Shamor v'Zachor

The Evolution of the Idea of Shabbat Observance Within the American Reform Movement

Daniel Simon Bogard

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Ordination
Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion

2011 / 5771

Referee: Rabbi Dr. Richard Sarason

Digest

Shabbat observance has long been one of the defining traditions of the Jewish faith. In the context of North American Reform Judaism, the very idea of Shabbat observance has seen a long and storied evolution since the middle of the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, in the midst of the most radical period in American Reform Judaism, Shabbat was centered primarily in the synagogue, with an emphasis on sanctification. The great debate during this period was over whether Shabbat should be moved to Sunday, or whether it would remain on its historical day of Saturday. A century and a half later, the state of Shabbat observance is quite different. Today, Reform Judaism is more and more pushing for a robust observance grounded in traditional Jewish law, with a focus on home observance and on rest. This thesis sets out to trace this evolution, and to look into the historical events and contexts that helped to shape the change. Finally, this thesis concludes with an examination of where Shabbat observance is likely to go from here and how it will continue to evolve over the coming decade.

Dedicated to Judy and Shmuel Himelstein,
at whose table I first fell in love with Shabbos

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, a big thank you to my fantastically helpful and fantastically flexible thesis advisor, Rabbi Dr. Richard Sarason. During my time at Hebrew Union College, he was a constant source of help, of encouragement, and a man I am proud to call 'my rabbi'. I cannot thank him enough; it truly was my honor to learn from such a great mind, and such a *mensch*.

A deep and heartfelt thank you also needs to go out to my wonderful wife and fellow rabbinical student here at HUC, Karen Kriger Bogard. She is the most loving, accepting, and supportive partner anyone could ask for. My life with her is without doubt the single greatest blessing in my life.

Thanks also go out to my parents, to my brother Jonathan and my sister Tenzin-Yidok, all of whom have been immensely supportive and loving throughout this process.

Finally, I would like to thank all my teachers and rabbis who brought me to this place: Rabbi Susan Talve, Rabbi James Stones Goodman, Rabbi Randy Fleischer, Rabbi Howard Kaplansky, Rabbi Brigitte Rosenberg, Marsha Mermelstein, Jonathan Cohen, Mrs. Katz, Peter Harle, and all of the others who I am forgetting. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

There are too many others that I am sure I am forgetting—but know that I love all of you.

Introduction

The Sabbath and its observance have long been among the most defining characteristics of Judaism. From the biblical mandates to remember and to protect the Sabbath to the rabbinic period's description of thirty-nine categories of work that were forbidden on Shabbat, to the fences established around this observance in the idea of *mukseh*, a huge percentage of Jewish thought through the centuries has been dedicated to this subject. This is equally true of the Reform movement in Judaism.

Arising out of both the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement in Germany in the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism originated as an attempt to bring what the early reformers saw as an antiquated religious expression into the modern era. Initially this meant that major changes in observance were advocated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, starting in the early twentieth century, North American Reform Judaism began to back away from its radicalism, and slowly return to a more traditional approach to religious observance.

Shabbat, as it is such a major component of Jewish religious thought and practice, is a wonderful topic through which to follow the overall progression of Reform thought as it pertains to ritual obligation and observance. The goal of this thesis, then, will be to examine what the Reform movement and its primary leaders have said and thought about the nature of the Sabbath--and in particular the nature of Sabbath observance--within the Reform movement. As many great thinkers have noted, the only constant in Reform Judaism is a constant process of change, where each generation redefines Reform Judaism in its own image.

This thesis will follow the major arguments and threads found in the ongoing, intergenerational discussion that is Jewish thought, in an attempt to understand how the movement itself has changed philosophically. Starting in the late nineteenth century, with those early Reformers who considered moving the Sabbath to Sunday in order to save it in a world where American Jews were forced to work on Saturday, certain threads can be seen throughout. It is my hope that in reading this thesis, the reader will glean a new appreciation for the sincerity with which Reform Judaism has always approached this subject, and the commitment to the Sabbath that has often been at the core of its rabbis' concerns.

Dividing up history into segments is always problematic, and yet for a topic such as this, necessary. As such, this thesis is divided into six different chapters, arranged by historical periods that are at some level arbitrary. The first chapter looks at the early Reform movement in America and its European antecedents, looking at how this most radical period of the Reform movement dealt with the very idea of Shabbat and Shabbat observance. The second chapter--and onward--looks exclusively at the experience of North American Jews. This chapter examines how the formation of the primary institutions of Reform Judaism in America (the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Hebrew Union College) led to Reform's tackling of the Sabbath issue as a defined movement rather than as an aspiring common American Judaism.

The third chapter with its focus on the interwar period and the fourth chapter, which is concerned with the post-World War II period, look at how the Reform movement's treatment of Shabbat changed in a world where American Jews began to feel

more comfortable as Americans. Finally, the fifth and sixth chapters look at how Shabbat has changed in the second half of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century, with a marked return to a more traditional approach to Jewish practice and ritual. In the conclusion there is to be found a summary of the arc of American Jewish history as seen through the lens of Shabbat observance. In addition to this, there are concluding notes on the direction that the American Reform movement is moving toward, and how the observance of Shabbat may change in the Reform context through the next decade.

Chapter 1: European Antecedents

It is impossible to examine the issue of the development of the idea of the Sabbath in the American Reform movement and ignore the Reform movement's European antecedents. Though today Reform Judaism is most associated with the United States of America, the origins of the movement are to be found in Germany.

The early liberal rabbis in Germany were marked initially not by their radical interpretation of Torah, but instead simply by the fact that they combined the traditional Jewish education of the Yeshivah with the secular education of the European University. Amongst the early German founders of Reform, no man carried more influence than Abraham Geiger. Starting in "as early as 1837 Abraham Geiger is on record as advocating a conference of like-thinking, progressive rabbis for the discussion of the essentials of Judaism and the consideration of the practical religious problems that were demanding solution."[1] These conferences--though they were initially quite a failure--ended up forming the intellectual, theological, and practical basis for American Reform Judaism.

The first of the noteworthy conferences occurred in Brunswick, from June 12 to 19, 1844. Attended by twenty-five leading rabbis who were inclined more liberally, the goal of the conference was to find a path between Judaism and the radical modernizations that were occurring during the mid-1800s. Among the most contentious issues was the observance of Shabbat, and how to reform the laws associated with it. "At the closing session of the conference Samuel Hirsch proposed that the conference take steps to

[1] David Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, revised ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 140.

reconcile the differences between Jewish doctrine and practice by the abrogation or the amelioration of a number of Sabbath and dietary laws. He stated that the matter would not be so grave were the Sabbath laws disregarded only in the household economy, but that the public desecration of the Sabbath demanded that something be done to save the situation."[2] This quote well illustrates the motivations of the time: the emancipation of the Jews had created a world in which, for the first time, Jews were able to engage in much of the civic life and civic discourse of non-Jewish society. This presented a number of problems, however, for traditional Jewish observance. Beyond the issues of exposure to other ways of living and other thought-traditions, emancipation meant that Jewish authorities lost much of their ability to enforce religious observance. It was with this in mind that Samuel Hirsch proposed a change to the laws of Shabbat observance, to bring the legal system in line with the observance of his time.

There was some discussion following Hirsch's call for reform. When questioned about why it was that this moment required reform, as opposed to generations prior, Abraham Adler well summarized the feelings of his day, saying that the experience of modernity represented a qualitative, not just quantitative shift in the experience of humanity. He represented this view on the matter of Sabbath observance, saying, "There is a cleft between life and the traditional Sabbath observance. We must reconcile this difference, not continue it."[3]

We also see during this period a shift in thinking about Judaism that would influence American Reform Judaism for its foreseeable future: a move from considering

[2] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 154.
[3] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 155.

Judaism to be a religion of law, and a move toward a more essentialist Judaism. Samuel Holdheim observed this at the 1846 rabbinical conference convened to deal specifically with Sabbath observance, remarking that "we cannot adopt the rabbinical conception of the Sabbath. We must ask our conscience what is the intent of Sabbath observance. Perhaps we can preserve Sabbath observance without Sabbath rest."[4] This move in thinking would eventually come to dominate the Reform movement in America, where the issue of the essential nature of some observance, or some belief, would come to hold more importance for the movement than the original observance itself. This issue of observance versus the essential nature of Judaism came to define much of the discourse regarding the conference as a whole. As David Phillipson observes, "The conference was assailed as negative and destructive....the orthodox accused the conference of having undermined the very foundations of Judaism, the reformers acclaimed it for having given voice bravely to the true spirit of Judaism."[5]

As Hirsch did not raise the issue of reforming Sabbath observance until the end of the conference, it was decided that a commission would be put together consisting of Abraham Geiger, Abraham Adler, Samuel Adler, B. Wechsler, and Joseph Kahn. This commission would meet to discuss Sabbath observance and report back at the next conference. Unfortunately, however, once again at the next conference in Frankfurt, too much time was taken up on other issues--in this case primarily discussions of liturgy--and Sabbath observance was once again bumped to the following conference.

The third of these early liberal rabbinical conferences was held in Breslau during July 12-24, 1846. "The very fact that it was convened in this East-Prussian city near the

[4] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 155.
[5] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 155.

Silesian border was equivalent to throwing down the gauntlet to the opposition to the conferences, much of which had emanated from that section."[6] It was here that Sabbath observance was finally given its due, and in truth, "the chief interest in the Breslau Conference centers about the Sabbath discussions. Possibly nowhere was the conflict between the commands of rabbinical Judaism and the demands of life as apparent as in the matter of Sabbath observance."[7]

The central argument that the conference attendees made was, essentially, "as long as the Jews lived in isolated communities such an observance of the Sabbath was quite possible, but when they began to participate in the life of the larger world, the collisions between that life with its changed industrial, economic and social conditions and the hundred and one prohibitions wherewith the Talmud had hedged about the observance of the Sabbath were constant."[8] As a way of approaching the issues involved rabbinically, the Committee on Sabbath Observance examined the development of the rationale for the Sabbath within both the biblical and rabbinic literatures. The differentiation in holiness between the Bible and the Talmud came to be one of the defining factors of the early reformers, who frequently placed much greater value on the Bible as the word of God than on the Talmud, which they saw as being the work of the rabbis. Whereas the biblical conception of the Sabbath was understood as being about a cessation of work in order "to make possible the consecration of the self on that day...in the later outworking of the Sabbath conception in Mishnah and Talmud the greatest stress was laid on the necessity of rest."[9]

---

[6] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 193.
[7] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 195.
[8] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 195.
[9] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 197.

The committee itself was unable to come to a verdict, and instead split 3-2 in favor of adopting their proposal. Samuel Adler and Joseph Kahn, however, were the dissenting members, reducing the force of the committee report. The report itself marked a radical departure from traditional Jewish thinking on the Sabbath, on observance in general, and on the very nature of Judaism. This can be seen within the report, which addresses the specific issue of Sabbath observance, but really can be seen to be talking about Judaism in general:

> "Applying this principle to the case in hand, we must return to the Biblical idea of the Sabbath, which as is the case with divine truth in general, has eternal validity, while the Talmudic conception wherever it is not the development of the Biblical idea, but contradicts it as well as our own religious consciousness, can lay no claim to consideration. We must then reemphasize the Biblical idea that the Sabbath is a day of consecration which is sanctified through our sanctifying ourselves; a day the distinctiveness of which is to be brought forcibly home to us by our ceasing from our daily toil and our special tasks, and giving ourselves to contemplation of the divine purpose of our existence as indicated by Jewish teaching. Hence, no task should be forbidden which conduces towards recreation and spiritual elation and which serves to lift us out of our circumscribed environment and to arouse in us thoughts of a higher nature. The detailed enumeration of prohibited tasks in the Talmud is characteristic rather of juridical method than of true religious striving. The all important consideration in this matter of prohibited activity is where such activity interferes with or furthers Sabbath consecration. Since, then, rest is not an end in itself, but only a means towards a higher end, viz., the consecration of the day, and since in our time that consecration expresses itself through divine service, all such activities as are necessary for the furtherance of that service must be permitted."[10]

This move away from valuing foremost the importance of the law, and instead trying to divine the motivation behind the practice became a rallying point for the committee. They ended up presenting a recommendation of five different points to the plenum of the Breslau Conference. Initially these points were modified by Geiger to better suit the general consensus of the conference as a whole, and this modified report

[10] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 197-199.

was eventually modified again through debate at the conference, before it was ultimately adopted. There are two things that stand out in particular concerning the report on the Sabbath: the first is that, contrary to criticisms leveled at these early reformers, they did not believe that they were initiating changes within the Jewish community. Instead, what they were attempting to do was to reconcile Judaism to the changes that had already occurred within the Jewish communities of Western Europe (Germany in particular). The second observation that immediately stands out when reading the text of the committee's recommendation is their focus on theoretical issues of observance and faith, and a lack of attention paid to realistic ways to once again increase Sabbath observance amongst their Jewish communities. Adler leveled this criticism, observing that, "It was regrettable that so much time was devoted to academic discussions of the question and so little to a practical solution of the difficulty. What was desired and required was a way out; the Sabbath was not being observed as a day of rest; thousands were following their vocations, business, professional, industrial."[11] Jacob Auerbach declared, in a similar vein, "Our civil day of rest is another than our traditional Sabbath. This constitutes the chief collision. The commission has offered no suggestions how this is to be removed; I have none to offer either."[12]

The impact and aftermaths of these conferences was not immediately clear. While in retrospect these conferences served as much of the intellectual basis for the early Reform movement in America, initially they were quite controversial--and not just among the more traditional community members. Almost immediately following the conclusion of the conferences, criticisms were leveled at them that they were too

[11] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 205.
[12] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 201.

rabbinic, and that lay Jews, academics, and theologians did not have a voice. In response to this, a series of synods were convened to bring together these various groups between 1869 and the early 1870s. They likely would have occurred decades earlier, but the revolutionary uprisings that had swept through Europe in 1848-49 and their repressive aftermath delayed the convening of these synods.

The first of these synods occurred in Leipzig, and included 83 delegates from 60 congregations. The second synod occurred in Augsburg and saw a significant drop-off, with 52 delegates from thirty different liberal congregations.[13] However, even with a diminished attendance, all of the large cities with liberal congregations were represented, and a number of distinguished people attended. It was at the Augsburg Synod that a resolution on the Sabbath was voted upon--and accepted unanimously. This resolution held that:

> 1. If the distance from the residence to the house of worship, or age and delicate health, prevent attendance at divine service, notably if this be of an educating and edifying character, it is permissible to remove this obstacle by riding on Sabbath and holidays, either on the railroad or in a vehicle to the place of communal worship.
> 2. This permission extends also to the practice of charitable acts in such cases where delay would be dangerous.
> 3. The same permission holds where the purpose is educational or recreative.
> 4. An Israelite is permitted to play the organ in the house of worship on the Sabbath.[14]

The resolutions of the Augsburg Synod were, interestingly, much more concerned with actual, on-the-ground practice, than the resolution from the Breslau Conference. Of additional note is the retention of the legalistic framework for Judaism that seemed to exist within the Augsburg Synod as opposed to the Breslau Conference. Both of these

[13] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 307.
[14] Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 309.

influences--the reformation of the legalistic tradition, and the move toward a more essentialist view of Judaism--were to have profound influences on American Reform Judaism. In the early period of an institutionalized, authentically American Judaism, it is clear that these German sources were heavily drawn from, and served as the intellectual backbone from which those American rabbis began to tackle the ever-thorny issue of Sabbath observance.

Chapter 2: The CCAR Through the First World War

America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a place of rapid expansion and rapid growth. Leaving behind the strife and the tumult of the Civil War, America was growing both in terms of its own burgeoning conception of itself as an 'important nation' in the world, and in a literal sense: America was experiencing massive immigration to its shores. In particular, Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe led to radical changes in the makeup of American Jewry. Remarkably, by some estimates "some two million East European Jews from Russia, Romania, and Austria-Hungary landed on America's shores between 1881 and 1914."[15] Unlike the wave of Jewish immigration that had come from Central Europe and peaked in the 1850s, [16] these immigrants were by and large less educated and less modern than their American coreligionists. These new Eastern European Jews came to America fleeing the pogroms that were spreading across the Russian empire starting in 1881, but found a country in which anti-Semitism was on the rise, and where their fellow Jews were embarrassed by these new immigrants' *yiddishkeit*.

These changes in the makeup of American Jewry went along with equally important changes in the institutional structures of Judaism in America. For Reform Judaism, nothing was more influential than the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 (for which the foundation had been laid at an 1871 conference in Cincinnati), and the later founding of the Central Conference of American

---

[15] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004), 151-152.

[16] Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1829-1914 (* New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994), 9, 16; Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, eds., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 10-11; as cited in Sarna, *American Judaism*, 66.

