

REFORM JUDAISM AND *ALIYAH*

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Reform Judaism and *Aliyah*

An Introduction

Today, the majority of American Reform Jewish synagogues, organizations, camps, and youth initiatives proudly support Israel as a pillar of Reform Judaism. Yet as a movement, our historical relationship with Israel has been more ambiguous. As incredible as it may seem, the Reform Movement once opposed Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state. Its evolving platform regarding Zionism and Israel from the 19th century until today is both fascinating and complex. The Reform Movement's relationship with the idea of *aliyah*, settling in the land of Israel, is even more ambiguous and complicated. This thesis hopes to gain a broad understanding of the evolving nature of Reform Zionism, *aliyah*, and the relationship between American Reform Judaism and Israel. It will look at the issue from a variety of perspectives, beginning with a central Talmudic discussion on *aliyah*, followed by a historical overview of Reform Zionism, and lastly, a sociological look at Reform *Olim*—those individuals who have chosen to settle in Israel. By looking at the topic of *Aliyah* in Reform Judaism from these distinct points of view, this thesis hopes to show that the relationship of the American Reform Movement with *aliyah* is a unilateral one, having much guidance from the Reform Movement but ultimately being a personal decision. A challenge of the Reform Movement (as

well the Conservative Movement) is that *aliyah*, like most other Jewish values, are not obligations. The most our movements can do is articulate why *aliyah* is a value and then educate, encourage, and support accordingly.¹

This project came out of a personal desire to explore my own ambivalent relationship with the idea of *aliyah* after my experience of living as a Reform Jew in Jerusalem during my time spent at HUC-JIR. Israel did not play a prominent role in my Jewish identity as a child, nor my family life; but support for Israel was instilled in me at the Workman's Circle Camp, Kinder Ring, which I attended for many years. Israel was really introduced to me through a Birthright Israel trip sponsored by Kesher, where I started to become familiar with the Reform Movement in Israel through visits to HUC-JIR in Jerusalem, and kibbutzim Yahel and Lotan in the Arava. I would describe my HUC-JIR year in Israel as complicated. It was the place where I both fell in love with the State of Israel, became familiar with Israeli culture and Hebrew, and began to grow into a Jewish professional. Yet certain experiences of discrimination stand out from that year, and I have continued to relate to Israel through the fight for Reform recognition in Israel. While I personally never considered *aliyah*, I tried not to let my personal experiences or opinions shape the research of this paper.

¹ "Gillman, Neil. "The Ambiguity of our Ties to Israel." *Deepening the Commitment: Zionism and the Conservative Movement*, JTS: New York, 1990. pp 131-135 Gillman suggests that Aliyah should be presented as one option for American Jews, but not the only option. "If we really accept that Jewish life today has two centers, each with its own strengths and shortcomings, we will have to reconceptualize why and how we teach *aliyah*."

Additionally, this thesis topic arose from my experience learning with the iCenter, a non-profit educational organization that works to advance innovative Israel education. As a component of a Master's Concentration in Israel Education through the iCenter, this thesis hopes to offer the Reform Movement, how Reform *olim* have been inspired and motivated by Reform educational programming to define their personal relationship with Israel as well as expose some of the challenges *olim* see between the movement's two sides.

Finally, the course, "Why Israel Matters?" on the New York Campus of HUC-JIR taught by Dr. Lisa Grant and Dr. Jonathan Krasner, encouraged me to take seriously the issue of Israel as an essential component of a Reform Jewish identity.

The first chapter of this paper, *Aliyah in the Text*, is a close reading of Ketubot 110, a defining text on *aliyah* in rabbinic tradition. The text tradition grapples with the question of whether making *aliyah* to land of Israel is a mitzvah (A positive commandment) or simply a meritorious act. A dissenting opinion can also be found in a discussion that seems to prohibit going up to Israel "as a wall," which would seemingly forbid the large waves of *aliyah* we have seen in Modern times. Although our sacred texts are filled with teachings

extolling the virtues of the Land of Israel, none of these teachings seem to find their way into modern conversations about *aliyah*.

