIRUV comes in. Started in 2021, KEIRUV's mission is to be a safety net for the unaffiliated and underserved (those who belong to congregations without clergy) in south-central Pennsylvania and north-central Maryland. Because, despite a high rate of un-affiliation, the Pew Research survey also showed that these same Jews remain overwhelmingly proud of their Jewish identities, often calling upon a rabbi to help them celebrate their joys or comfort their sorrows.

When that call comes, KEIRUV strives to answer with "Yes." Yes, we hear you. Yes, we see you. Yes, we value you. And, yes, we will do all that we can to be of support to you.

To date, KEIRUV has provided 2600 support encounters to 8000 unique individuals. True to our name (*keiruv*, meaning "to draw close"), we do not wait for them to draw close to Judaism; we draw Judaism close to them in homes and hospitals, prisons and parks, coffee shops and community centers. And we do so without charging a fee for service. Instead, we rely upon a "pay it forward" donation model, as "no stumbling block shall be placed" between Judaism and those who call upon its support.

The switchboard of American Jewish life is busy. And, it is not just getting busier by the day, it is getting more extensive and spread out. Rather than seeing innovative organizations like KEIRUV as competitors to the existing providers, KEIRUV strives to be a collaborator, working alongside established congregations and Jewish organizations to ensure all calls are answered and their callers – regardless of affiliation – are connected to clergy wherever we have been called upon to serve.

May God help us answer this call.

***Rabbi Marshal Klaven** is Executive Director/President of KEIRUV Rabbinic Outreach Services. He credits his service to the gifts of God, the investment of his teachers, and—most especially—the love of his family.*

KEIRUV, an independent nonprofit, affirms and fortifies Jewish life outside the congregational setting through direct provision of rabbinic outreach services to the unaffiliated and underserved within the Jewish community as well as Jewish advocacy within the general population.

ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

Please visit our website www.rootsofreform.org often and follow us on social media.

A Commitment to Tomorrow

By Rabbi Evon Yakar

Imagining a future is very much part of our people's purpose. Whether it is *tikkun olam* and social justice, ritual and holy day observance, or education and study, our time spent together in Jewish community always includes a commitment to tomorrow. Our efforts to meet challenges, like social injustice, are about imagining a world more whole. When we celebrate time and mark holy days, we are often considering the past as we look towards a future. And, in study, we are adding to our knowledge to better respond to life as we move through it. In our Tahoe Jewish Community (TJC), a new Jewish organization founded by our two Reform congregations here in Lake Tahoe, we spend a lot of time looking towards what we can create. We envision a future of Reform Judaism built upon recognizing our skills and talents, lived through deep collaboration among community members, leaders, and professionals, and a Jewish life that expresses our commitment to cherishing creation, a strong sense of place, and lifting up skills and interests of community to collaborate.

When I look to the future of Jewish life, I recognize the ways synagogues and Jewish communities strove for decades to be a center for *all your Jewish needs*. Here, in our small mountain communities, we continue to learn we cannot always do everything. Yet, when we tap the interests and skills of our community, we realize beautiful ways to live our rich tradition. It is through this lens that we see a bright future. It is a thriving Jewish life that consistently reflects our life in the mountains and foothills by how we build community. Our work of *tikkun olam* supports our vulnerable neighbors struggling with housing in a tourist economy. Our holiday celebrations integrate recreation with spirituality, like Mussar Yoga on Yom Kippur, and Purim in the Powder – skiing in costumes before our celebration. When we engage in Torah study on the trail, on the beach, or on our annual Elul camping retreat, we ensure our Jewish expression reflects our lifestyles and strong sense of place.

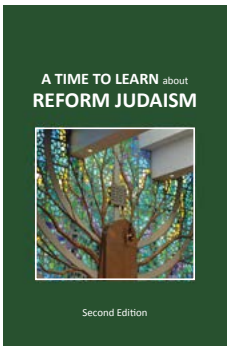
In order to look towards the future, we first work to understand where we are *and* who we are. Knowing that all of our residents and visitors are drawn to this specific place in creation, we learn this must be reflected in how we craft our Jewish moments together too. As Moses did in our Torah story, we constantly take a "census". Not necessarily taken for a *count* of our numbers but rather tapping the interests and skills of our people. It is a bit more like the ways God identified Bezalel to build the *Mishkan*. Engaging with our members, including our non-member residents and visitors, means inspiring them to co-create how we live our lives as Jews. It is in this collaborative model that our Jewish future must be lived. Each of us as individual Jews owns our Judaism just as much as the next, and we must share the writing of our story together into the future.