Rabbis in 1889.[17] With these two bodies established, the institutional framework for American Reform Judaism for the next century was in place, and the table was set for a new, more centralized conception of liberal Judaism to spread throughout the country. Rather than seeing Judaism as a religion of law, this period saw a shift toward imaging Judaism as a religion primarily concerned with morality. As such, the nature of Shabbat moved away from it being a day with severe ritual observance, and instead toward a day concerned with the values of 'rest', of 'sanctification,' and of 'relaxation'.

How Reform Judaism looked at itself--its own internal sense of identity--began to change radically in the period following the adoption of the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885. It stopped dreaming of becoming the one and only American Judaism, and instead narrowed both its own sense of self, and its target demographic. As Sarna notes, "Having lost all hope of becoming Minhag Amerika, the Judaism practiced by all American Jews, Reform responded to the rapidly changing American Jewish situation by becoming increasingly exclusive. During this era, often known as the period of Classical Reform Judaism, Reform positioned itself as the religion of American Jews of German descent...Reform Temples...perceived themselves as citadels of 'American Judaism', the antithesis of the unruly Yiddish-speaking Orthodoxy that Reform Jews associated with their immigrant coreligionists from Eastern Europe."[18]

The Jewish world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was experiencing a period of change far beyond the walls of the burgeoning Reform movement. This period saw a resurgence of interest in traditional practice, as the two

[17] See W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism; American and European Sources until 1948* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965), 42-43.
[18] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 193-194.

million or so Jewish Eastern European immigrants found their place in this new land. The land that they came into, though, was one quite different religiously from the one they had left. In America, there was no authority requiring them to be religious, so religion became much more a matter of personal choice and observance. But of even greater impact was the economic reality of the American Sabbath. As Americans, Jews were able to take part in a much broader segment of economic life than they had been in Europe. Jews became artisans, merchants, and quite frequently, store owners. However, due to blue-laws that forced businesses to be closed on Sundays, Jewish store owners were presented with a harsh decision: take off the Jewish Sabbath, and thus have their stores only open five days a week, or work on the Sabbath and be better equipped to compete with their non-Jewish competitors. It had been in response to this that the Jewish renewal group Keyam Dishmaya was formed in 1879. As Jonathan Sarna points out, "A major goal of Keyam Dishmaya was to 'recreate the ancient Hebrew Sabbath.' Sabbath observance had declined markedly in the post-Civil War years, as surging business pressures combined with stricter Sunday closing laws to magnify the losses experienced by Jews who kept their stores and offices shuttered on Saturday."[19]

This period also was one of great challenge to the Reform movement from within. Though Reform Judaism began ordaining American rabbis at the newly established Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, OH in 1883, it also faced an internal rebellion from the conservative wing of its movement, soon to become the independent Conservative movement. Men involved in this movement, such as the influential Alexander Kohut, rebelled against what they saw as an abandonment of authentic Judaism in the reforms of Reform: "A Reform which seeks to progress without the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition...is a

[19] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 135.

deformity--a skeleton without flesh and sinew, without spirit and heart. It is suicide; and suicide is not reform."[20]

In addition, the Jewish renewal organizations that were finding support among American Jews also provoked a crisis of identify for Reform Judaism. These organizations--frequently headed by women--showed a path of revitalized Judaism that was different from the one put forth by the Reform movement. As Sarna points out, "Reform Judaism maintained an uneasy relationship with all of these proponents of Jewish renewal. This was understandable: For half a century, young progressive American Jews had marched under the Reform banner and had viewed its program as the wave of the future, the only viable direction for Judaism in the New World to follow. Now, unexpectedly, Reform Jewish leaders found this and other long-cherished assumptions of theirs called into question. Indeed, some critics argued that Reform, far from being the solution to the crisis facing American Jews, was actually part of the problem."[21] It is with all of this as a context that Reform Judaism produced the remarkable document that came to be known as the Pittsburgh Platform.

The adoption of the Pittsburgh Platform itself was the cause of much soul-searching and boundary-drawing by the nascent movement. While "the first conference of American Reform rabbis took place in Philadelphia in 1869, in many ways it seemed to continue the German conferences of the middle forties," rather than representing a truly American expression of Reform.[22] The real founding point of American Reform, then, can be traced instead to the meeting of just nine rabbis in Pittsburgh in the fall of 1885. There "their deliberations resulted in the adoption of what came to be known as

[20] Cited in Sarna, *American Judaism*, 147.
[21] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 144
[22] Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 29.

the 'Pittsburgh Platform,' and these principles remained the foundation of the movement for fifty years."[23]

The platform itself represented a new definition of Judaism. This new platform rejected all notions of peoplehood, saying, "We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[24] In addition, the platform moved away from traditionally particularist understandings of Judaism, and instead framed the religion of Judaism as being one particular expression of a universal truth. This is seen in the very first paragraph of the platform, which states, "We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man."[25] In terms of the effect that the Pittsburgh Platform had on Shabbat observance in the Reform movement, no section has been more influential than the third, which directly addresses issues of ritual observance: "Third--We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and to-day we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."[26]

An objection was immediately raised by Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, son of Samuel Hirsch and son-in-law to Dr. David Einhorn. He recognized that with the platform doing

---

[23] Plaut, ed.,*The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 31.

[24] "The Pittsburgh Platform." Section Five. CCAR website <http:..ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=39&pge_id=1606>, accessed 14 Feb. 2011.

[25] The Pittsburgh Platform.

[26] The Pittsburgh Platform.

away with most ritual law and instead focusing on moral law, the place of the holidays--including Shabbat--became unclear at best. He makes this point, saying, "Are not the holidays ceremonial laws, and would we abolish them? Let us embrace the opportunities to declare openly against legal Judaism....what is called ceremonial laws are symbols representing the idea! Symbols die; those that are dead and, therefore, no longer intelligible we abolish; those that are still imbued with life, we, of course, retain...among the latter I class the holidays. As such, I opposed their transfer to Sunday in my own congregation!"[27] In response to this, the term "Mosaic legislation" was substituted for "Mosaic laws," which was seen as more problematic.

Perhaps more important than the individual arguments, though, is that the discussion (recorded in Gunther Plaut's source book *The Growth of Reform Judaism*) makes clear that the shift away from an understanding of Judaism as a people in covenant with their God, and toward a more universalist, non-legalistic religious system in the vein of the Protestant denominations of America was happening with the full self-conscious awareness of the nine rabbis participating in the formulation of the Pittsburgh Platform. These changes solidified not only in a new understanding of Judaism, but also in an entirely new aesthetic of Judaism: "In a Reform Temple, men and women sat together in mixed pews, the men bareheaded and without prayer shawls. Music filled the air, usually from an organ, and often from a mixed choir that included women and sometimes non-Jews as well. The prayer book, at least following the publication of the *Union Prayer Book* in 1895, opened from left to right...and contained only minimal amounts of Hebrew; the bulk of the service was in English. Even on the Sabbath...cigarette and cigar smoke permeated the corridors....Finally, the major service of the week was not held on

[27] Plaut, ed.,*The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 36.

Saturday morning, as among traditional Jews, but rather on Friday night or (less commonly) on Sunday morning, to accommodate worshippers who worked on Saturday."[28]

No issue more encapsulated the varying changes and influences affecting Reform Judaism during this period than that of Shabbat. Unlike laws of ritual purity and of *kashrut* that were explicitly dismissed by Reform Judaism in the Pittsburgh Platform, Shabbat did not cleanly fit into simply the category of meaningless ritual law. However, Shabbat as it had been observed traditionally was not seen as meaningful--or perhaps more importantly, sustainable--within the American context by these early American Reform leaders. It thus became the challenge of Reform Judaism to maintain the integral notion of Shabbat, but to remove it from its legalistic context. The major battleground for this debate, then, became the issue of when the Sabbath should be observed.

Traditionally--and quite clearly within the history of Jewish texts--the Sabbath was to be observed on Saturday, the final day of the week. However the economic realities of the early twentieth century necessitated that Saturday be a day of work for most Jewish men. Max Lilienthal expressed this conundrum as early as 1854, saying, "We are tired of seeing men violating the Sabbath until they have accumulated an independent fortune, and calling themselves Orthodox nevertheless; we are disgusted at seeing men transgressing every religious ceremony in public life, and yet clothing themselves with the halo of sanctification. We wish to see those contradictions solved;

[28] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 194.

we wish to know when religious ceremonies have to yield to the necessities of life, and when they have to be kept at any price."[29]

This issue of when Reform Jews should observe the Sabbath did not begin in the twentieth century, but instead was an issue as far back as the founding years of the the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in the 1870s. In fact, Moritz Loth, the first President of the UAHC, felt so strongly about the need for the Sabbath to remain on Saturday that he described it as being one of the three primary reasons for the importance of forming the Union: "And it shall be a fixed rule that any Rabbi who, by his preaching or acts, advises the abolishment of the Milah, or to observe our Sabbath on Sunday, has forfeited his right to preach before a Jewish congregation, and any congregation employing such a Rabbi shall, for the time being, be deprived of the honor to be a member of the Union of Congregations."[30] While the issue of the Sabbath in the Reform movement--and in particular on what day it should properly be observed--dated back to the late nineteenth century, the issue came to a head in the first few years of the twentieth century when the Central Conference of American Rabbis dedicated a significant portion of time to the issue at its annual conferences, starting in 1902 and continuing through 1906. The issue came to the forefront in 1902 when Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger presented the conference with seven large questions pertaining to the place of Shabbat observance in the Reform movement.[31],[32] Voorsanger began his address to the conference by reiterating the importance of the issue, saying that the issue of Shabbat "presents, in my

[29] Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism*,. 236
[30] Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 27
[31] *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* 12 (1902), 99-147.
[32] See Appendix A

opinion, the greatest issue of our modern religious life."[33] Having stated this, Rabbi Voorsanger continued his initial address by summarizing the sorry state of affairs with the American Sabbath, saying, "Is not the present flagrant contrast between theory and practice the strongest indication that so far as our American Jewish communities are concerned, the historical Sabbath has no more life in it than the prophet's dry bones, before their resurrection?"[34] Though he was seen as a traditionalist by many of his colleagues, Rabbi Voorsanger very much felt that by bringing the issue to the forefront of the CCAR, he was engaging in a sort of triage of the soul of Reform Judaism, and in doing so he helped to reshape the Sabbath for the movement.

The response to Rabbi Voorsanger's provocative talk (and his even more provocative "Seven Questions on the Sabbath") was passionate. While there were many who disagreed with some of the positions that he took, he provided the spark that began the discussion in earnest. He saw his job primarily as not being about finding a solution to the 'Shabbat problem', but instead outlining the issues involved in the Sabbath, and defining the terms of discussion. He pointed out both the importance of the Sabbath, and the challenges that modernity offered to it, saying: "Two distinct principles unite in the institution of the Sabbath: the one, spiritual, and the other physical...One of these two principles is fast become obsolete...in brief, Sabbath rest, so far as its public character is concerned, is nullified by the exigencies of the times, and the public, as well as the domestic celebration of the day, is affected in consequence."

In his address, he frequently pointed out the very real challenges that the economic realities of America presented toward any changes that the CCAR might try to

[33] CCAR Yearbook 12 (1902), 103.
[34] *CCAR Yearbook* 12 (1902), 104.

enforce upon its movement: “Jewish banks and counting houses are open on the Sabbath. Professional men are busy. Artisans pursue their toil, and the lamentable truth is that, even many who theoretically accept the Divine authority of the Sabbath commandment, ignore it practically, and pursue their daily avocation.”[35]

Rabbi Voorsanger also drew attention--with some alarm, it appears--to the changing role of women in the Temple. Whereas historically women’s role within Jewish life had been primarily within the home, this was changing rapidly. Sarna points this out, saying, “The home, the synagogue, and philanthropic social work came increasingly to be seen as part of women’s domain, especially among Reform Jews. As a result, women became significant players in the campaign to revitalize Judaism to meet the needs of a new era.”[36] Voorsanger noted with some concern that, “This may sound ludicrous, but we really cannot tell what may betide in congregations, the men of which are reduced to the condition of mere contributors and business administrators, and where women sustain the burden of maintaining the public celebrations as well as the domestic practices.”[37] Interestingly, Voorsanger has proved to be somewhat prophetic, in that the world of twenty-first century Reform Judaism is a world frequently dominated by women, from our camping system to our rabbinical school.

Finally, Voorsanger described what he saw as the three-pronged problem facing the Sabbath within Reform Judaism: the decline of spiritual authority within the American religious experience, the economic realities facing American Jews (primarily the Sunday Sabbath), and the social issues involved with the redefinition of rest in modern America. These three reasons, along with his concluding remarks in which he

[35] *CCAR Yearbook* 12 (1902) 106.
[36] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 143.
[37] "Yearbook." *Central Conference of American Rabbis* (1902) 106.

refused to give up on the possible resurrection of American Sabbath observance, form the basis for his Seven Questions.

In terms of arguments over what the proper observance of Shabbat should be, there is very little recorded from this period. We have people like Voorsanger who believed in producing a halakhic document to detail the state of Reform observance (or non-observance), but very little in the way of what that observance might consist of. Instead, the primary debate was on whether or not the Sabbath should remain on Saturday, or move instead to the more practical Sunday. As such there were men like Isidore Lewinthal who argued passionately for maintaining the Saturday Sabbath for cultural distinctiveness, above all. He noted, "Christianity has transferred the day of rest to the first day of the week in its effort to create distinctions between Judaism and herself. If we should follow her example now in this instance, we surrender to her the most precious boon bestowed by God on Judaism as our rabbis call the Sabbath, and abolish a landmark of faith which has kept Israel on the road of religious enlightenment in his toilsome and hardship-beset wanderings through ages past."[38]

Those who favored a move to a Sunday Sabbath generally advocated it based on pragmatic grounds. These were men like Hyman G. Enlow, who pointed out the very real truth that Shabbat just wasn't being observed in any real form at the time. He presented this with brutal honesty, saying, ""At present we can hardly teach our children to observe the Sabbath. They may naturally ask, What is the Sabbath? Which is our Sabbath? The day on which our fathers are employed at the offices, stores, factories; on

[38] "Yearbook." *Central Conference of American Rabbis* (1902) 129.

which our mothers do their shipping--is that the Sabbath? A Sabbath without rest is no Sabbath."[39]

Then there were men such as Louis Wolsey, who combined pragmatism with a true belief in one of the great Reform ideals of the age: reason. He summarized his point, saying, "My whole position then, is this: if Sabbath means rest, let us have that Sabbath on Sunday for that is the only day when modern business conditions will allow a rest. Secondly, if you wish to be logical in your Judaism; if you wish to consult your reason in so far as the whole progressive tendency of this Conference is vested in its being logical--you must, you should accept the Sunday Sabbath."[40]

Though the issue of the Sabbath and of Sabbath observance come up again at the next few CCAR conferences, never again during this period was Shabbat observance brought so much to the forefront. This is due to a number of factors, but perhaps none more so than the reality that Reform Temples soon found the answer to the Shabbat problem with late Friday night services, and Sunday morning services. This culture of Friday night being the Shabbat experience for Reform Jews has had a lasting impact until today, when Friday night continues to be the most well attended service in many Reform Temples.

This period of time, then, marked the true beginning of denominational Reform Judaism in America: a Judaism that was not Minhag America, but instead an institutionalized movement, offering a different image of what religion could be. This was a religion of rationalism, and as such much ritual was discarded. However, this was

[39] "Yearbook." *Central Conference of American Rabbis* (1902) 132.
[40] "Yearbook." *Central Conference of American Rabbis* (1902) 135.

also a religion practiced by people who were consciously moving away from traditional practice, so the attention was on what should be changed, not what should remain.

As such, Shabbat became something new during this period: instead of a twenty-five hour period governed by a series of laws and customs revolving around thirty-nine categories of *malachah*, Shabbat was a day of rest from the modern conception of work. The focus during this period--as can be seen in the wider American culture of the time--was on collectivism rather than individuality. As such the Shabbat issues that most concerned the rabbis of this time were collective issues: what day the Sabbath should be held, when the main service should be, how the rituals should be observed at the Temple. But there were those during this time who acknowledged that if a restoration of Sabbath observance was to take place, it had to happen not at the synagogue, but instead in the home. This argument was put forward by Joseph Herz, when he argued that the restoration of the Sabbath should begin with the very group that was coming more and more to prominence inside the Reform Jewish world: women. Herz made this case in response to Dr. Voorsanger at the 1902 CCAR conference, saying, "There is, perhaps, no minister who has not, at some time or other, appealed to the female members of his congregations to sanctify the Sabbath within their homes. This appeal would be of greater weight were the Central Conference of American Rabbis to second the appeal. The Kiddush service within the home would, I think, be one of the means to sanctify the Sabbath. The consequence would be a more general attendance at the places of worship."[41]

Herz and Wolff Willner, who also spoke in response to Voorsanger, represent the transitional move in Reform that was taking place during this period, from a religion of

[41] CCAR Yearbook 12 (1902) 142.

rationalism to a religion that had room for positive commandments and ritual. Rabbi Wilner put this beautifully in his response to Voorsanger, saying, "The Sabbath never was a day of worship purely, it was a day of rest with incidental worship. I am perfectly frank with my people and tell them that attendance in synagogue is not absolutely necessary, if they but pray at home--but since they do not do so, it is better for them to come...Rest must be sacred. Not in the synagogue, but in the homes was the real sanctification, the kiddush of the Sabbath."[42]

Whereas the first generation of truly American Reform Judaism had rejected ritual while distinguishing itself as a rationalist religion, the next generation of Reform thought was directed to what positive commandments Reform Jews should observe. In the period of classical Reform, Shabbat was about sanctification manifested through Temple worship. For the next generation of Reform thought, Shabbat would be not just about sanctification, but also about rest; not just about the Temple, but also about the home.