The second chapter, *A Historical Overview of The Reform Movement's Relationship with Zionism*, explores the slow but dramatic shift the Reform Movement took from rejecting the idea of a national Jewish identity to actively supporting the modern State of Israel. The chapter looks at the Reform Movement's influential documents and leading voices that have articulated the movement's stance on Israel and *aliyah*. It seeks to set these policies and opinions in a historical context to suggest why, and show how the movement has evolved in its relationship with Israel.

Finally, Chapter 3, *Personal Narratives of Reform Olim*, turns to those individuals who made the choice to settle in the Land of Israel. They are the living examples of how the Reform Movement influenced their relationship with the State of Israel and how they continue to shape the story of Reform Judaism and *aliyah*. In order to get a more narrow understanding of *aliyah* in Reform Judaism, this chapter is composed of personal interviews and draws out some overarching themes. The Reform *Olim* speak to the educational programs which helped inspire their *aliyah*, their understanding of Reform Jewish identity in Israel, and opinions about the future of the Reform Movement in Israel, and its relationship with America. Through interviews with Reform Olim, this paper hopes to understand how can an exploration of their

lives and experiences help to build a deeper relationship between American Reform Jews and Israel?

In Stanley Davids' article, "A Proposed Taxonomy for a Twenty-First Century of Reform Zionism," He reports that North American Reform Jews today have a distant relationship to Israel, Zionism and Jewish Peoplehood, and suggests that this gap will continue to widen with the next generation.ⁱ I hope this thesis in some way can prompt Reform Jews to engage with our complex history and think about ways our relationship with Israel can improve in the future. I also hope this thesis gives voice to those who live in Israel and who shape the relationship between Reform Judaism and Israel in their daily lives. Their voices have and should continue to inspire the Movement's Israel platform.

ⁱ Davids, Stanley. "A Proposed Taxonomy for a Twenty-First-Century Theology of Reform Zionism." *CCAR Journal* Spring 2007.

Reform Judaism and Aliyah

Chapter 1: *Aliyah* in the Text

“All roads lead to the Land of Israel, but none from it” (Mishnah, Ketubot, 13:11).

Aliyah is the Hebrew word that means, “to go up” in reference to the Land of Israel. Jewish tradition maintains that going to the land of Israel is an ascent both physically and spiritually. The idea of Jews “returning to Zion” refers first to the events described in Ezra-Nehemiah in which the Jewish people return to the Land of Israel from the Babylonian exile in 538 BC. In the Book of Ezra we read the call to “go up to Jerusalem” using the Hebrew, *V’ya’al l’Yerushalayim*. We read:

*Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is Judah. Anyone of you of all His people- may his God be with him, and **let him go up to Jerusalem** that is in Judah and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with the silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2-4)*

In this passage, exile is over for those who want to return, and a relationship is defined between those who make the choice to settle in Israel and those who choose to remain in the Diaspora. The term, *aliyah*, was later borrowed from the ancient event and adopted as the definition for all immigrations to the Land of Israel and the State of Israel in modern times. *aliyah* is an important Jewish

cultural concept and a fundamental component of Zionism. It can refer to an individual's choice to settle in the land and can also refer to a large group of settlers. But before the contemporary definition of *aliyah* came to be, the rabbis of our Talmud were mostly concerned with the question of whether living or settling in the Land of Israel, the value: *Yishivat Eretz Yisrael*, is mitzvah. They wanted to identify whether Jews are commanded to do so, or whether it is simply a meritorious act.