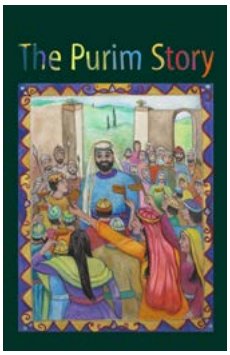
The future of Reform Judaism is one that understands that our charge is about building community and focusing on the people. It is a future that leverages the skills, talents, and interests of those involved to co-create engagement opportunities. This means it can never be static. One of the powerful concepts of Reform Judaism is a commitment to change being a constant. Our movement's gifts to the world and our Jewish story are in our commitment to keeping our past sacred, while evolving to the sensibilities and values of our moment in time. The TJC is born out of these realizations. The rhythm of our Jewish life, here in Tahoe and the Northern Sierra Nevada, reflects our people. The future of our Movement will be the ways our congregations and organizations see the '*who*' of their communities as the starting point of all our work. When we do this, we can authentically be committed to both our Jewish past and future.

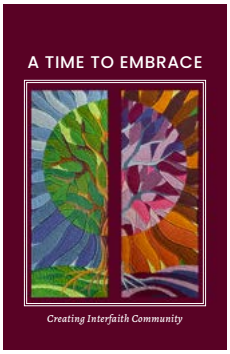
***Rabbi Evon Yakar** is rabbi of the Tahoe Jewish Community and has been part of the team at Adventure Rabbi: Synagogue w/o Walls.*

New from Roots of Reform

As we have been guided by our Roots of Reform Judaism's long-range plan (found on our website Rootsofreform.org), we have undertaken the creation of a number of new and meaningful resources for the several constituencies in our RRJ world. During recent years, whether it is at Central Conference of American Rabbis conventions or congregational visits, we have learned that more and more families are turning to the RRJ for children-based holiday and family resources. We are excited to announce the publication of a family-focused *Megillah* written by our gifted Senior Scholar, Dr. Lance Sussman – a beautifully illustrated *The Purim Story*. Each page of this Purim *megillah* is enriched with drawings in a "Persian" style, graphically telling the Purim story in an easy-to-read yet accurate fashion. RRJ will have three new projects for children in the coming year, for Shabbat and Pesach. We are excited to share these with you.







A second "new" booklet is actually a revised version of our widely used booklet *A Time to Learn about Reform Judaism*, originally written by Rabbi Devon Lerner in association with the American Jewish Archives' director emeritus, Dr. Gary Zola. Used in classrooms and synagogues around the country, we recognized the need to update this important book, enriching its historical text and illustrations. Many congregations have understood the importance of young people and adults learning about the history of Reform Judaism and the values it espouses. Our Senior Scholar and noted historian, Dr. Lance Sussman, served as advisor and author for this revised edition, focusing on these important lessons. For those of you who are familiar with this early resource of RRJ, you will appreciate the updates needed as we better understood how this book was being used.

And finally, our greatest undertaking will be available in just weeks. Over the past few years, we have created Shabbat and High Holy Day liturgy, Reform history, and children's and interfaith materials, all in short booklet format of 30–50 pages. The significant effort of two distinguished scholar-clergy writers has allowed us to publish our first book to fill a need felt by many in these fraught times of antisemitism and divisiveness. During my seventeen years at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, I had the honor to teach and work with both rabbinical and graduate students. Our rabbinical students came from Jewish backgrounds across the denominational spectrum, and most of the students at the Pines Graduate School came from a wide range of Christian traditions, from the most conservative to more moderate. Most of our students from both schools had one desire in common – to learn more about each other's faiths and beliefs. Thanks to the vision and dedication of two of Hebrew Union College's most gifted graduates, Pastor Caleb Gilmore, Ph.D., and Rabbi David Bloom, that request has been satisfied with *A Time to Embrace- Creating Interfaith Community*. Caleb began with the idea to create a book directed at Christian seminarians, offering the Christian community the opportunity to learn about what they and Reform Judaism share and, perhaps, where they diverge. After this book was well on its way, it became clear that this effort was just as important for members of the Jewish community as for the Christian clergy community. That is where David Bloom entered the project. It is especially meaningful because both Reverend Gilmore and Rabbi Bloom studied and worked together at HUC and had built a warm and collegial relationship. The result of their friendship and shared scholarship is a substantial book with a study guide, bibliography, and resource recommendations. I am confident that this will become an important and valuable resource for those learning about Reform Judaism, working to build relationships of respect and understanding within and among the diverse communities in our Jewish and Christian world. As was said about Eleanor Roosevelt at her death, we would rather light a candle than curse the darkness. I believe this book will help illuminate what we share, rather than simply bemoan where we differ.