[42] CCAR Yearbook 12 (1902) 146-147.

Chapter 3: The Interwar Period

The time between the two world wars marked a period of growing anxiety and doubt within the American Jewish community. Restrictions on Jewish immigration, increasing antisemitism in America, and war in Europe were the dominant factors of Jewish life early in the interwar period. As time progressed, antisemitism and nativist sentiments within America only continued to grow as war turned to depression, and then depression to war once again. All of these events had a profound impact on the nature of Reform Judaism, with more and more calls emerging for a return to a more traditional observance and a more traditional mode of worship. This move away from Classical Reform Judaism and toward a more ritually rich observance can be witnessed clearly in the difference between the way that Shabbat observance was conceptualized at the beginning of this period and its conceptualization in the years immediately preceding World War II and the Holocaust.

If the time from the late nineteenth century until World War I can be understood as the era of Classical Reform Judaism, the interwar period was very much dominated by the rapid growth of Conservative Judaism. In part due to the massive influx of more traditionally-minded Jews from Eastern Europe, and in part due to the rising sense of Jewish peoplehood, Conservative Judaism soon became the largest movement in American Jewish life. This change first became obvious in regard to the Jewish soldiers who served in World War I. As Sarna says, "The fact that the 'preponderating group of soldiers' chose to attend Conservative services--a mixture of the traditional Hebrew liturgy, selected English readings, and an English-language sermon--proved...to be a

harbinger of the future. For the next fifty years, thanks largely to Americanizing East European Jews and their children, Conservative Judaism would grow faster than any other American Jewish religious movement."[43]

It wasn't just American Jewry that was experiencing changes during this time, however. Throughout the world, revolution was in the air, nowhere as clearly as the Bolshevik revolution in Russia: a movement dominated in part by Jewish intellectuals. These social revolutions in Eastern Europe fed growing American nativism and xenophobia, which often took the form of antisemitism. As "the president of the CCAR gravely reported [within three years following the close of the war], 'there was perhaps more antisemitic literature published and distributed in the United States than in any previous period of its history'."[44] This growing antisemitic sentiment was not restricted to the old media of print, however. Men like the virulently antisemitic Father Charles Coughlin would, in the 1930's, come to dominate the airwaves of American radio. This, in addition to the emergence of Adolf Hitler in Germany, gave American Jews legitimate reason to worry.

In addition to the wars abroad, rapid social change was also occurring in America proper. This was the time of the suffragettes, of prohibition, and of drastic limitations put in place on immigration to America. As Sarna points out, "Prohibition, like nativism and antisemitism, tapped into deeply rooted antimodernist trends in American life; it attempted to turn back the cultural clock so as to restore the nation to its earlier, pre-mass-immigration state of 'purity'."[45]

---

[43] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004),213.
[44] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 217.
[45] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 218.

This interwar period--a period in many ways dominated in the Jewish world by Conservative Judaism--also marked a turning point in Conservative Judaism. In particular, the sociological understanding of Judaism as a civilization espoused by Mordecai Kaplan rocked the American Jewish world across denominational lines. Kaplan argued that the synagogue model was incomplete, and that Judaism needed a restoration of the cultural components of the faith. Kaplan, though, was really only responding to a growing secularization among American Jews. As Sarna points out, "The very act of living in close proximity to other Jews gave a Jewish 'feel' to the neighborhood. The Sabbath and holidays that Orthodox neighbors scrupulously maintained; the synagogues calling out for men to complete the minyan required before public prayers could begin; the kosher butcher, the Hebrew bookstore, the candy store...these and countless other cues signaled to inhabitants that theirs was a Jewish community. Simply by living there they experienced, absorbed, and in many ways internalized that Jewishness. Even if they neither practiced it nor trained their children in its precepts, they assumed that it was well-nigh inescapable--as inescapable as the neighborhood atmosphere itself."[46]

As the Roaring 20s gave way to the Great Depression, antisemitism and xenophobia only continued to grow in America. Reform Judaism did not respond to this threat by shrinking back, but instead came out strongly and vocally in favor of minorities and the rights of the individual. In its Columbus Platform of 1937, the movement made this clear in a section on Social Justice, saying:

> Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international

[46] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 223.

> affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safeguarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness, and unemployment.[47]

In addition to the new focus on social justice, this new platform--the first major revamping of the Reform platform since the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885--introduced a number of major changes that would shape the movement for the coming generation: a more Zionist position on a state in Israel, evolving notions of Jewish peoplehood, and calls for a return to a Judaism that extended beyond the limits of the ethical laws, and into the realm of the ritual.

After the surge of interest in defining Shabbat within the Reform movement that occurred at the 1902-3 CCAR conferences, there was a lull in Shabbat-related discourse in the movement. This changed in 1913 when Rabbi Samuel Schulman, the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, used a significant portion of his address at that year's conference in Atlantic City to discuss the issue of Shabbat observance. His main focus throughout the address was not on what observance should be, per se, but instead on reclaiming a Saturday Sabbath from the clutches of the American system of law. This legal system at the time mandated that many businesses be closed on Sundays in observance of the Christian Sabbath--a holiday which had come to have special status

[47] "The Columbus Platform." Section Seven. CCAR website http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=40&pge_prg_id=4687&pge_id+1656, accessed 14 Feb. 2011.

in the United States. He ultimately moved to further this goal by calling for the Committee on Church and State to address the Shabbat issue, saying, "The object of such a committee should be to create interest in various parts of the country for the Sabbath idea, to bring home to men's minds the right of the Jew to observe his own Sabbath without molestation and without the questioning of his Americanism."[48]

Rabbi Schulman began his talk by describing what he saw as the fatal flaw in the previous attempts that the movement had made to increase Shabbat observance. He began, "We have been deploring the constant destruction of our Jewish Sabbath. Many Conferences have attempted to wrestle with this problem, and yet we have not solved it, because in my opinion we have not been clear enough in thought on the question and bold enough in action...developing itself in a free land where there is absolute separation of Church and State."[49] This is a noticeable change from the discourse over the Sabbath that dominated the Reform movement in the previous generation. Then, the issue had been deciding whether Shabbat should be moved to Sunday in order to accommodate the American Sabbath. Now, the issue being raised was how to make America accommodate the Jewish Sabbath. This is a profound change in thinking, and shows a movement and a people more comfortable in their own country.

Schulman also begins the discussion of expanding Shabbat beyond the borders of the synagogue. For a generation of Reform Judaism, the focus of the Sabbath had been worship; Schulman begins the process of change that would continue up through World War II. He makes this clear in his address when he combines pragmatism with change, observing that, "If [the American Jew] cannot observe it perfectly, he must observe it to

[48] CCAR Yearbook 23 (1913), 211.

[49] CCAR Yearbook 23 (1913), 210.

the best of his ability. Even an hour of worship on that day is better than nothing. Have we been brave enough on this matter? I answer no! On the one hand, we have weakened allegiance to it. On the other hand we have not fought sufficiently for our rights as a religious minority in this country. We have a positive message to the world on the Sabbath--its humanitarian side."[50]

Rabbi Schulman's address shows clearly that Reform Judaism--and its leaders--had internalized their American identities and had begun to expect to be treated as equal citizens. This can be seen in a comment at the 1914 CCAR convention in Detroit, just weeks before the outbreak of World War I. Here, Rabbi Schulman again places the issue of the Jewish Sabbath in political terms, saying, "As far as this subject falls within the province of the Committee on Church and State, it can mean only the securing of the rights of a minority to observe the day of rest dictated by religious convictions; in other words, if a Jew observes his seventh-day Sabbath strictly by abstaining from gainful occupation on that day, he should not be forced by the law of the state to observe the Sunday also."[51]

This emerging sense of Americanism is particularly noteworthy in that it came just as antisemitism began to increase in America. But rather than responding by retreating back into their ghettos, American Reform Judaism responded in the most American way of all: standing up for their rights. This focus on Jewish rights, on Jewish observance, and on the Sabbath would all unfortunately fade away over the course of the next half decade, as World War I began to dominate the thoughts of most Americans.

---

[50] CCAR Yearbook 23 (1913), 211.

[51] CCAR Yearbook 24 (1914), 133-134 .

The next decade--the twenties--was a time of reduced focus on the Sabbath within Reform Judaism. Instead, the monumental events of the day, from the war to the depression, took up the energy of most Jews and of the movement as a whole. We see occasional calls for a renewal of creativity in regard to the Sabbath, such as when Beryl Cohon called for a renewed focus on innovation, saying, "The Reform Synagogue experimented with a Sunday service, for instance; this particular experiment has failed. But because an experiment has failed is no warrant for tearing down the laboratory."[52]

Whereas the Sunday service had lost traction as the primary worship-service of the week by this point in time, the late Friday evening service was just coming to prominence. Rabbi Jacob Schwartz took up the issue of the late Friday service, arguing that "in the process of adjusting Sabbath worship and observance to the conditions of modern life, modifications have taken place which constitute a definite contribution to Reform Jewish practice. Economic considerations have made Sabbath rest impracticable for countless thousands of Jews. As a result, the Sabbath morning service...is poorly attended in many congregations which still retain it....The late Friday evening service seems to afford the best opportunity for worship in harmony with the traditional spirit of the Sabbath."[53] Rabbi Schwartz's point soon became the norm, as the late Friday evening service became the dominant worship-service within the Reform context through the end of the twentieth-century.

---

[52] Beryl D. Cohon, "Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism as Seen by a Reform Rabbi", in Abraham J. Feldman, ed., *Reform Judaism Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1949), 132.

[53] Jacob D. Schwartz, *Reform Judaism Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni.* Ed. Abraham J. Feldman. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1949) 223-224.

Cohon's call for a renewed Reform Judaism did not exist in a vacuum, however. Reform was constantly being challenged by the rapidly growing Conservative movement, frequently populated by the children of Eastern European immigrants. This relationship between the movements, though, frequently led to greater innovation for both Reform and Conservative Judaism. Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, in an essay for Hebrew Union College, succinctly shows both the success and the failure of Reform Judaism up to that point, saying, "We have influenced the form and the ritual of Conservative and Orthodox congregations. But we know in our hearts that we have not succeeded in making American Jews pious, worshipful, happy, or prophetic."[54] This was the double-edged sword that Reform Judaism was: in allowing Jews to leave observance behind, they had also left behind something essential to Jewish continuity. Rabbi Liebman says this clearly, commentating that "our rationalistic Reform pioneers, under the spell of Kant and Hegel, failed to appreciate the enormous role of emotion, and its expression in ritual and ceremony, in the group life of the Jew."[55] This move away from pure rationalism, as Rabbi Liebman points out in his reference to Kant and Hegel, went along with a general loss of faith in the power of rationalism that took place among intellectuals throughout the world in the wake of the First World War. But for Reform Judaism, this meant that room was once again being made for the non-rational, with a move towards a practice that dictated that "they should observe in the home and synagogue certain Sabbath and festival rituals."[56]

While the issue of Sabbath observance was taken up occasionally during the interwar years, after the CCAR convention discussions in 1913 and 1914, Shabbat is not

[54] Joshua Loth Liebman, "New Trends in Reform Jewish Thought," in Feldman, ed., *Reform Judaism*, 58.
[55] Liebman, *Reform Judaism* , 59.
[56] Liebman, *Reform Judaism* , 62.

mentioned again until 1937. In his address before the committee that year, Israel Harburg mentions this, saying, "It is no wonder that since the beginning of the World War we do not find a single discussion on the floor of the Conference regarding Sabbath Observance In short for almost a quarter of a century, the CCAR had nothing new to say regarding that very problem which has been considered throughout our history as the very basis not only of our synagogue life but of the entire structure of Jewish life everywhere."[57] This comment is the beginning of a scathing critique that Harburg offers of American Jewry in general, and Reform Judaism in particular. He begins by stating the importance of the issue, saying that, "The factors that make for the laxity in Sabbath observance, both within and without the ranks of the Synagogue, are in the main well known to all of us. They were already presented to our Conference thirty-five years ago by Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger...Except the problem now is far more aggravating than it was then...I believe it would be superfluous to present statistical evidence to the effect that the Sabbath institution is today honored among us more by its breach that by its observance."[58]

Harburg however makes a concerted effort to concentrate on solutions to the Sabbath dilemma, rather than just pointing out the flaws in current practice. His main point--and one that he repeats frequently in a number of different ways--is that the Sabbath does not exist primarily in the Synagogue. Rather, he argues, its proper place is in the home, and the move to the Synagogue as the primary place of Shabbat observance was a mistake. He says, "Even now, whenever the discussion of the Sabbath problem is raised in our midst, it is usually with regard to attendance at Temple services, as if the

[57] CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937), 327.
[58] CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937), 324-325.

two were interchangeable or co-extensive."[59] He continues his argument, eventually calling for a return to a sense of commandedness, criticizing his predecessors, saying, "It was a great fallacy on the part of our early liberal leaders when they spoke of all mizwot, outside of those pertaining to human relationships, as being customs, traditions, rituals and ceremonies, none of which imply the imperative connotation of the word mizwot...but in our excessive zeal to emphasize the universalitistic aspect of Judaism, we somehow failed to stress the observance of mizwot which made it possible for this universalitistic message to survive against all odds."[60] This charge represents a significant shift in Reform thinking, from a rationalistic view of religion as being essentially concerned with ethical behavior to a perspective that viewed a return to law and commandments as being essential. This change--while not representative of the whole of the Reform movement--absolutely was influenced by the problem of rationalism after the first World War, and also by the massive growth of Conservative Judaism.

All of this came to its dramatic peak in the adoption of the Columbus Platform, the first significant attempt at a unified statement of Reform belief since the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885. Rather than the Pittsburgh Platform's focus on Judaism as an ethical, rational religion, the Columbus Platform made room for ritual--and made room for a ritually observed Sabbath. It did this, saying, "Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath."[61]

This increased room for ritual can also be seen in the 1940 revision of *The Union Prayer Book*. The first official edition of the *Union Prayer Book* (1895) contained only a simple Kiddush for Shabbat, with no mention made of ritual or of other home

[59] CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937), 327.
[60] CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 334-335.
[61] "The Columbus Platform.". *CCAR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2011.

observance.[62] However, the 1918 revision contained an expanded liturgy, with a short discussion of ritual observances.[63] It was in the 1940 Newly Revised Edition, however, that dramatic changes were made. Here, there were descriptions given for the Friday night evening home ritual. Included was a Kiddush, but also the prayer over bread (motzi), and paragraph discussing how these rituals were to be carried out. This marks a remarkable change in the Reform movement, as it perceived its own sense of ritual obligation and observance.[64]

In the aftermath of the First World War, the world had shifted. This shift was felt dramatically within the Reform movement. Reform Judaism felt free to dream up its own vision of religion, unencumbered by the need to be everything to everyone. Though facing challenges from the war to the great depression to the rise of Conservative Judaism, the Reform movement continued to remake itself, to continue the process *of* 'reform'.

Nowhere is this clearer than with the issue of Sabbath observance. Starting from a rationalist perspective where Sabbath was almost entirely about worship, and the great issue was on what day the Sabbath should be observed, the Reform movement began to change. It moved to a place of confidence that can be seen in the years leading up to World War I, where Reform Judaism stopped being concerned with fitting into America, and instead began to contemplate how America could make room for them. Finally, as the Second World War loomed, the Reform movement began to reclaim ritual, to reclaim

---

[62] *The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship,* vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1895), 290-291.
[63] *Union Prayer Book,* vol. 1revised edition (Cincinnati: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1918), 344-348.
[64] *Union Prayer Book,* vol.1, newly revised edition (Cincinnati: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1940), 375.

observance, and in doing so it would set the stage for the generation that was to come: the generation of suburban Jewry.

Chapter 4: The Suburbs after the Shoah

The midpoint of the twentieth century was a moment of startling extremes for American Jews. On the one hand, Jews were experiencing increasing acceptance in America, they were seeing financial and social success that they had previously been unable to dream of, and the nascent state of Israel was a source of pride for many Americans. Yet, at the same time, the full horrors of the Holocaust were just beginning to be known, and Reform Judaism was struggling with the destruction of the liberal dream that the ramifications of the Holocaust brought.