The popular conception suggested by numerous Biblical passages is that the Land of Israel is a gift from God to the Jewish people, based on promises to the patriarchs. In the book of Genesis this promise appears to be unconditional. In other books of the Torah, it becomes evident that the promise is contingent on Israel following the laws of the Torah. Therefore, according to the biblical view, the Land of Israel is both a gift and a reward for observing the commandments. However there are also passages, which suggest that living in Israel is, in itself, a commandment. The most important of these is Numbers 33:53: *V'horashtem et ha-aretz, v'yashvetem bah. Ki lachem natati et ha-aretz, lareshet otah*. In context, verses 52 and 53 read, "Then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places. And you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you

to possess it.” Rashi interprets "*V'horashtem*" as a command to drive out the Canaanites and "*v'yashvetem bab*" as a promise from God, that this land is the place for the Israelites to settle. However, Ramban, takes issue with Rashi, and interprets "*v'horashtem*" as a command to take possession of the land and "*veyeshavtem ba*" as a command to dwell in it. In his commentary on Maimonides, the Ramban criticizes Maimonides for not including the commandment to dwell in the Land of Israel in the list of positive commandments.ⁱⁱ

Later, in our Talmud, the question of the mitzvah of settling in the land of Israel becomes more imminent. We come across this discussion in a Talmudic text regarding marriage and the question of where a family may settle. In Ketubot 110a, the Mishnah reads:

*There are three provinces in Eretz Yisrael with respect to marriage: Judea, Transjordan, and the Galilee. One cannot require his wife to move from a town in one province, to a town in another province, or from a city in one province to a city in another province. However, within the same province, one can require his wife to move from one town to another town, or from one city to another city; but not from a town to a city, or from a city to a town. One can require his wife to move from a bad dwelling to a good dwelling, but not from a good dwelling to a bad dwelling. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says: One man not require his wife to move even from a bad dwelling to a good dwelling, because the good dwelling tries a person constitution.*ⁱⁱⁱ

In the Talmudic discussion that follows, the rabbis discuss the hardships that come with making a major move. For example, a husband is not allowed

to take his wife from a city to a town because a city offers access to many necessities while a town may not. This is the logic that also drives the conversation between a superior dwelling to an inferior dwelling. The husband is not supposed to cause any additional hardship to his wife and therefore is not allowed to bring his wife to a place that will be less comfortable for her. Yet, an exception is made. The rabbis ask, “On what grounds, can a wife be compelled to move from a town to a city? Or in other words, what is a situation where a husband can impose some discomfort or difficulty upon his wife? The Gemara answers, this supports the teaching of R. Yose b. Chanina who stated, ‘From where do we know that city life is difficult? From Scripture where it is said, “And the people blessed all of those who willingly offered themselves to settle in Jerusalem.” This biblical text, from Nehemiah 11:2, refers to the returning of the exiles from Babylonia. When these exiles returned, some settled in the city of Jerusalem and were blessed for doing so. The Schottenstein commentary clarifies that since volunteering to dwell in Jerusalem warranted a blessing, it is evident that living in a city is objectionable.^{iv} From this conversation we can understand that moving to Jerusalem was a city that was difficult to live in. Therefore, anyone willing to live there was worthy of an extra blessing and the value of moving there to settle was greater than the discomfort a family may endure by moving.

While this conversation does show that some extra merit is credited to those who willingly choose to settle in the land of Israel, specifically, Jerusalem; this conversation doesn't exactly show that Jerusalem was inherently an important place to the rabbis of the Talmud. The next Mishnah text shows that the Land of Israel had a special status. In Ketubot 110b, It reads:

A person can force all the members of his household to go up to Eretz Yisrael to live there but he can force none of them to leave Eretz Yisrael. A person can force all the members of his household to go up to Jerusalem, but he can force none of them to leave Jerusalem. The same is true for both men and women."