NOTES TO ROOTS

Advocate

Thank you for upgrading your magazine. At 67, I received real value from the essays that stressed that Reform continues and adds to classical tradition and learning. The first three essays were a *tour de force* that reinforced each other's validity. Many Reform Jews believe that Reform is ersatz. Thank you, and may we be worthy for the success of our prayers. Respectfully, *Dennis Ashendorf (Costa Mesa)*

I had the opportunity this afternoon to take a look at the most recent addition of the *Reform Advocate*. What an incredible collection of essays and articles! I love the way that so much was brought forward under the theme of books. *Rabbi Ben Zeidman (El Paso)*

Ken, I received your generous and thoughtful package of the *Reform Advocate* with your personal note – on Yom Kippur no less! Thank you! I've shared a couple copies and will keep a couple. One I sent to Jeremy Wise – Jonah's grandson . . . He is so enthusiastic . . . I want to express my ongoing gratitude for RRJ's faith in me and this book as well as to you personally for inviting me to write an article for inclusion in your publication. With warmest regards, *Geri Kolesar (Cincinnati)*

High Holy Day Online Services

Very enjoyable service and interesting thought-provoking sermon, thank you. At the end when you recited Kaddish I stood up as suggested and ended up in tears all by myself in my living room. Very emotional moment. *Joan Elman (Glenview)*

A beautiful service with a meaningful sermon, lovely arrangements of contemporary melodies and beautiful heritage ones too. Most meaningful. Thank you. *Fred Roden (New York)*

HHD Recording Temple Emmanuel Atlanta-Rabbis Max and Rachael Miller and Ken Kanter

The Reform Advocate arrived in my mailbox on Saturday) and – **wow** – it is terrific. I've not yet read every essay (still working on it), but what I've read so far has been excellent. Congratulations to all. *Jan Stone (Chicago)*

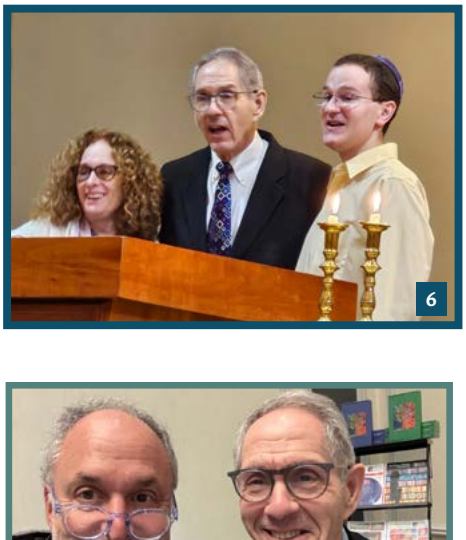
RRJ Board Meeting Congregation Micah Nashville

Rabbi Kanter "On the Road"

Rabbi Kanter gave me my start in Jewish music. When he first approached me, I wasn't all that interested. I said no. He asked again – I said no. The third time, he finally wore me down, and I said yes. I've been grateful ever since. Rabbi K, you changed my life. And then there's Simon Barrad – his voice has gentle power that just about floored me. What an unexpected and fantastic surprise to make music together this week. Can't wait to create more beautiful noise with him soon. Thank you, Rabbi K, Simon, and Congregation Micah. (*Michael Ochs, Nashville*)

Ken Kanter, Simon Barrad, Michael Ochs

CCAR Convention



1. With Rabbi Steve Fox 2. Rabbi Ben Zeidman and Allie Weiner 3. With Rabbi Michael Shefrin in Sarasota 4. Allie Weiner 5. With Rabbis Ari Jun, Marina Yergin, Ricky Kamill and Jessica Rosenthal 6. With Rabbis Beth Jacowitz-Chottiner and David Bloom in Louisville 7. With Rabbi Steven Lowenstein

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Quilt, Hexagon or Honeycomb pattern by Rebecca Davis, 1846

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