The period of the 1950s through the early 1970s was one of massive growth in the Jewish world. Jews became part of the mainstream in theater, literature, baseball and Hollywood, and in fact came to dominate many of these fields.[65] For Reform Judaism, this was a period of remarkable growth, and a continuation of the trend that had been happening since the early twentieth century: a return to more traditional practice and a more traditional-looking Judaism. This can be seen in prayerbooks, in Sunday Schools, in attendance at synagogues, and in a resurgence of interest in rituals and observances associated with Shabbat. While "American Judaism had actually been gaining strength since the late 1930s, partly, we have seen, as a form of spiritual resistance to Nazism and antisemitism," this turned out to be only the beginning. Instead, the growth of American Judaism that began in the 1930s would turn out to only be the seed that grew into the golden age of American Jewry.

[65] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004), 273.

The 1950s in America was in many ways a golden period in American history. America had come out of the depression of the 30s and World War II as a world superpower, both economically and militarily. At home, America was experiencing a post-war economic boom, and was soon to feel the effects of the post-war baby-boom as well. This combination of economic and demographic growth meant that Americans both had the cash and the need to move out of the cities and into the rapidly growing suburbs. Jews during this period looked much like their gentile neighbors, and "between 1945 and 1965, about a third of all American Jews left the big cities and established themselves in suburbs."[66]

This move away from the cities and into the suburbs had greater meaning to American Jews than just having more space and having a private residence. "In addition, the suburban style of life became, especially for erstwhile religious outsiders like Jews and Catholics, a 'symbol of Americanization', a sign of 'acceptance in the culture of the United States'."[67] American Jews, for the first time en masse, were feeling that they had become part of the very fabric of America. The term 'Judeo-Christian' began to gain prominence, and "as antisemitism declined during the postwar decades, the religion of American Jews gained widespread recognition as America's 'third faith' alongside Protestantism and Catholicism."[68] All of these things meant that America Jews began to feel more comfortable both in their American identities and in their Jewish identities. Whereas previous generations may have felt a much stronger pressure to assimilate, this generation of American Jews felt more welcomed into America as they were, and as such many liberal Jews felt more comfortable exploring their Jewish identities. The converse

[66] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 282.
[67] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 283.
[68] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 275.

of this was also true: whereas Reform Jews felt accepted as Americans, and thus free to explore their Judaism, many Orthodox Jews began to feel more secure in their American identities, and as such wanted a Judaism that better reflected their new dual-identities. For instance, "a widely publicized 1952 study found that 'only twenty-three percent of the children of the Orthodox intend to remain Orthodox; a full half plan to turn Conservative'."[69]

This growth in American Jews' confidence in their American identities can be seen beyond the bounds of theology, however, and quite concretely in terms of the buildings that they erected. "The postwar decades witnessed the greatest synagogue-building boom in all of American Jewish history. Between 1945 and 1965, well over one thousand synagogues and temples were built or rebuilt, most of them...in suburbia."[70] This geographic move to the suburbs set the stage for the Judaism that American Jews would experience for the next half century. The other great change that went along with the move out of the suburbs was the increasing share of the available resources which American Jewish congregations began to devote to children. "Between 1948 and 1958 the number of children attending Jewish schools more than doubled, jumping from 239,398 to 553,600."[71] This remarkable growth in religious school attendance went along with a general shift in religious attendance away from the realm of men, as had been traditional in Judaism, and toward children. This change in focus--both in terms of time and in terms of investment of capital--would come to define Judaism for the next half century.

[69] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 278.
[70] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 279.
[71] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 279.

In terms of movements within American Judaism, this was a period of remarkable growth for the liberal denominations. While Reform Judaism more than doubled in size, experiencing a major boom, undoubtedly the trend that had begun in the inter-war periods continued: this was the age of Conservative Judaism. As Sarna says, "Reform Judaism also grew substantially during this period, more than doubling the number of its congregations between 1943 and 1964 and more than tripling its family memberships. But Conservative Judaism grew still faster, capturing the allegiance of a clear plurality of America's Jews and becoming the largest of the Jewish religious movements."[72]

The rise of Conservative Judaism was prompted both by a feeling that Orthodox Judaism was incompatible with the American identities that many Jews were adopting, and a perception that Reform Judaism was too radical in its reformations. This attitude about Reform Judaism took root within the movement itself, as well, and caused a reevaluation of its values and its approaches to rituals and to traditional Jewish thought. "Throughout suburbia and in many East and West Coast cities as well, Reform Judaism displayed new interest in the Hebrew language, Zionism, the new state of Israel, and 'ceremonials'."[73] While Judaism within the walls of the synagogue may have been turning to a more traditional style, Jews outside of the synagogue were becoming more and more politically active, and adopting many causes outside of the specific realm of Jewish issues. Jews--including many rabbis--were at the forefront of the civil rights movement, of the women's liberation movement, and later on in this period, in the protests against the Vietnam war. All of these things--a more traditional liberal Judaism and a more universalistic American Jewish population--shows a Jewish community more

[72] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 284.
[73] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 288.

at ease in its own skin and in its own country than had ever been seen previously in America.

Shabbat for most American Jews in the early 1950s had stopped being a day observed according to *halakhah*. This change did not occur in a vacuum, however, as this lack of Shabbat observance went along with a general decline in routine observances altogether. Instead, "occasional practices, like the lighting of candles on Hanukkah and the celebration of the Passover seder did find growing numbers of adherents, and the High Holidays continued to be widely maintained, but observance of the dietary laws declined markedly, and most Sabbath restrictions, except for the kindling of candles on Friday night, were observed in the breach."[74]

Perhaps the most significant change in the thinking about Shabbat that occurred for the Reform movement in the 1950s-1960s, however, did not happen in the Reform movement at all. Instead, "In 1950, the Rabbinical Assembly's newly reorganized Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, noting 'that the Sabbath observers among our people constitute but a tiny minority and a dwindling minority at that,' and concerned that 'the number of people who find themselves living in widely scattered suburbs is increasing,' issued by a majority vote an enactment declaring that: 'Where a family resides beyond reasonable walking distance from the synagogue, the use of a motor vehicle for the purpose of synagogue attendance shall in no ways be construed as a violation of the Sabbath but, on the contrary, such attendance shall be deemed an expression of loyalty to our faith."[75] This, along with another ruling the same year which

[74] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 278.
[75] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 284-285.

allowed Conservative Jews to watch television, listen to the radio, and turn lights on and off, marked a radical change within the Conservative movement. Whereas prior to these rulings, it was often difficult to distinguish in practice the differences between Modern Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism, following this ruling the lines between the movements became much clearer: there was Orthodoxy, consisting of all of the various Orthodox movements (Modern Orthodox, Charedi, Chasidic, etc...), and there was liberal Judaism, consisting of Reform, Conservative, and the nascent Reconstructionist movements.

These rulings by the Conservative movement may not have changed the behavior of many Conservative Jews, but they did have the effect of bringing Conservative thought closer to what actual observance of American Jews looked like, and as such proved to be a strong selling point for Conservative Judaism. The Reform movement, however, was also beginning a process of reformation of its stands on Jewish law, though frequently in the opposite direction from Conservative Judaism. Whereas previously Reform Judaism had a number of broad rulings, and a number of important rabbis who had given their opinions on the matter of Shabbat observance, the 1950s saw the rise of formal responsa within the movement.

In 1952 the committee in charge of issuing responsa took up the issue of Shabbat observance in a major way. In an opinion written by Rabbi Israel Bettan, a number of questions that had come in from various Reform rabbis regarding Sabbath observance were collected, and an attempt made to give a coherent response. The image of Sabbath that arises from this responsum marks an important moment in the formation of Reform conceptions of Jewish law. Namely, the Sabbath, which had been removed from its

legalistic framework by previous generations of Reform rabbis, was now being once again framed within the bounds of Jewish law. Much in the same way that the Conservative movement had allowed driving to synogogue on Shabbat as a way of taking reality and encompassing it within the bounds of its conception of Jewish law, the Reform movement was now attempting to do the same things.

The questions that Rabbi Bettan collected ranged from whether or not it was appropriate for Temples to hold Friday night dances to compete with the school dances that were being held then, to issues of whether a rabbi should participate in a civil project (flag raising, a welcoming to the city of a distinguished visitor, etc.) on the Sabbath. The rulings sketched an image of the Sabbath that was at the same time both a return to tradition and an embrace of the freedoms offered through Jewish acceptance into the fabric of American culture. For instance, it was ruled that, "One may attend any kind of meeting the purpose of which is to deal with some pressing communal problem. The law permits both the pledging of funds for the care of the poor and the holding of special convocations in the synagogue for that purpose."[76] This ruling is remarkable, as it attempts to bring Reform Judaism and Reform Jewish practice--at least theoretically--into the realm of Jewish law--a realm to which it had all but abandoned itself in the previous few generations.

There is also a principle that appears within this responsum that seems to follow in the spirit of the traditional idea that any *minhag* which has been followed for a long enough time has the force of *halakhah*. This can be seen in the ruling that, "likewise, in the light of this Rabbinic principle, it is quite obvious that one may join on the Sabbath

[76] Walter Jacob. *American Reform Responsa: Collected Responsa of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1889-1983*. (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis), 1983. 114-115.

any assembly of men who have been brought together in response to some public good--provided, of course, that there is nothing that conflicts with such participation, as, for instance, the call to public worship, or (in the case of those who abstain from any kind of travel on that day) the forced use of public or private conveyance."[77] Thus, Rabbi Bettan seems to be implying that if one does follow a more traditional observance, then the leniencies allowed within his ruling do not apply. Instead, his leniencies simply give positive permission to those who are already engaging in such actions.

However, the most telling moment in the responsum comes at the end, when Rabbi Bettan attempts to draw a broad theology of practice for Reform Jews, saying that "the principle that fences must be built around the law, which has led to the enactment of countless precautionary regulations, is a principle that we today must boldly reject in the interest of a saner observance of the Sabbath. Instead, we should reaffirm and employ as our constant guide the more important and fruitful Rabbinic principle: That the Sabbath has been placed in our control, and that we are not under the control of the Sabbath (Yoma 85b)."[78] This rejection of the notion of fences around the Torah is nothing new for the Reform movement, and yet what is remarkable about it is the motivation behind it: Rabbi Bettan is clearly trying to not just tear down fences because they are no longer relevant, but to instead create a new, coherent body of Jewish law for a modern age. He summarizes his argument in full in his conclusion, saying that, "But we shall not seek, in the name of Judaism, to deny men the freedom to perform such necessary acts and to engage in such additional delights as they have *learned to associate with their periods of rest.* In an age like ours, when we have come to view sports and games of all sorts as

[77] Walter, *American Reform Responsa*, 116.
[78] Walter, *American Reform Responsa*, 117.

proper forms of relaxation on rest days; to hark back to the puritanical rigors of the Rabbinic Sabbath is to call in question the relevancy of religion to modern life."[79]

While there were additional moves toward a more revitalized Sabbath within the Reform movement, the previously mentioned responsum was the high-point of the 1950s in terms of dealing with the Sabbath issue. However, the broader issue of Jewish law within the Reform movement, and the motivations behind it, continued to develop throughout these two decades. For instance, in a responsum offered by Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof in 1960 regarding the Sabbath and whether it was permissible for the congregation to hold non-Sabbath related meetings at the Temple on the Sabbath, Freehof both expanded Reform law, and distanced it from its traditional bearings. He decided that the meeting should not occur, nonetheless, "It does not always follow that a Reform congregation is in everything less strict than the Orthodox. Reform congregations are not governed by the strict details of the law, but they may sometimes be considerate of the general feeling of the community, even where the law would permit a certain action."[80]

In addition to the formal responsa offered by the movement, the move toward a more ritually diverse home Sabbath observance can be seen in the publication of the *Union Home Prayer Book*. This volume, published originally in 1951, includes a detailed section dealing with the home rituals associated with the Sabbath evening meal. Here, in an almost identical form to that which is found in the *Union Prayer Book*, newly revised, there are details included in terms of how the table should be laid out (festively), the readings that should be done (including an English translation of *Eishet Chayil*), and a

[79] Walter, *American Reform Responsa*, 117.
[80] Solomon Bennett Freehof, *Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1960), 49.

full Kiddush. All of these components show a Reform movement much more comfortable with ritual and with more traditional observance than ever before.

As the 1950s wound to a close, tides began to rise in Reform Judaism that called for even more ritual--tides that would only increase in the 1970s and beyond. As both an expression of and a response to this, Frederick Doppelt and David Polish published their work *A Guide for Reform Jews* in 1957. While there is not a huge change in terms of what the movement was advising, this does mark a turning point for the movement in that Doppelt and Polish were attempting to produce a work that would advise a Reform Jew on how to observe commandments positively, as well as articulating a number of prohibitions that the observant Reform Jew should avoid.

They begin the section on Shabbat by detailing what observance should be in theory: "The observance of Shabbat involves more than abstaining from work. This observance should be planned each week to include positive acts which help us to experience, as did our fathers, the sanctity of this day…"[81] Positive commandments that they recommend include the lighting of Shabbat candles, the recitation of *kiddush* over the wine, and grace after eating. In addition, they hold that an observant Reform Jew must also attend Friday and Sabbath morning services, saying that "this is part of his responsibility for the preservation of the Shabbat which is one of the bases for the preservation of Judaism."[82]

Whereas in the 1970s and beyond the focus on the Sabbath in much of Reform literature is around the home, for Doppelt and Polish, the focus is very much still the synagogue. They make this clear, saying, "Attendance at social functions on Friday

[81] Frederic A. Doppelt and David Polish, *A Guide for Reform Jews* (New York: Bloch Publishing House, 1957), 97.
[82] Doppelt and Polish, *A Guide for Reform Jews*, 98.

evening by individuals or groups who absent themselves from services is a desecration of the Shabbat and harmful to Judaism...By its very nature, the observance of the Shabbat centers around…the Synagogue."[83] This is not to say, however, that Doppelt and Polish didn't hold that home observance was important. In addition to the Friday night home liturgy previously mentioned, they also advise that *zemirot* should be sung at family meals, *havdalah* should be made at the end of the Sabbath, and, "at some time during the Shabbat, the entire family should gather for reading and discussion of the weekly Scriptural portion."[84]

As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, American Judaism began to change radically once again. "Whereas during the 1950s and 1960s universal causes like world peace, civil rights, interfaith relations, and opposition to the war in Vietnam dominated the American Jewish agenda, subsequent decades saw greater emphasis on issues of particularistic Jewish concerns."[85] This change continued the progression that had already begun of Reform Judaism in particular returning to a more traditional view of Judaism and of Jewish law. While it is easy to look at the changes that have occurred since the 1970s and see that period alone as the period of return to ritual, the seeds of that change had occurred in the post-war period, as American Jews finally felt comfortable in their American skin.

[83] Doppelt and Polish, *A Guide for Reform Jews*, 98.
[84] Doppelt and Polish, *A Guide for Reform Jews*, 98-99.
[85] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 307.

Chapter 5: The Gates of Change

The period of the 1970s through the 1990s in American history was a time of radical social change, both for Jews and for the greater American public. This was when the civil rights movement turned into the black liberation movement, when the defining feature of the Vietnam war in American discourse was the vocal opposition to it, and when women began--for the first time--to have an equal say in the public sphere. This atmosphere of change and upheaval extended beyond the secular world, and directly influenced the atmosphere of Judaism in American society.

Like the generations of Reform Jews that came before, for the Reform Jews of the 1970s, "their aim was to re-create Judaism in their own generation's image."[86] For this generation, the 'reform' in Reform Judaism was not an adjective, describing a set religious doctrine. Instead, 'reform' was a process, and one that was ongoing. These changes, though, did not happen without some controversy. "Dissident Reform Jews criticized this return to ritual and tradition as an abandonment of Reform Judaism's central message and teachings and a 'surrender to Orthodoxy'. Leaders, however, recognized that Reform was becoming more diverse: embodying and even engendering pluralism and opening itself to liberal Jews of every sort."[87] Reform Judaism was no longer one overriding religious dogma, but instead was in the process of becoming a 'big-tent' for many different shades of liberal Judaism. This change was a radical one, and only one of many difficult transitions that American Judaism was going through.

---

[86] Jonathan Sarna, American Judaism: A History (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004), 320.
[87] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 325.

For many of the leaders of this generation, there was as much of a generation gap in their Judaism as there was in the broader culture. This can be seen clearly in the type of rabbis that congregations chose to hire. As Sarna observes, "Many a fiery rabbinic-prophet who battled publicly for justice and righteousness was succeeded, upon retirement, by a more modest and congenial rabbinic-pastor, the embodiment of personal and religious values that congregants sought to emulate in their private lives."[88]

The influence of the changing landscape of America can be seen dramatically in the Jewish world in the rise of the *havurah* movement. This movement started out as an alternative to traditional Jewish congregational life. Carrying with it the spirit of independence from institutional organization that was an integral element of the 1970s cultural changes, these *havurot* (plural of *havurah*) were informal groups of Jews who would gather together for their own meetings. Sometimes these sessions were for communal prayer, but just as often they were for social justice issues or for Jewish study. As time went on, these groups eventually found their way into traditional congregations. As Sarna points out, "But the havurah movement's countercultural ideals, counteraesthetic values, and relaxed decorum lived on. In moderated form, they became part of mainstream Judaism, which as a result became more informal, more focused on promoting fellowship and community among members, and more open to discussion-based learning, group singing, and participatory prayer."[89]

Among the most influential and definitive works of the period came out of the *havurah* movement was *The Jewish Catalog*. Based on *The Whole Earth Catalog* that was a product of the hippie movement, *The Jewish Catalog* attempted to bring old rituals

[88] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 324.
[89] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 321.

back to life with new meaning, and provided a guidebook to Jews throughout the English-speaking world who were interested in practicing a meaningful, authentically Jewish spiritual life outside the bounds of the traditional congregation. This same reclamation of tradition that was at the core of the *havurah* movement and *The Jewish Catalog* was also very much influencing Reform Judaism.