In the Gemara, the rabbis expand on the idea that if a husband is bringing his family to live in the Land of Israel, it does not matter if he is moving his family from a superior dwelling to an inferior one. The land of Israel has a special status that sets it aside as an exception to Jewish living. Schottenstein notes that because several mitzvot require a person's presence in Jerusalem, thought of as "the place that God will choose," the sages recognized that the settlement of Jerusalem is a worthy objective, and they therefore enacted a right for a person to force his household to move there. The underlying value is *Yishivat Eretz Yisrael*, the responsibility to further the settlement of the Land of Israel. The Sifri maintain that the mitzvah of dwelling in the Land of Eretz Yisrael is as important as all of the other mitzvot of the Torah combined. Ramban comments that Eretz Yisrael is the main locale where mitzvot should be performed even if they are not related to the land.^{vi}

While, it seems hard to say that this value of settling the land is a positive commandment, Schottenstein notes that according to some Rishonim, like the Ramban mentioned earlier, there is a Biblical mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, the Mishnah's ruling that a person may force his household members to go there with him is a reflection of this mitzvah although the right to coerce them is probably a rabbinic enactment. Other Rishonim maintain that there is no positive commandment to settle Eretz Yisrael. However, even these authorities agree that it is a worthy cause to live in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the Sages enacted that a person should be able to force his family to move there in fulfillment of this aim.

Furthermore, if a husband wants to bring his wife to the land of Israel and she refuses, it is ground for him to divorce her. The Talmudic conversation continues:

The rabbis taught in a Barita: If a husband wants his household to go up to Eretz Yisrael or to Jerusalem and she wants them not to go up, we force her to go up with him. But if she will not go up with him despite our efforts, then she must leave him (accept a divorce) without receiving the entitlements written into her ketubah. If she wants them to go up and he does not want them to go up with her, then he must divorce her and give her the ketubah.^{vii}

Although this conversation continues on to clarify the mode in which the ketubah is paid, the fact that both a man and woman can divorce over the issue of moving to Jerusalem further emphasizes the importance of the value *yishivat eretz yisrael* to the rabbis.

If at this point living in the land of Israel simply seems like an option that earns one some merit, the text goes to firmly state that living in the land of Israel is a priority. The Gemara of Ketubot 110b reads:

The Rabbis taught in a Barita: A person should always dwell in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city with a majority of idolaters. A person should not dwell outside the Land, even in a town most where most of the inhabitants are Jews; for whoever lives in the Land of Israel may be considered to have a God, but whoever lives outside the Land may be regarded as one who has no God. For it is said in Scripture, "to give you the Land of Canaan, to be your God (Leviticus 28:38)."

This is the part of the Talmudic conversation where the rabbis state firmly that living in the Land of Israel is a priority, so much so, they claim that whoever lives outside of the land has no God. In a clarification of this statement, the rabbis question the idea that God is the God of the entire world and cannot be limited to one geographical location. Therefore they further clarify that living outside the land of Israel is compared to idol worship, a transgression so great that it would cause God to abandon the Jews as God's chosen people.

The sentiment about the relationship between lands outside Eretz Yisrael and idol worship brings us back to our Torah. Deuteronomy 28:64 warns in admonition that if the Jews abandon the Torah, a punishment will be to live outside the land. It reads, "God will scatter you among all the people, from the end of the earth, and there you will serve the gods of others, whom

you did not know- you or your forefathers- of wood and stone.” We can see from this verse how the rabbis made a connection between living outside the land of Israel and idolatry. Rashi comments that this verse does not mean that the Jews will actually worship pagan deities, but rather that the Jews in the Diaspora will have to pay taxes to pagan deities. (And in fact, Jews living in other countries did have to pay taxes to foreign governments used to support religious engagements).

According to Rambam and Meiri, a person who lives outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered to be engaging in idol worship simply because he is dwelling among and associating with idolaters. Meiri writes that, generally speaking, the environments outside of Eretz Yisrael are the permanent home of pagans while Eretz Yisrael is typically the home and the possessors of Torah wisdom. Living in an idolatrous country is therefore conducive to behavior that is antithetical to the Torah. A Jew who resides there- even if he lives within a Jewish environment- cannot help but acclimate himself to his surroundings. Rambam agrees with the sentiment that surrounding environments influence people. He writes, “Man was created in such a way that he is drawn to emulate his friends and colleagues in his attitudes and deeds. He will conduct himself according to the conduct on his countrymen.”^{viii} Following this logic, a person who chooses to settle in a Torah observant country exerts the same pressure on a person’s behavior and soul. Meiri points out that in the Gemara, Eretz Yisrael

is spoken of as a community of God-fearing, Torah observing, people; making it an ideal place to settle.