Whereas the previous generations of Reform Jews had frequently rejected traditional practice as being old fashioned and out of touch with the realities of modern existence, during this period, "some Reform Jews jumped at this chance to deepen their ritual lives: they took up Jewish dietary laws, deepened their Sabbath observance, and even, in a few cases, re-embraced such traditional practices as tefillin."[90]

As in the greater American culture of the time, the role of women was also shifting dramatically within the Reform synagogue. This is the time when issues of gender and God-language began to come to the forefront, and women began to take on leadership positions within the synagogue--both in terms of governance and ritually. This is also the period when women first began to be ordained by the Reform movement's seminary, Hebrew Union College. The changing role of women and the rise of ritual came together so that, "among Reform Jews, these changes were accompanied by a visible return to once-discarded Jewish customs and practices--as extension of the neo-Reform trend of the 1950s. Growing numbers of men and women chose to don head coverings and prayer shawls in their temples, reversing the late nineteenth-century move to spurn these practices as 'Oriental', and providing women, for the first time, the opportunity to wear the same religious garb as men."[91]

---

[90] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 325.
[91] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 324.

All of this came to a head in the 1970s as the Reform movement produced two documents that reflected the changes occurring around it and within it: an entirely new *siddur* (prayerbook) in 1975, and, in 1976, a new platform, both of which attempted to address many of these issues. This new prayerbook, *Gates of Prayer*, was not a revision but instead a completely new approach to prayer. Rather than having one service that went in a linear fashion through the liturgy, the *Gates of Prayer* series offered a number of different liturgies within one book, so that an individual community could pray the service that most suited their particular style or theology (or rotate though a number of different liturgies). This new, more pluralistic approach to Reform Judaism can also be seen in the new platform that was adopted in San Francisco in 1976.

In the new San Francisco platform, the movement codified a number of the changes that were already starting to happen in reality. It held "that change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life," meaning that Reform Judaism must not stay static, or it would betray its very principles. It states this even more clearly later on in the platform, holding that, "Reform Jews respond to change in various ways according to the Reform principle of the autonomy of the individual. However, Reform Judaism does more than tolerate diversity; it engenders it." This new focus on pluralism within the Reform community would become one of the defining features of the movement as the 1970s became the 1980s and the 1990s.

In addition to these changes specific to Reform Judaism, there were also broader cultural changes that were occurring throughout Judaism. While the Orthodox had always tended to be more insular and more internally focused than Reform and Conservative Judaism, in the later part of the twentieth century, these liberal movements

too began to turn inward toward a more particularistic place.[92] Much of this change came along with--or perhaps was inspired by--changes in Reform Jewish attitudes toward Israel following the Six-Day War of 1967. As Sarna says, "In the years following 1967, the American Jewish communal agenda as a whole shifted inward, moving from universalistic concerns to a preoccupation with Jewish particularism...Domestic causes like civil rights...lost ground...in their place, Jews took up causes like Soviet Jewry and Israel, where the objects of assistance were fellow Jews."[93]

As the 1970s began and the Reform movement in America continued its embrace of traditional rituals, much of the discussion centered on Shabbat, and how to reclaim a meaningful Shabbat experience within a liberal context. It was in this vein that Rabbi Morrison David Bial wrote his landmark work, *Liberal Judaism at Home.* True to its name, this book attempted to sketch out how a Reform Jew could meaningfully bring a Jewish way of life into his or her home, as opposed to the previous generation's religious focus, which was much more centered on the synagogue. The book reads almost like an anthropological study of the Orthodox, with notes on how some of the practices and rituals which Rabbi Bial discusses can be brought into a liberal context.

Rabbi Bial begins by discussing the importance of the Sabbath, noting that "only the Day of Atonement is more important than the Sabbath in the Jewish calendar."[94] He then confronts the charge frequently brought against Reform Judaism that its early rabbis had intended to do away with the Sabbath altogether and move it to Sunday. However, he argues that "it would be entirely wrong to say that the early Reform rabbis tried to do

---

[92] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 318.
[93] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 318.
[94] Morrison David Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home; The Practices of Modern Reform Judaism.*(New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1971) 124.

away with the Sabbath…Years ago some American temples endeavored to shift the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. It was an attempt to get their members to observe the Sabbath, even if on another day."[95]

When it came to Sabbath rituals, however, Rabbi Bial makes a point of noting that, in many cases, there are rituals which Reform Jews observe that the Orthodox do not (often for Jewish legal reasons). For instance, he notes that while most Reform Jews do not light Shabbat candles based on the sunset time, "in many Reform Jewish homes the mother lights the candles at the start of the Sabbath eve meal, regardless of whether or not the sun has set. In this way the entire family shares in the candle-lighting ceremony."[96] Rabbi Bial does not just describe what Reform Jews currently do, though, but instead also makes suggestions of places that the Reform community can adopt (and adapt) from the Orthodox. He notes that in Orthodox homes, after lighting the Shabbat candles, the matriarch of the house usually "adds a prayer of her own for her loved ones at this propitious moment. Certainly this is a custom to be honored in every Liberal Jewish home, as it combines beauty, meaning and spiritual worth."[97] In addition, Rabbi Bial suggests that it would be proper to have the patriarch bless the children, to make a full *kiddush* over wine, and to have a *challah*. However, unlike in the Orthodox world where two loafs of bread are traditionally used in memory of the Temple sacrifice, Rabbi Bial holds that Reform Jews only need one loaf, as we do not pray for the restoration of the Temple sacrifice.[98]

---

[95] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 126.
[96] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 126.
[97] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 128.
[98] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 131.

In addition to suggesting these rituals, however, Rabbi Bial goes further and suggests that Reform Jews should also mark the end of Shabbat with a Havdalah ceremony at home.[99] This is in marked contrast to much of the observance that occurred within Reform Judaism at the time, which placed much greater emphasis on what occurred in the synagogue than in the home, and more emphasis on Friday night than the rest of the Sabbath. For the day of the Sabbath itself, Rabbi Bial holds that while Reform Jews need not observe the Sabbath as the Orthodox do, "each Liberal Jew should accept a pattern of living for the Sabbath which will set it aside, to some degree, from every other day of the week."[100] Also, Rabbi Bial goes on to suggest that regular work should not be performed on the Sabbath if possible and that no cooking or shopping should be done on the Sabbath.

Unlike his Reform predecessors who often held that the Sabbath should be used for what each individual felt was relaxation and rest for him or her self, Rabbi Bial suggests that, for instance, "digging in a garden may be a soul stretcher to some people, especially those who work indoors all week. But to save the garden chores for the Sabbath is scarcely in the spirit of the day."[101] This ruling is quite a traditional ruling, as it upholds one of the thirty-nine traditional categories of forbidden Sabbath work as being more important than the classically Reform conception of 'work'. This traditionalism is not, however, all encompassing, as he also notes that "a museum, a concert, a stroll in pleasant surroundings, games whether active or sedentary, all are permissible."[102]

---

[99] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 134.
[100] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 136.
[101] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 136.
[102] Bial, *Liberal Judaism at Home*, 136.

Bial's work, then, comes off as a grand marker of the changes going on throughout the Reform movement during this period. His work is a reembracing of ritual and ritual obligations, and continues on the path of Reform Judaism that had been progressing since the early twentieth century, with a move away from radical changes, and a move back toward a more traditional place. This same move can be seen in some of the responsa of the period that came out of the Reform movement.

In *Modern Reform Responsa,* a collection of Jewish legal opinions issued by the Reform movement in 1971, two different issues dealing with Shabbat observance are taken up. The first of these deals with whether or not Shabbat candles may be moved or relit so as to avoid them blowing out if they are by a window.[103] The second of these issues involves the permissibility of using a pre-cut loaf of bread during the Friday night Shabbat meal.[104] While neither of these issues is groundbreaking on their own, what is remarkable is that the simple fact that the Responsa Committee addressed them in the first place indicates that the Reform movement was in a very different place when it came to Jewish law and Sabbath observance than it had been in previous generations. However, no work of this period was more influential in terms of Shabbat observance in the Reform movement than *A Shabbat Manual* by the esteemed Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut.

The publication of Plaut's *Shabbat Manual* was a noteworthy moment in this period of Reform history because this was a leading rabbi in the movement who was taking the step of saying that there were proper ways of observing the Sabbath. Whereas early Reform Judaism was more interested in listing the observances that no longer were required, Plaut attempted to create positive commandments that a Reform Jew could

[103] Solomon Bennett Freehof. *Modern Reform Responsa*. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1971) 91.
[104] Freehof, *Modern Reform Responsa*, 91.

observe. He begins in much the same place that Bial did, by stating the problem as he sees it, and his goal in relation to it: "We know that Shabbat, as a discipline and as a source of noble living, has been lost to large numbers of our people, a loss which is both tragic and unnecessary...This manual is our beginning in the effort to recover Shabbat observance as an enhancement of Jewish life, both for the individual Jew and for our people as a whole."[105]

While Plaut was interested in returning ritual and observance to the Reform Sabbath, he also was a devoted Reform Jew, and true to this tradition he held that "each individual and each family will decide where and how to begin, and what and how much to do to make Shabbat an essential element in the rhythm of life."[106] Plaut is also keenly aware of the sociological reasons that Reform Judaism saw a marked turn toward traditionalism and ritual in the 1970s. As he says, "A sense of peoplehood [after the Shoah] and personal obligation came much to the fore, a new sense that mitzvah was a necessary component of Jewish life became stronger among many Jews."[107]

For the majority of the *Manual*, however, Plaut describes mostly positive commandments that a Reform Jew can observe in order to bring Sabbath observance into his or her life. He first lays out what he sees as the low state of Sabbath observance amongst most Reform Jews, and then just before introducing the commandments, says, "To make Shabbat meaningful, observe as much as you can. Begin from where you are

[105] Gunther Plaut. *Tadrikh Le-Shabat: A Shabbat Manual* (New York: Published for the Central Conference of American Rabbis, by Ktav Pub. House, 1972) 1.
[106] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 1.
[107] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 2.

now, with what you presently do or do not do. If your Shabbat is like a weekday, begin with any mitzvah, but begin."[108]

For Friday, Plaut recommends preparing for the Sabbath by cleaning the house, preparing a special meal, and bringing flowers home--all traditional ways of preparing for the Sabbath. For Friday evening at the home, he recommends lighting the candles with the appropriate blessing, reciting the full *kiddush*, making *motzi*, and doing a *birkat hamazon* at the conclusion of the meal. He makes a special point to note that "the recitation of the Kiddush in the synagogue is no substitute for the performance of the mitzvah of Kiddush in the home."[109] This is particularly noteworthy because it marks a move away from the synagogue as the center of Jewish life, and instead an attempt to have the home be that center. For the Sabbath day itself, he simply advises that one should "maintain and enjoy the special quality of Shabbat throughout the afternoon," and conclude with *havdalah* at sundown or later.[110]

Finally, Plaut offers up negative commandments--things that should be prohibited on the Sabbath to Reform Jews. Among these things are: engaging in gainful employment, housework, shopping (only to be done in the case of an emergency), engaging in social events during worship hours, and avoiding any "public activity which violates or gives the appearance of violating Shemirat Shabbat."[111]

This work collectively, from its articulation of positive and negative commandments to the inclusion in the second half of the book of those prayers and songs that one would need in order to observe the Sabbath as Plaut lays it out, is a landmark

[108] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 8.
[109] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 9.
[110] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 10-11.
[111] Plaut, *A Shabbat Manual*, 11-13.

moment for Reform Judaism. It marks a moment when the movement became comfortable both with the return of traditional observances (modified to suit Reform Jews), and a move toward actively engaging with the concept of *mitzvot* in the realm of Sabbath observance.

As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, the interest in Reform observance only increased, and along with it a number of new responsa were published by the Reform movement dealing with the issues surrounding Shabbat. In 1983 for instance, the movement took up the issue of the *eruv*, and ruled that "certainly we, Reform Jews, who are interested in the spirit of the law, would reject this kind of legal fiction for the observance of the Shabbat, and we should discuss the matter in that spirit with our Orthodox colleagues."[112] In 1986 the Responsa Committee took up the issue of public charity work on the Sabbath, dealing with a charity gift-wrapping and with Habitat for Humanity work. In both instances, the Committee ruled that these were prohibited activities, and that while such work can be done on other days, "we must, however, ask how we can balance this goal [social justice / charity work] of Reform Judaism with the equally significant tasks of honoring the Shabbat and observing the spirit of this day of rest."[113]

Throughout this period of the 1970s and 1980s, the Reform movement continued the slow turn toward more ritual, more observance, and more traditionalism that began during the early part of the twentieth century. However, unlike the periods that came before it, what makes this time unique is that the focus of much of the literature regarding the Sabbath is not on the synagogue, but instead on home observance. This change is a

[112] Walter Jacob. *Contemporary American Reform Responsa* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1987) 268-269.
[113] Walter, *Contemporary American Reform Responsa*, 266.

remarkable one, and one that only continues in the 1990s and beyond. For as long as there have been Reform Jews, there have been Reform rabbis trying to create a more "shabbasdik" observance of the Sabbath. This was very much the goal of this period: to both acknowledge the lack of observance that existed among Reform Jews, and to try to move the Reform community to a more observant place. As the Responsa Committee points out in a responsum from July of 1983, "Some Reform Jews may not live up to the ideals of Shabbat observance, but we must, nevertheless, encourage them and discourage activities which clearly lead in other directions."[114]

[114] Walter, *Contemporary American Reform Responsa*, 267.

Chapter 6: Today and Beyond

As the 80s became the 90s, the trend within Reform Judaism to reclaim ritual and to be more comfortable with encouraging Reform Jews to engage in these rituals only continued. In the realm of Shabbat observance, this can clearly be seen in Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro's 1996 work, *Gates of Shabbat: A Guide for Observing Shabbat*. In many ways, this work is a continuation of the strides made by Doppelt and Polish in the late 50s and Plaut in the early 70s with their guides to observance that focused on reclamations and reinterpretations of traditional Shabbat observances. As Shapiro himself says, "A generation ago Reform Judaism entered into a new age of religious discipline. With the publication of *A Shabbat Manual* by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, an authoritative guide for Sabbath observance was welcomed into the lives of Reform Jews. As a consequence of that first guidebook for Reform Jewish observance, *mitzvot* were given new vitality and rituals were endowed with added significance."[115]

Shapiro's work built heavily upon Plaut's *Shabbat Manual* from a quarter-century prior, but went even further in both its scope and its approach. Like Plaut, Shapiro includes a number of traditional rituals and traditional observances for Shabbat, but unlike Plaut, he also proposes the possibility of a traditional-looking Shabbat observance by Reform Jews. This continued traditional turn, however, is put into a clearly Reform context by Shapiro, who defends his proposed changes by saying, "An undergirding principle of Reform Judaism holds that each generation is obliged to define for itself the

[115] Mark Dov Shapiro. *Gates of Shabbat [Shaarei Shabbat] : A Guide for Observing Shabbat* (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1996) vii.

way it will interpret and act out the *mitzvot*. It was that sense of generational need that mandated the publication of this new manual for Sabbath observance."[116]

Shapiro begins the first chapter of his book with a quote about Shabbat from Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, and one of the most influential American Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. What is noteworthy about this is that it shows just how much the Reform movement had internalized the sociological understandings of Judaism (Judaism as a civilization) that Kaplan espoused. It is this sort of sociological approach that helped to usher in the period of ritual observance that Shapiro's work advocates.

While many of his predecessors focused primarily on what observances a Reform Jew should / could engage in, perhaps the most interesting section of Shapiro's work are the more philosophical / theological introductions that he includes to each chapter. For instance, when talking about the philosophical underpinning of the notion of 'Shabbat rest' in the Reform movement, Shapiro holds that there are three legitimate approaches to rest. The first he describes as "the walker". This is the person who does not pursue his or her occupation on Shabbat:

> The walker is a Jew who makes the seventh day holy by choosing not to use the car and not to spend or even carry money on Shabbat. The walker puts aside these so-called necessities of modern life and uses Shabbat afternoon, in particular, as a time for taking walks, private reading, studying with a group of friends, picnicking, or any activity along those lines. What the walker does on Shabbat afternoon is a total change of pace from anything done on other days.[117]

[116] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, *vii*.
[117] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, 51.