Ramban, takes a different approach to our Gemara, but concludes with the same value that living in the Land of Eretz Yisrael is the antithesis to the idolatry of other nations. His approach has to do with a belief that God designed the world in a way where angels are placed as overseers, designated for each country. The exception is Eretz Yisrael in which God himself oversees. Therefore, foreign lands experience an inherent spiritual separation from God while the Land of Israel is in closest relationship to him. Foreign lands tolerate a certain level of idolatry because God is not closely related to those lands and people, however if idolatry occurred in the Land of Israel, God would ensure that Israel would expel its inhabitants. Hence, not only does living in Israel make one closer to God, there is also a higher expectation for one's spiritual behavior there.^{ix}

In later times, the relationship between God and the Jewish people is not conditioned absolutely upon their presence in Eretz Yisrael. Saadia Gaon in *Emunos VeDeios* 3:7 states, "The Jewish people is a nation by virtue of its Torah." This means that it is not the people's land or government, which makes the Jewish people in unique relationship to God. We can look upon our history to affirm that God is still the God of the Jewish people even if they are in exile. The covenant of the Torah remains intact no matter where they go.^x

Although one chapter of Ketubot seems to place a priority on living in the Land of Israel, not every rabbi had the same view. In Ketubot 111a, we find two rabbis arguing about whether it is permissible to move to Eretz Yisrael. Many have taken Rav Yehuda's view to be an admonishment against making *Aliyah* to the land.

R. Zeria was evading Rav Yehuda because R. Zeira desired to go up to the Land of Israel from Babylonia while Rab Judah protested against his doing so. Rav Yehuda held the view that whoever goes up from Babylon to the Land of Israel transgresses a positive commandment, for it is said in Scripture, "They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I remember them, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 27:22).

This raises an interesting question about the arguments of Ramban and Meiri, as stated earlier, who believe that it is a biblical mitzvah to settle the land of Israel. How then, is it possible for a prophet to contradict this commandment? Because of this verse, many authorities hold that there is no ongoing and permanent mitzvah to settle the land.

For Rav Zeira, his view of this Biblical source does not prohibit a person from emigrating from Babylonia. He looks at an earlier verse in the passage that refers to the vessels of the Temple and maintains that this verse was written in regard to the sacred utensils of the Temple. God, in his interpretation, declares that those vessels shall remain in Babylonia, but people are permitted to go to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Yehuda disagrees, and cites another verse to help prove that this move is prohibited. He says:

Another text also is available; “I have adjured you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, [should you wake up or rouse the love until it pleases] (Song of Songs 3:5).

The citation of this verse is meant to teach us that we are bound by an oath not to ascend to Eretz Yisrael until the Final Redemption. The “Daughters of Jerusalem” are the Jewish people in every generation. They are sworn not to awaken God’s love for them by returning to Eretz Yisrael before the time that it pleases God to bring about a final redemption. They are sworn by gazelles or by the hinds of the field, meaning that they will be hunted like hinds if they do not observe this oath.^{xi}

R. Zeira interprets the verse from the Song of Songs differently. Our gemara continues:

R. Zeira maintained that this verse implies only that the Jewish People should not converge upon Eretz Yisrael in a wall.

Schottenstein calls this wall, a “wall of force,” and claims that literally, Jewish people should not scale the wall. This wording in the Gemara could be taken from the verse in Joel, “They scale the wall like men of war” (2:7). Rashi explains that Jewish people should not go to Eretz Yisrael “together with a mighty hand” or with force. Piskei Riaz repeats Rashi’s explanation and adds that the Gemara is speaking of something akin to the Ingathering of the Exiles. According to the Tanchuma, it is the ascension of “multitudes and multitudes”

that is prohibited.^{xii} This interpretation is interesting considering the fact that many Modern Jews emigrate to Israel in large groups.