The second legitimate Reform approach to Shabbat rest that Shapiro mentions is one that he labels "the museumgoer". For Shapiro, this is:

> . . .a second Jew who also stays away from business on Shabbat. Unlike the walker, however, this Jew will spend money and drive on Shabbat, although he or she limits the use of money or the automobile to certain activities that he or she feels are appropriate for the creation of a meaningful Shabbat. This Jew doesn't drive to the mall in order to shop on Shabbat, but will go to a museum.[118]

Finally, Shapiro offers a third alternative, "the painter":

> The painter's claim derives from the Shabbat commandment as it appears in the Book of Deuteronomy. In those verses the Torah describes Shabbat as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. For the painter....Shabbat is best observed when it calls to mind the end of Egyptian slavery and the gift of freedom that came with it...For some Jews, finding an activity that liberated them from the mundane could be the essence of 'rest' on Shabbat. it could allow their weekday minds and spirits to 'rest' as hands and body came into play in the ways that are impossible all through the week.[119]

Shapiro continues with a few notes on all appropriate Shabbat practices for Reform Jews, and eventually concludes that the only thing truly recommended for all types of Reform Jews is that "Reform Jewish sources affirm the principle that a person should not pursue his or her gainful occupation on Shabbat."[120] While Shapiro is careful not to prioritize one type of Shabbat observance over another, it is hard not to look beneath his three types of practice and see an order of preference: from walker, to museumgoer, to painter. In many ways, in fact, one can see the three different paradigms of Shabbat observance that Shapiro describes as being three different periods of Reform

[118] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, 51-52.
[119] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, 51-53.
[120] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, 57.

Jewish approach to ritual, with the painter reflected the mainstream approach from early in the 20th century, to the museumgoer of the 1950s and 60s, to the much more traditional approach that began to gain credence in the movement in the 1970s.

In terms of the 'manual' part of Shapiro's work, there is nothing particularly groundbreaking in the rituals he outlines. Instead, what is remarkable is the approach he takes, where he lists a huge number of ritual possibilities for each time period (preparation, Friday night, Shabbat day, and *havdalah*). For each of these, he takes the time to explain both the traditional understanding of the ritual and a way that Reform Jews can take these same rituals and re-appropriate them for their own lives. For instance, he actively encourages people who have never observed Shabbat before to not begin with candle lighting, but instead that the first ritual observance that should be done is preparation for Shabbat. As he says, "stopping early and preparing for Shabbat can be the first steps in observing Shabbat."[121]

For preparation, Shapiro recommends purchasing flowers, using different dishes for the Friday evening meal, dressing up for the meal, and inviting guests. He also advises that one should donate to charity just prior to the beginning of *Kabbalat Shabbat* at the synagogue. He then includes (and highly advocates) the Friday evening home ritual, with a candle blessing, *shalom aleichem*, family blessings, *kiddush* and *motzi*. In addition, he suggests that *zemirot* and *birkat hamazon* should all be a part of the Friday evening meal for those Reform Jews looking to increase their Shabbat observance.

For Shabbat day, Shapiro includes many of the same recommendations for the meal--as well as attending Shabbat morning services--and finally includes an extended home *havdalah* ceremony. He ends the discussion component of his book with an

[121] Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, 9.

extended look at the *mitzvot* of Shabbat, and how each of these *mitzvot* can be observed within a Reform context. While Shapiro's work still stands as the single greatest work on Shabbat observance in the Reform movement in recent years, it was soon followed up by Rabbi Mark Washofsky's *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* in 2001.

This work by Washofsky--who is the head of the CCAR Responsa Committee--follows in the tradition of Doppelt and Polish in the 1950s and some of the work of Bial, in that it attempts to both describe the current state of practice in the Reform world as well as to move observance in a new direction. It is noteworthy in that, unlike many other approaches to the subject, Washofsky begins in each subject with the traditional *mitzvot* associated with said observance, and then describes how these can be made into authentically Reform practices. Washofsky quite consciously sees his work as a continuation and advancement of Doppel and Polish, Plaut, and Shapiro, remarking, "How do Reform Jews experience Shabbat? 'These books (Plaut and Shapiro) have emerged out of an effort by the CCAR to 'create old/new opportunities for Jewish living.' That effort reflected an increasingly positive appraisal of the role of religious discipline in Reform Jewish life and the conviction that 'the recovery of Shabbat observance' is an item of pressing significance on the Reform Jewish agenda."[122]

Washofsky's starting place of *mitzvot* shows that the Reform movement--at least the movement that he sees--has come to the point where the mainstream has become comfortable with the idea of commandments and commandedness. For Shabbat, then, this leads to a much more traditional mode of practice that is put forth.

---

[122] Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York: UAHC, 2001), 74.

In his chapter dealing with the Sabbath, Washofsky begins with a philosophical discussion on the nature of the Sabbath, and in particular that oft-quoted idea that "Shabbat is an island in time" (Heschel). Washofsky, however, modifies this, saying, "Unlike a true island, which is formed by an act of nature, Shabbat is a human construction. It becomes holy in our lives as a result of our own creative endeavor....we sanctify Shabbat by means of actions that correspond to four separate *mitzvot*. We *remember* the Sabbath through our liturgy, by the words we say and sing that distinguish this day from all others. We *observe* the Sabbath by refraining from doing 'work' on that day. And we *honor and delight* in the Sabbath through the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, and the special ends to which we devote the hours of the day that would otherwise be given over to work and the pursuit of material gain."[123]

Having established the basis of Shabbat observance in the *mitzvot*, Washofsky then moves on to a discussion of how this should be done in a Reform context. He eventually concludes that, "As with every other aspect of Jewish religious life, Reform thought on the subject of Sabbath observance is the product of a long and continuing process of historical development. The one constant feature of this process has been change."[124]

In terms of the actual observances that Washofsky advocates, the vast majority of them are similar to what Shapiro puts forth in his work. These include preparing the house for Shabbat with flowers, a large meal, and inviting guests to join you, attending services at the synagogue, a Friday night *kiddush* at home, a restful observance on Shabbat day, and finally *havdalah*. However, what is noteworthy is that he includes the

[123] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 73.
[124] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 74.

rituals of hand-washing, advocates including two *challot* for the Friday evening meal, and even puts forward the idea of ritually salting the bread before eating it.[125] Though all of these rituals have other, established meanings, each of them individually also has a meaning that hearkens back to the Temple and the sacrifices of the Temple, While not embracing theologies of Temple sacrifice, this at least shows that the Reform movement had come to a place where there no longer was a gut-rejection of rituals that were associated with the Temple. This then marks a major turning point in Reform Judaism, where not only has a major legal thinker in the movement come to a place of starting from *mitzvot*, but also including rituals which Reform Judaism has long avoided.

However, Washofsky still puts his religious thinking within the realm of the Reform world in that he holds that "the observance of Shabbat in Reform Judaism--the definition of rest and work--will vary widely from person to person and from community to community."[126] While Washofsky seems to advocate a much more traditional approach to observance than his predecessors in the Reform world, he continues to legitimate--much like Shapiro--other ways of observance. As he notes:

> The individual is encouraged to choose from among a variety of responses to the holiness of Shabbat. One may avoid engaging in any kind of 'creative' activity, actions which involve the manipulation of the world around us, as an acknowledgment that the universe is not our creation by God's...Alternatively, one may observe Shabbat as a day of freedom from devotion to necessity. That is, one may decide to engage in any number of activities which, though traditionally forbidden on the Sabbath, are done *likhevod* Shabbat, in honor of the Sabbath. One might not drive to the mall to shop, for example, but might drive to

[125] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 75-82.
[126] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 75-83.

> a museum, and pay the price of admission, because one considers a visit to a museum as an act that refreshes the soul.[127]

While Washofsky's book was groundbreaking in many ways for Reform Judaism, it is worth noting that it came from a rabbi as part of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a group made up exclusively of clergy. However, in 2007 Rabbi Eric Yoffie, then President of the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) devoted his keynote address at that year's Biennial to the idea of revitalizing Sabbath observance within the Reform world. He began by discussing the success that many Reform congregations have had in reforming their services--both in terms of style and in terms of content. He begins with success, and moves to the challenge of the future, saying, "And the result is that on Erev Shabbat, our synagogues are often overflowing and our worship is often a sustained celebration in song. Many of our members have opened themselves, for the first time, to the music, poetry and passion of heartfelt prayer."[128]

This sermon, however, was only the beginning, as Yoffie went on to announce a year-long "Shabbat Initiative" for the movement, where it spent the following year rethinking how Reform Judaism can bring contemporary Shabbat observance back to the mainstream for Reform Jews. This Shabbat Initiative eventually became a widely published curriculum for the movement, including adult study materials, children's materials, and workshops throughout the country. While the specific rituals outlined within the initiative do not differ significantly from those which Washofsky brought forward in his book, this was a remarkable movement in Reform Jewish history, where

[127] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 84.
[128] "Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie 69th General Assembly Presidential Sermon." URJ website accessed 31 Mar. 2011.

the movement as a whole took on the challenge of Shabbat in a way that hadn't been seen since the CCAR discussions over a century prior.

Conclusions

The Sabbath--and the command to rest, to remember, and to protect it--has long been one of the defining features of Jewish practice, and one of the central themes of Jewish thought. As has been shown throughout this thesis, this is equally true of Reform Judaism. While the nature of Reform practice--and even the way that Reform Judaism has conceived of the Sabbath--has changed radically over the last century and a half, there are threads that can be traced throughout, and trends that began generations ago, which we only become aware of through the distance of time.

Starting in the late nineteenth century with the early American reformers, the central concern of Sabbath observance centered on the question of the day on which the Sabbath should be observed. These Jews lived in a land where there was a national Sabbath that occurred on Sunday. In addition to this, the state of employment in the United States at the time did not allow the flexibility needed for most Jewish men (the vast majority of the work force) to take Saturday off. Thus, while many have criticized the Reform thinkers of this time for advocated a move to a Sunday observance, it is important to understand that, in their own time and in their own context, these rabbis were very much engaged in an effort to save the Sabbath amongst Reform Jews, not to destroy or Americanize it. Though the Sunday observance did not end up becoming dominant in American Reform Judaism, its cousin, the late Friday night service, did. Thus, one of the great themes of Reform Jewish thought regarding the Sabbath from this time is that the Sabbath would primarily be observed in the synagogue. Or, to put it in another way, the Reform movement and its leaders of the time seemed to conceive of

Shabbat as being centrally associated with community and communal worship, and only secondarily a home ritual.

As the twentieth century began, and in particular during the interwar period, Jews in America became much more comfortable as Americans and much more financially stable. As a result, the nature of Reform Judaism and the nature of Shabbat observance changed. Rather than being in a place of radically reforming the traditional Judaism of their time to make it work in modern society, these thinkers were instead focused on how to take the flourishing Reform movement that they had inherited and bring a meaningful Sabbath ritual to its members. Thus, the early twentieth century--and from the 1930s on in particular--began the process of a return to a more traditional approach to Judaism and in particular to Shabbat that would continue for the rest of the century. In addition, we see from this time period that rather than focus exclusively on Shabbat as a communal observance, major rabbis and thinkers in the movement began to discuss how the Sabbath should be observed at home. However, it is important to note that though home rituals began to be discussed, the main thrust of Sabbath thinking in the early twentieth century still revolved around the synagogue.

The time after World War II marked a major sociological change for Jews in America, as they began to achieve a level of financial success and social acceptance that had previously been inconceivable. The Reform Jews of this era by and large migrated out to the suburbs, and away from the majority-Jewish communities of which they had previously been a part. These changes continued the move toward a more traditional practice, as the Bar Mitzvah ceremony began to gain prominence in Jewish life and Hebrew continued to return to the Reform liturgy. For the major thinkers of this period,

the trends that had begun in the early part of the century continued, as the major Reform thinkers of the era no longer felt as strongly the need to reject observances that were felt to be outdated and outmoded, and instead were able to conceive of ways that Shabbat *could* be observed positively by Reform Jews. Shabbat by this time had moved from being primarily about sanctification, as it was during the early part of the twentieth century, to instead being a balance of sanctification and rest. Though rest was seen as being quite personal during this period, and not necessarily viewed in the same way that the Orthodox conceived of the idea, nevertheless, this was an important change during this era.

With the rise of the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Reform Jewish life once again changed radically. The well studied and well documented 'generation-gap' of this period also expressed itself in Reform Judaism, as many younger members sought a more personal and individual observance of the Sabbath, and valued the communal aspects significantly less. *Chavurot* were formed of Reform and Conservative Jews who were interested in trying out traditional practices and traditional observances, and adding new relevance to these ancient rituals. Thus, the period of the 1970s and 1980s in terms of Shabbat thinking is marked by an emphasis on rest over sanctification, personal observance over communal worship, and traditional rituals brought into a modern context.

All of these different trends continued their logical progressions into the contemporary era, as the Reform movement took on the idea of Shabbat observance in a very personal way. This is the era of guidebooks to observance and of experimentation with ritual. Whereas modernity had promised Truth based on rationality, post-modernity

spurned such possibilities, and as such Reform Jews have recently felt the personal empowerment to pick up long discarded religious themes.

So where do we go from here? It is clear that we have come to a place where Shabbat has become as much about rest as it is about sanctification (and perhaps more so); our movement as a whole and its major thinkers (leaders of the URJ and the CCAR) have openly advocated quite traditional approaches to Shabbat observance; and we have perhaps even come to a tipping point where Shabbat--at least in terms of the major thinkers in the movement's treatment of the subject--has become as much a matter of personal and home observance as it is of public worship. All of these trends seem likely to continue, especially seeing as this generation of Reform Jews (and really, of Americans) is less organizationally committed or loyal than perhaps any generation in recent memory. Today's Jews are willing to take a piece from their Reform upbringing, a piece from the Chabad experience they had on campus, a piece from the local *minyan* that they might attend on Friday night, and create their own Jewish experience out of all of them.

I deeply believe that Shabbat--and in particular a traditional observance of Shabbat--is something that will become more and more meaningful to this generation of Reform Jews. We now live in a world that is ever more interconnected, where my cell phone allows me to receive and send emails across the globe, twenty-four hours a day. The Internet has drastically changed what it means to communicate as a human being. With all of this noise, with all of this connectedness, I hold that Sabbath observance as traditionally conceived will only become more important. For six days a week, we are entirely dominant over creation, from flipping on a switch to answering an email from a

relative across the globe. The seventh-day rest, however, offers us a chance to disengage from this control, to disconnect from our mastery of creation and our deeply embedded interconnectivity. Mental health experts constantly are recommending that we disconnect, that we make a clearer division between work time and rest time, and the traditional Sabbath is the perfect vehicle to do so.

This is why I believe that over the next few decades we will see more and more calls in the Reform world to return to a much more traditional observance of the Sabbath. Whereas our intellectual ancestors rejected such things as not tearing toilet paper and avoiding turning on lights as being overly legalistic, borderline ridiculous approaches to religion, tomorrow's thinkers I believe will instead look at turning off your Smartphone and coming together for communal meals as being a way to disconnect, to decompress, and to acknowledge that we are not just masters of creation, but very much a part of it.

Bibliography

Bial, Morrison David. *Liberal Judaism at Home: The Practices of Modern Reform Judaism.*New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1971.

Doppelt, Frederic A., and David Polish. *A Guide for Reform Jews*. New York: Bloch Pub., 1957.

Feldman, Abraham J., ed. *Reform Judaism Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni.* Ed. Abraham J. Feldman. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1949.

Freehof, Solomon Bennett. *Modern Reform Responsa*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1971.

Freehof, Solomon Bennett. *Reform Responsa*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1960.

Jacob, Walter. *American Reform Responsa: Collected Responsa of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1889-1983*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983.

Jacob, Walter. *Contemporary American Reform Responsa*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1987.

Liebman, Joshua Loth. *Reform Judaism Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni.* Ed. Abraham J. Feldman. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1949.

Philipson, David. *The Reform Movement in Judaism.* New and revised edition. New York: Macmillan, 1931.

Plaut, W. Gunther. *Tadrikh Le-Shabat: A Shabbat Manual*. New York: Published for the Central Conference of American Rabbis by Ktav Publishing House, 1972.

Plaut, W. Gunther, ed. *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources until 1948.* New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965.

Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004.

Shapiro, Mark Dov. *Gates of Shabbat [Shaarei Shabbat: A Guide for Observing Shabbat*. New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1996.

Washofsky, Mark. *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*. New York: UAHC, 2001.

Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, vols. 12 (1902), 23 (1913), 24 (1914), 47 (1937).

Yoffie, Eric H. "69th General Assembly Presidential Sermon." *URJ*. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <http://urj.org//holidays/shabbat/congregation//?syspage=article&item_id=4130>.

“The Columbus Platform." Section Seven. *CCAR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2011. <http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=40&pge_prg_id=4687&pge_id=1656>.

“The Pittsburgh Platform." Section Five. *CCAR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2011. <http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=39&pge_id=1606>.

APPENDIX.

THE SABBATH QUESTION.

BY RABBI JACOB VOORSANGER, Ph.D., SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

This question, for the presentation of which, you have courteously given me a mandate, presents, in my opinion, the greatest issue of our modern religious life. No other question, from the nature of its conditions, presents such attractive or delicate aspects of discussion. No other question opens up wider vistas of thought or indicates greater possibilities of friction. Permit me to say in a purely personal way that no other question could, at this particular time, have brought me away from my home on a four days' journey, to meet with my brethren. But if we can make but a beginning towards the ultimate disposition of the issues involved in this question, I dare say none of us will have cause to regret any inconvenience, any wearisome toil, for the sake of the present well being, and the future happiness of our people. For both are involved in a successful, or unsuccessful, treatment, of this great problem.

I assume that the purport of the present discussion is, not in a mere negative way, to call public attention to the gradually lessening respect for Sabbath observance, nor unite in a mere courteous recommendation to our people to yield greater loyalty to our time-honored institutions. We have more important business than that. It seems to me that, having reviewed the situation it will be our duty to formally engage in an important and solemn discussion of the question whether the facts and data at our disposal will at all justify a proposition to recommend formal action in the uprooting of one of our most important historical institutions. I must say at the outset, that the very suggestion fills me with apprehension. It is an open question whether such a proposition can under any circumstances be entertained. This Conference is composed of rabbis and Jewish ministers, and there is nothing in its constitution that could warrant the suspicion that it would not desire to remain in

all and everything that affects our faith and religious practice upon distinct historical ground, so long as it can be maintained that the ground is historical, or that a departure therefrom is not a violation of the essential and fundamental principles upon which, by common consent, our faith is founded. Liberals we may be, but we are neither Sectarians nor Schismatics, nor, I take it, have we any desire to unite in any action whatever, by which, directly or remotely, we would create sect or schism in the confraternity of our people. But just at this point, many important considerations obtrude themselves. Has not the historical ground, as regards the Sabbath, been virtually cut away from beneath our feet? Is not the present flagrant contrast between theory and practice the strongest indication that so far as our American Jewish communities are concerned, the historical Sabbath has no more life in it, than had the prophet's dry bones, before their resurrection? And if all the life be gone out of this time-honored institution, is there any choice left between a candid confession of the fact, and a proposition to assimilate the distinctive principles underlying our Sabbath with those of the day of rest observed by the Gentile communities and a serious determined effort to remain as long as possible, upon historical ground, seek to reinvigorate the principles that have always obtained in Sabbath observance, and restore, if so much can be achieved, the spirit of the ancient Sabbath of Israel? These are questions, I take it, not unworthy the deepest consideration of a body of learned representatives of our people.

A superficial observer, less interested in the spiritual unity of Israel than we are, would perhaps find no difficulty in solving these questions at once. It would not occur to him that currents can be stemmed by deliberate, systematic and persistent action, nor would he think of the possibility of directing such currents into channels where their influence would be most beneficial. He would merely pass judgment upon the decaying and degenerating processes that arrest his attention, and conclude that the day of the flood was nigh. But overflowing rivers have been dammed, and floods have been stayed. Is it not at least possible that by a careful analysis of causes, we may contribute some suggestion whereby the historical Sabbath may remain a part of our spiritual inheritance to our

children? Is it not more consistent at least with our duty to exhaust every means of saving the Sabbath, before we finally confess that the new social and economic environments of our people justify our surrender? And if we finally did surrender, would we not owe the present and the future a solemn and careful statement of the reasons that justify so radical an action as the complete renunciation of one of our historical institutions?

These questions, it seems to me, clear the ground for action. Our first business then ought to be to make a correct diagnosis of the present situation. No matter how lamentable it is, let us hide nothing. If we desire to be spiritual physicians, let us not gloss over the ills that may confront us. Above all things, the truth is necessary. To hide it, or to refuse to acknowledge it, would simply mean a cowardly postponement of this question for an indefinite time, and that, surely, would be unbecoming men assembled for studying means by which to secure the permanency of their people's spiritual happiness.

It must be confessed, then, that the situation is serious enough. Two distinct principles unite in the institution of the Sabbath; the one, spiritual, the other physical. These two principles are briefly stated in the identical words of both decalogues, Exodus xx., 10, and Deut. v., 14. Spiritually, a Sabbath unto the Lord; a proclamation and celebration of the Divine Benignity, an emphasis of the Divine creative faculty, that having made the world maintains it in love and mercy; physically, a day, whereon to abstain from exercising wonted energies, so that redemption from incessant toil, deliverance from the burdens of daily cares and anxieties, might be the legitimate inheritance of people who believe in freedom, symbolized by the powerful suggestion of the Deuteronomist, who proclaims the Sabbath to be a memorial of our fathers' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Whilst, presently, I will have occasion to return to this statement, it is here briefly presented, to note that to a very considerable extent, one of these two principles is fast becoming obsolete; and because of its close identity and union with the other, the latter is of needs affected, and its power and influence limited. In brief, Sabbath rest, so far as its public character is concerned, is nullified by the exigencies of the times, and the

public, as well as the domestic celebration of the day, is affected in consequence. This is a fact that admits of no discussion. We must look it straight in the face, and keep strict account with it. The fact that individuals keep the Sabbath, by no means affects the general statement. The latter is not only true as regards the centers of Jewish population in America, but the same facts may be noted in European centers, like Berlin and Paris. Jewish banks and counting houses are open on the Sabbath. Professional men are busy. Artisans pursue their toil, and the lamentable truth is that, even many who theoretically accept the Divine authority of the Sabbath commandment, ignore it practically, and pursue their daily avocation. Nor is this almost universal secularization of Sabbath, for the pursuit of labor, the greatest evil. Far exceeding the latter is, that the sanctifying influence of the day is becoming lost. The day has not retained its grasp upon the household. Women and children imitate their male relatives. Saturday begins to be a day whereon to discharge all the postponed duties of the week. The crowds of Jewish women, who preferably do their shopping on Saturday, might testify to the almost hopeless change that has taken place in the practice, if not actually in the sentiment, of our people. As regards the public celebration of the Sabbath, we can best prove how it is affected by the loss of its companion principle of rest, by pointing to our audiences. Whether the latter be large or small, whether the service be prolonged or brief, decorous or otherwise, the fact is that the attendance of men is utterly out of proportion to that of women, and the time may come when the total absence of men at the service will influence both the ritual and the instruction to the extent of adapting them to the wants of a single sex. This may sound ludicrous, but we really cannot tell what may betide in congregations, the men of which are reduced to the condition of mere contributors and business administrators, and whose women sustain the burden of maintaining the public celebrations as well as the domestic practices. If these facts are baldly stated, I maintain that they are facts, and no matter how much ground for rejoicing they will afford the would-be opponents of our liberal cause, we must present them concisely and truthfully, lest our sincerity in dealing with them be questioned,

and lest the very absence of that sincerity prevent us from clearly discerning our responsibilities in so grave and critical an issue.

On the other hand, however, it is our bounden duty to carefully analyze the causes that have led to this deplorable state of affairs. I deem it pertinent to say at this juncture that I must decline to allow the charge of indifference or convenience to be made a part of this discussion. That there are enough indifferent people with neither heart nor sentiment for the efficacy of religious agencies and the enforcement of a wholesome religious discipline, is true enough, and has always been true. But in the abstract, we have no right to assume that a people, otherwise always imbued with a correct perception of right, always loyal to its institutions, noted for the strength of its domestic virtues, a people capable of sacrifice on behalf of every element that can at all strengthen or perpetuate its vital principles; a people capable of the most enduring affection for its traditional legacies of truth and spirit, such a people I submit, cannot be assumed to be merely flagrantly and criminally indifferent to, or negligent of, one of the most important factors in its religious economy. Indifference is an effect, not a cause. It is in many instances, unconsciously perhaps, an expression of many antecedent causes, that have modified the social or spiritual environments, with which the individual desires to be in harmony. For in religion, as much, if not more so, than in social life, we require harmonious environments to secure our happiness. Man either adapts himself to his surroundings, or what is less frequently the case, surroundings adapt themselves to man. When the two, the man and the surroundings, do not harmonize, a condition of passiveness is likely to ensue, that the casual observer is sure to identify with indifference. But in the present instance, we must know whether that word stands for a paralysis of spiritual emotion, or for that passiveness that, for the present, expresses an inability to determine the processes by which the vital principles of our faith may again become potent factors in the activities of life. If the former, we may as well adjourn sine die. If the latter, I believe we should carefully classify the causes that have produced spiritual inactivity and indolence, and by aid of that classification, determine the means, if such exist, of restoring the harmony of Jewish faith and practice.

And this classification, I must again insist, must be no mere moralizing on the spirit of the times. The spirit of the times need not be invoked to account for all the ills that our religious practice has fallen heir to. Nor is it fair to denounce men because they seem to be involved in a vortex of operating causes. Rather let us blame, if blame we must, the obstinacy that prevents a full and free consideration of the processes that have their play with us, the latter molding us to activities we dare not now look plainly in the face, and forcing us to conclusions we lack the courage to acknowledge and carry into operation. Our duty therefore points to a presentation of causes, that have made the Sabbath the attenuated shadow of its former strength and beauty, and placed the communities of Israel in the remarkably incongruous attitude they occupy at present.

These causes, I respectfully submit, are threefold: Spiritual, Economic and Social; and so far as my time will permit they must be closely examined.

First. Admittedly, the institution of a Sabbath, already in pre-Mosaic times, bears a distinctly economic and social character. A day of rest is one of the earliest evidences of social culture. Before the Babylonian Moon Feasts became occasions for stated worship, they must have suggested a judicious conservation of human energies by an apportionment of time into periods of labor and rest. But it is unnecessary to venture so far back into the recesses of time. It is not only unnecessary, but distinctly unfair, to rob the Jewish institution of the Sabbath of its peculiar spiritual originality. In its crudest outlines, it stands upon a higher plane than the Moon Feast of the old time Semitic kinfolk of the Hebrews. Assuming that the selection of a seventh day is a mere characteristic of Semitic calendation and nothing else, it is nevertheless true that for the Jew and all the civilized nations of after times, the Mosaic Sabbath has furnished standards of interpretation which it has neither derived nor borrowed from any extraneous sources. The old Mosaic Sabbath is a unique institution. It is no mere acknowledgment of the necessity of conserving energy, and no mere factor in the social order; it is the first acknowledgment of an ideality that is sure to inspire man with a different view of his own position in the world.

It brings him a sense of his personal dignity. It develops his sense of freedom. It inspires him with humane sentiments towards his fellow men. This ideality lies imbedded in the decalogues, and it has been developed by the domestic environments of our people. Absolutely unassailable as this statement can be proved to be, we must nevertheless hold strict account with the development of the Sabbath in history, not merely as a social and religious, but likewise, as a political institution. The old Jewish commonwealth sought to protect the ideal and spiritual character of the Sabbath by the concrete character of legal enactments. It placed the institution under the protection of authority, and that authority was made imposing by the proclamation of its divine mandate. The interpretation of authority was that rigorous abstention from labor was to be the reflex of a divine rest at the end of creation. God had rested. Therefore man must rest. The principle of rest is, I should think, considerably affected by so solid a consideration. It must, in the public estimation, make considerable difference whether an institution is founded in a Divine authority that has ordered its enactment as an integral element in a moral and political constitution, or is maintained merely by the free consent of a people, wisely imbued with the salutary characteristics of such an institution. It places before us in rugged contrast the two factors, that it seems to me, have always striven in Judaism for the mastery. That is to say, the legal discipline that always rested itself against a background of Divine authority, and the spiritual freedom, that never is able to admit the efficacy of a concrete and immutable discipline. For the history of the Sabbath, if we had ample time to venture into its details, might prove the gradually accumulating discipline to confirm authority, as well as the efforts of spiritual freedom to break through its slowly tightening trammels. We might illustrate the one by pointing to the massive legislation of the Talmud as subsequently codified, classifying various degrees of labor until almost nothing in the way of exercising energy is tolerated. We might illustrate the latter with copious quotations from the same source to prove the growing desire for ethical culture, and the acquisition of knowledge, as occupations eminently adapted to fill in hours of passive energy.

But the legal codes tell their own story, the story of an authority inherently qualified to dictate the conditions of rest as contradistinguished from the conditions of labor. They must be extremes, else the emphasis of authority is lost. The moral injunction to labor, can only be strengthened, if so that a Divine ordinance needs to be strengthened, by the moral prohibition to labor on the day of rest. So emphatic is the need of rest, so completely must it be an interpretation of the Divine rest, that the penalty of death is assessed against the offender. Society must be in harmony with the Creator, its conditions with those wrought by Him. It seems to me we cannnot very well escape the conclusion that the Biblical account of the origin of the Sabbath was taken literally by our fathers, for despite any subsequent interpretation of social and religious discipline the prohibitive character of every kind of labor is altogether an attempt to translate into social conditions that absolute rest they believe to have existed on God's Sabbath. Now, if they did accept that account literally, and not as allegory or myth, as is sometimes suggested, we can readily understand the source of that authority that first consecrates the Sabbath to God, secondly, makes labor on that day a capital offense; and thirdly, directs the always active mind of man into the channels of education and spiritual contemplation. We know that the historical Sabbath has borne these characteristics. Now why does not that day present the same characteristics to us? Simply because, cavil as we may, apologize as we may, scold as we may, the cold fact is that spiritual authority has been steadily on the decline. We are confronted with the certainty that the spiritual suggestions of the Sabbath could at one time be enforced by political legislation; in a word, that the Sabbath as a Palestinian State institution, recognized by law as a valid factor in the people's happiness, expounded by an authority acknowledged of Divine origin, presents safeguards that it can never possess the moment it steps forth from these classical environments. And even if, in later times, the competent authorities possessed moral as well as social agencies whereby to enforce at least a moiety of the old discipline, what authority is sufficiently valid today to appeal to it for a direction of the moral energies of man, so long as the latter's activities do not come in conflict with the law?

And that is not all. Do we, ourselves, the teachers and ministers of the people, recognize any authority, from which aforetime proceeded the moral and physical directions regarding this day? Let us look this question squarely in the face. This Conference and its successors must deal with issues that never yet confronted deliberative bodies of this character. We may be called upon, not merely to define what, under present circumstances and conditions, religious authority amounts to, but what is of the utmost, the gravest importance, whether new aspects of thought can be adapted to our religious economy, and whether we can remain on positive ground, notwithstanding the application of methods of criticism, whereby for the time being, authority is apparently undermined. It is my personal opinion that we can, though the processes whereby the new harmony is to be developed are not yet wholly clear to me. In the meantime, however, we too are affected by the decline of authority, and in a greater degree than our people, because we are more sensitive to the changes that the new schools have wrought. I know perfectly well, and I will claim it before I will conclude, that a belief in the Divine Law need not be affected by the mechanism that when thoroughly understood, is apt to give that law a firmer and more conscious expression. But how has the new doctrine of evolution, for instance, affected, for the time being, our belief in the divinity of institutions that have proved to be mere expressions of social order, or that, as in this present instance, have proved to be much older than the conventional era of the creation itself. If we believe the Sabbath to be a copy from an older Babylonian institution, as in a measure it is, can we continue to endow it with the traditional interpretation that it is divinely ordained, and that in addition to the characteristics heretofore adduced, the pledge of its authority comes from its being a covenantal sign between God and His people, and therefore, like other covenantal signs, inextinguishable as long as Judaism remains an affirmative expression of the relations of God and man? I cannot tell to what extent these considerations appear to you as important. To me they appear grave enough. When the authority of the day is shaken by the absence of social, political and ethical safeguards, when the origin of the day, historically and archæologically considered, contradicts

the statement of the traditions, when people prove by their attitude that in some way they know these things; how, unless we turn the dials of time backward, can we restore this old institution to its original status and endow it with an authority that shall not be opposed or questioned?

Second. The present economic aspects of the Sabbath question next invite our consideration. It is here that we are strikingly confronted with the contest of the progressive forces of our own times with the old order, representing the historical influences that always clamor for recognition. A Palestinian Sabbath, so far as its injunctions of rest are concerned, has been, for a long time past, an utter impossibility. Assuming even the possibility of its restoration, the old time interpretations and conditions of rest are not only untenable, but they appear absurd, and religious absurdities afford the strongest encouragement to indifference. The Sabbath, as has been stated, was a state institution, the ideality of which was developed by safeguards, that came from the spirit of popular legislation. The history of the growth of rabbinical discipline cannot be made a part of this paper, but it must be consulted to account for the rigor with which abstention from labor was enforced. All I wish to note here is that within state environments, or within domestic environments that are not considerably affected by exterior agencies, it is possible to observe a Sabbath in obedience to every minute direction of discipline. The moment these environments change, discipline becomes immediately affected. Labor in Palestine had no competition, not even the stranger within the gate, nor an alien was permitted to labor on the Sabbath. From the nature of the Jewish constitution, there could not have been any liberal interpretation of the law of rest, any exemption whatever, except in the well known instances of life saving and life preserving. Hence, a legal observance of the Sabbath, aside from its moral and educational considerations, created no material loss. Society was a unit in its observance. The seventh day, within such environments, is as completely and as strictly a *dies non*, as is the Sunday of the American people, which, without consideration of its legal, or moral, aspects, is, by consensus, a day whereon to abstain from labor. Now, it is all well enough from a religious point of view, to

insist upon a traditional day of rest as being the only one worthy of celebration and observance, but religion will not suffer if it keeps account with the economic questions that are involved in such insistence. To demand compliance with the biblical injunction, as we understand it, means to insist upon our people observing two days of rest. I believe that to be the fact. I have never been able to endorse any Jewish appeal to the courts of the country for protection of the exercise of the functions of labor when the appellant sought to equalize his energies by laboring on Sunday. I believe such appeals to be poor policy, for they only serve to emphasize the gravity of our situation, and answer no questions whatever, except that in individual cases, they help to compound the losses that accrue from Sabbath observance. To be sure, I am not disposed to deny the conscientious attitude of such appellants, nor their religious scruples, but can it be denied that back of such appeals lies the grave fact, that no man, so situated, can compete with the exercise of five days of energy against his neighbor who exercises six days? This is the problem we have to confront. Sunday, aside from every other consideration, is the popular day of rest. All business is suspended on Sunday. The wheels of industry cease to revolve on Sunday. Not a single religious consideration that we might present could induce the American people to change its consensus in that matter. Our people are but a very small minority. We are barely three per centum of the population of the United States, and though our volume of business may far exceed that percentage, it is not so large in the aggregate, that we can venture upon a trial of strength with our neighbors. Business has no soul. The energy of man in the pursuit of legitimate channels of operation stops at no obstacle except such as are placed in its way by law. Three Jewish citizens of the United States are in full and open competition with ninety-seven citizens of other faiths, or no faith, under this condition; the three Jews are expected to succeed by the exercise of five days of energy in at least the same degree that the others achieve by the exercise of six days. How this can be done I do not know. To my mind it could only result in the systematic, if gradual, and ultimate, pauperization of the Jew. It must be borne in mind that the conditions which environ the American Jew

are different from those of his brother abroad. He has not created those conditions, but they have in a large measure affected him. The spirit of the American Sunday is more rigid, more intolerant, more exacting. Even though the constitution permits no sumptuary legislation, and therefore every man may follow the dictates of his conscience, the traditions of Sunday observance show the advisability of every man training his conscience in harmony with that of the people. Labor on Sunday will not be offensively resented, but it will be passively discouraged. No man can very well succeed in the exercise of his energies when all around him there is a complete suspense of energy. The success of labor depends upon the general exercise of its functions. Now success is an element of life that even religion dares not to underrate. The preaching of sacrifice, of the subordination of self-interest to principle and consistency, is the presentation of a magnificent ideal and of a sublime theory of faith; but, unhappily, we will find very few people who will consent to immolate their self-interest at the altar of Faith. Nor need we criticise them too severely. Material prosperity is no inconsiderable factor in social happiness, and even the well-being of our communal institution depends very largely upon the degree of prosperity our people enjoy. With the decline of such prosperity, we may count upon the decay of our institutions. Now I may be confronted with the assertion that many of our people observe the Sabbath and thrive wondrously. I would answer that we are to make no decisions from individual cases but are to study the question itself. I would further say that wherever the Jew lives in environments that do not bring his energies into conflict with those of his neighbor, as for instance, in centers where our people are massed together, and where they pursue certain exclusive lines of industry, it is possible for them to keep the Sabbath. But a million and a half of American Jews, scattered throughout all the cities, towns, villages and hamlets, whose business affairs bring them in open and active competition with their neighbors, can only observe their Sabbath at the loss of one-sixth of their energy, which must eventuate in a reduced capacity to earn a livelihood, and hence in poverty. Again, from a religious point of view that may not look very formidable,

since consistency is proclaimed both a virtue and a duty; but from the economic point of view, we are virtually dealing with an impossible proposition. Saturday is an important day in American industries. It is paying and distributing day. The half holiday institution of some of the large cities has not found general sympathy, because conditions vary with locality. But, wherever he may be, the Jewish wholesale merchant, the banker, the manufacturer, the artisan, and the unskilled laborer, owe obligations, which appear to be distinctly in conflict with their religious obligation. The banker cannot refuse to pay out money. The merchant and the manufacturer cannot impose upon their employees a duty of distributing their energies over five days. The artisan, who would be the greatest sufferer, cannot be expected to maintain his family at one-sixth less than keeps his fellows, for with them he shares the responsibilities of a social position, and therefore must enjoy an equal income. This economic difficulty is perhaps at the bottom of all our trouble, and from its point of view it may be seriously doubted whether any remedy can at all be devised to encourage and promote a better observance of the Sabbath. And yet, I must submit, even this grave aspect of the question ought not to induce us, as the Breslau Conference of 1846 bravely said, "to throw a three-thousand-year-old tradition overboard." We are not yet ready to confess that the future has nothing in store for our Sabbath but an assimilation with the National day of rest.

Third. As regards the social aspects of this great question, they might lead us into lengthy considerations of the evolution of our social life, with which, too, strict account must be kept. A people's religious practice is considerably influenced by its social environment. The social life of Israel in its native land, the social life of the Diaspora, the social life of the Ghetto, the present social life of Jewish communities in the various countries into whose nations they are incorporated, all present considerations that would lead to conclusions opposing the possibility of a uniform practice, as regards even many essential characteristics of religious observance. The latter will always seek to harmonize with its social surroundings. Many of the old-time restrictions of labor harmonize with the social life of old Israel. Sabbath rest

needed a social atmosphere, wherein to develop according to every conceivable detail. Principle and law were fixed and made concrete by pronouncements and interpretations, as well as by custom; whence comes the fact that any Halakha admitted in theory derives its vitality from Teqanoth, Gezeroth, and Minhagim, just as in our modern jurisprudence the status of the law is fixed by popular practice and decrees of court. These three anciently fixed the status of practice, but they cannot fix it permanently, for they are the mechanism only to bring principles of faith and practice in harmony with the life of the community. It is therefore easy to understand that two elements always come into conflict with one another in a consideration of almost every Jewish question; the traditional aspect of the question, which always refers to the old order, that is to say, its status in former times, and the modern aspect, which refers to the social changes that have affected the old status. Now, it is popularly believed that so far as religion is concerned, custom must be concrete. One is supposedly a good Jew when in matters religious, he lives and moves in a rabbinical atmosphere, which means, that in his practices and observances, he stands upon the law and the principle, environed by the mass of rabbinical decisions and interpretations that have, of course, become a part of the law. That means to say, that the possibility is admitted of living in two distinct atmospheres, one distinctly national, which means the acquisition and absorption of national characteristics, the other religious, which means the maintenance of social, as well as religious practices, which belong, strictly speaking, to the national life of a bygone time. Theoretically, that may be possible. Practically, it is possible only in individual cases, and must be explained upon special grounds. One might assume the possibility of a complete assimilation with the life of the Nation on the one hand, and an accompanying withdrawal into an atmosphere of esoteric religion on the other, but from a community point of view that is impossible. If it be our duty, and it undoubtedly is, to permit full sway to the assimilating processes of the times, whereby every Jew is welded into the body of citizenship that composes the Nation, and molded for his responsibilities as a factor in the common good,

we cannot place any restrictions on the growth of his sentiment as regards his social freedom. The atmosphere of social and religious life must harmonize. If that harmony consists in the removal, rather than the creation of restrictions, we certainly must stand our ground. I wish to contribute but one of many illustrations in point. It seems to me that many of the social restrictions regarding the Sabbath date from the same era to which we must attribute the rise of rabbinical discipline, that is to say, the centuries immediately succeeding the time of Ezra, when, in fact, the status of the Palestinian Sabbath, as we know it, became fixed. I would infer this from a Talmudical statement that the enactment of the prohibition known as "Muqzah" dates from the time of Nehemiah (Talmud Babli Sabbath, page 123; compare Moses Brueck, Rabinische Ceremonialgebraueche, etc., Breslau, 1837). Muqzah may be briefly defined as a prohibition to handle any vessel or instrument used in the trades and occupations which are forbidden on the Sabbath. Now it is clear that such a prohibition must have had far-reaching influence in determining both the social and the moral aspects of Sabbath observance. It puts a barrier on every kind of energy, and regulates thought itself, as it dwells on the difficult question of what to do, or not to do. To be sure, considered from an archæological point of view, we can understand the ethical background of such a prohibition. But our considerations are practical, not archæological. How would such a prohibition, with all the hardships it entails, apply to our present social environment? In fact, who, born and reared in our latter day surrounding, can even mentally assimilate the fact that the deliberate or accidental touching of a knife, used for labor, or an axe, is a grave infraction of the Divine commandment of rest? This impossibility to appreciate the practical value of rabbinical interpretation is not a matter of ignorance, nor a deliberate rejection of its wisdom. It is purely a matter of changed social aspects, a change of social environments within which life has become a different thing from what it has been in former days. So has it come to pass that what unreasonable critics are pleased to call irreligion is largely the operation of an assimilating tendency. We have adapted ourselves to our environments. That is all. Our social life is Occidental,

not Oriental. We have grown up in wider, broader conceptions of life. You cannot teach your American charges, accustomed to healthy exercise, that a walk beyond a fixed limit is an offense against God, nor can you insist that producing music on Friday evening is a thing so unlawful that it must be abhorred. You cannot teach your people, for they would not understand you, that the noblest ideal of Sabbath rest is to sit still and do nothing, or that their leisure hours may not be occupied with some pleasant task that is a diversion from the week's systematic toil—in a word, the very spirit of Sabbath rest has changed because the popular idea of rest has changed; because the social life, for better or for worse, has changed; because, further, it is an impossibility to perpetuate old time interpretations among a people that are forever learning from their neighbors, hence forever adapting themselves to the life of which theirs is a part. Here we are again confronted with very serious questions. What interpretation have we to offer to the demand for the perpetuation of the social ideals of the Sabbath, when we know that the old interpretations have wholly lost their force, and the people grow restive beneath a repeated charge that every act of theirs that contradicts the old standards is an act of irreligion inconsistent with their professions? Can we regulate either the public or the domestic character of Sabbath by new interpretations? Can we guard against the gradual decline of the Sabbath at home, when people no longer know what is considered right or wrong, or is it safe or advisable, to return to the conservative ground that regulates every act and custom, that admits no freedom of interpretation, that upholds every old standard, and assumes an attitude of resentment towards every supposed offender? I said, shall we return to conservative ground; can we? Can we change the tide of life, or can we create a distinct domestic atmosphere for the Sabbath so intolerant of personal freedom that our homes become once more locked in the shackles of an uncompromising discipline? It seems to me that all theorizing on this subject, only tends to make our situation appear more aggravating.

And now, two questions. Can we restore the Sabbath? Can we reconcile the progressive forces of our own times with the

historical influences, from which, in a considerable degree, we find it still impossible to alienate ourselves? The reply to these two questions must not, cannot be furnished by an individual. My task has been the presentation of causes which, in my own opinion, hinder the general observance of the traditional Sabbath. But I have not yet admitted, and I cannot admit, that these self-same causes constitute a valid argument for any synodical action, looking to the assimilation of the Jewish day of rest with that observed by other people. Back of observances lie historical principles, and the sacrifice of the latter is more to be feared than the decline of discipline. The non-observance of Sabbath by millions of Jews does not invalidate the fact that as an historical institution, it represents principles, that are a part of the life blood of our religion. Upon the face of this presentation, it might be easy for some to readily pronounce the impending doom of the Sabbath and its ultimate extinction, but that seems not yet very clear to me. I wish to stand as long as I can on historical ground. The Sabbath is one of those powerful elements that have given our religious system that distinct individuality that has made it the source of other systems, and I question whether the elimination of so great an element does not involve the gravest danger to the system itself. Such a contingency cannot be entertained with equanimity. If the trend of our American life in this matter is toward the popular recognition of Sunday, not merely as a day eminently convenient for public worship, but for the enunciation of the principles inherent in the Sabbath, then I believe we are on the eve of a sectarian movement that may eventuate in the third and fourth generation in our being cut off from the confraternity of Israel. If I am not mistaken in that assumption, the plain proposition would be an inquiry into the means of guarding against such an eventuality. The question concerns us deeply. Religion, with us, means more than a mere acknowledgment of ethical principles, more than a compliance with traditional discipline, more than a classification and profession of theological statements. Religion, with us, means also a maintenance of the continuous identity of Israel as God's missionary for the transmission of those truths held efficacious in teaching and saving the

world. That identity of Israel, I maintain, must be a distinct spiritual identity, aside from those considerations by which we perpetuate our physical life and existence as one of the great families of mankind. That spiritual identity, I submit, involves a maintenance of historical principles. We deal here with no mere discipline, the shifting character of which can be historically determined. We deal here with no mere custom, nor with rabbinical decrees and decisions. We deal with an institution, one of the oldest, held to be divinely ordained, and so still expressed in our rituals. However we may interpret the statement of its divine origin, that institution is indissolubly interwoven with other elements that make up our religious system. To eliminate it, means breaking through the entire system. Now, is the contingency of a sectarian movement such a dangerous one? That question, of course, has its sides and views. My side and my view are that I am a Jew and wish to remain a Jew, that my children are Jews, and that so far as all my moral and intellectual responsibilities extend, I wish to preserve the solidarity and identity of the people whose teacher I am. I have no mission to create or further new religious systems. If it be true that the latter are born, not made, my responsibility lies and will always lie with my own people in the conservation of those integral elements of faith, that have permitted our Judaism to survive the uprising of all other systems. Members of the oldest spiritual confraternity, let us not hug the false ambition of becoming founders of the latest. These views may be narrow, but narrowness in this matter is a virtue. We must guard if we can against breaking the chain of centuries. The moment we break the chain, we will realize how wide will be the chasm that will separate us from our people all over the world. Let those who can dwell on the contingency with pleasure. To me it is a matter of the gravest, most anxious concern. It seems to me, therefore, that this Conference has much business in hand.

The following considerations occur to me as effective in the future treatment of this question:

1. This Conference should authorize an official statement regarding its position in the matter of the Sabbath.

2. This Conference should define as a matter of information to the people the difference between a mere Sunday service and the endowment of Sunday with the characteristics and significance of Israel's historical Sabbath.

3. This Conference should define, if possible, the spiritual authority that guides and directs the religious practice of our people.

4. This Conference should inquire whether the ideas of rest involved in the Sabbath can at all be made adjustable to the present economic conditions, and whether, in view of our present difficulties, other ethical interpretations than those that have hitherto obtained, may not be suggested.

5. This Conference should inquire whether the institution of a Sunday Sabbath is, or is not, inconsistent with the historical and theological principles underlying the same, and whether or not such an institution would not be productive of schismatic action, by which its advocates would expose themselves to the possibility of creating a new sect in the midst of the Jewish people.

6. This Conference should urge a more emphatic, more solemn celebration of the Sabbath, and should appeal to the men of our people to attend the public service, even if economic reasons make their rest impossible.

7. This Conference should particularly look for the means whereby the domestic character of the Sabbath can be enhanced, and endeavor, by incessant appeal and unremitting instruction, to preserve within the domestic environments the spirit of Sabbath rest and devotion.

Whether in any or all of these considerations there lies a remedy for our besetting evil, time alone will tell. There are doubtless other considerations to be offered. Out of the careful, honest purpose of a body of strong men, much good may be developed. Knowing the gravity and extent of the evil, we may be better equipped to treat it. On the 14th day of July, 1846, at the Breslau Conference, in introducing the same issue, its famous President, Abraham Geiger, used the following memorable words with which I must conclude my study of this great question:

"It is to be assumed that in the treatment of so radical an evil

many a member of the conference, as a pure matter of theory, will present drastic remedies, and in consequence utterances will be made, which, to some may appear sarcastic or offensive. But, if anywhere, freedom of speech must here remain unassailed, and every one must be permitted to express his opinion. From the other side we may hear that, just because of the difficulties of the times it is so much more necessary to cling to that which obtains and that just on that account, concessions are not to be tolerated. These conflicting opinions must be considered but from one point of view—the effort to sanctify life through days of rest and devotion. Whilst we will remember what sacrifices the Jewish people, since former days, gladly and willingly have brought, we dare not ignore the chasm that is now in existence. Let us therefore to our labors with courage, but also with caution. It is of course to be anticipated that we may not arrive at a completely satisfactory solution of this question, and that, therefore, we cannot bring about a complete restoration, but here, too, applies the old adage—'not upon thee rests the duty to complete the work, neither art thou at liberty to withdraw from it'—What we commence, later conferences will continue, and out of the principles we shall be able to enunciate, the future will extract the necessary conclusions."

Let this utterance of the great leader of German Jewish thought be the keynote of our deliberations, and may our God direct our ways for the happiness and peace of our people.

Dr. Harrison had not returned his paper up to the time of going to press.—EDITOR.