In R. Zera's specific case, he was not ascending to Eretz Yisrael with masses of Jewish people, nor was he engaging in combat to get there, thus he was permitted to go. This teaches us that one must differentiate between living in Israel as a mitzvah directed at individuals and collectively taking possession of the land by setting up a state, particularly if the latter option requires military force. Schottenstein also reminds us of the case of Jews in the generation of Ezra, who came to Israel with a royal invitation from Cyrus, the ruler of the Persian Empire. However, Cyrus's role in the restoration of the exiled Jews was prophetically confirmed so the Jewish people were actually called to account for not ascending en masse at that time.

We see from our Talmudic conversation, that the question of *Yishivat Eretz Yisrael* has no set answer, only a multitude of interpretations. Additionally, there is the question of theory versus practice. How were these texts used as inspiration for actual emigration to the land of Israel? Religious Zionists have used the Ramban's writings to support their position. In particular they are inspired by his use of the term "*Kibbush Eretz Yisrael* -. the conquest of the Land of Israel" in addition to "*Yishuv Eretz Yisreal* - dwelling in the Land of Israel." and also the phrase "*Milchemet Mitzvah*., a war that is a *Mitzvah*", in his

commentary to Maimonides' *Sefer Hamizvot*. The religious anti-Zionists base their halachic argument on the "three strong oaths" that are found in Ketubot 111a. From our discussion about "going up as a wall", this group believes our halachic tradition effectively forbids the Jews from rebelling against the nations of the world by attempting to recapture the Land of Israel by force. They cite numerous examples, starting with Maimonides' *Iggeret Taiman*, to show that this Midrash was taken seriously by rabbinical authorities throughout history. They also accuse the religious Zionists of distorting the Ramban's views. They fail, however, to take into account the historical context in which this Midrash was probably formulated, in the period following the destruction of Betar, when the Rabbis wanted to discourage any further rebellion against Rome.

Traditional Jewish sources are filled with teachings extolling the virtues of dwelling in the Land of Israel. However, prior to the Modern Era the number of *olim* was quite small. This can be attributed to the dangers of travel and poor economic conditions in Israel. In fact, according to Tosafot on Ketubot 110b, the family law aspects that are discussed in this paper, did not apply in their time because of what they referred to as "the perils of the roads". In spite of these perils, some did make the journey, often to seek refuge from persecution. Maimonides, who does not view moving to Israel as a mitzvah, still traveled to Israel after fleeing from Morocco and lived there briefly, before

settling in Egypt. Nachmanides, who takes the opposing view, was forced to leave Spain at age 72. He settled in Israel and contributed to the restoration of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Another famous medieval *oleh* was Rabbi Judah Halevi (1085-1142). In his philosophical treatise "The Kuzari," written in the form of a dialogue between the pagan king of the Khazars and a Jewish sage, he criticizes his contemporaries for "talking the talk" while failing to "walk the walk". In sections II 23-24, after a hearing a long exposition on the merits of the Holy Land, the king tells the sage:

"If this be so, thou fallest short of thy religious duty by not endeavoring to reach that place and make it thy abode in life and death, although thou sayest: 'Have mercy on Zion, for it is the house of our life' and thou believest that the Shekinah will return thither". The sage replies: "this is a justified reproach O King of the Khazars!" and concludes the discussion with the claim that when people mention Zion in their prayers but do not go there:

"This is but as the chattering of a parrot or the chirping of a starling". The work ends with the sage choosing to make *aliyah*.^{xiii}

Rabbi David Golinkin, the leading halachic authority for the Conservative movement in Israel, wrote a response to the Ramban's opinion on *aliyah*. Golinkin says the Ramban was in the minority in declaring *aliyah* a mitzvah because in his times it was virtually impossible for most Jews to move

to Israel because he lived during a time when the land of Israel was controlled by Muslims and Crusaders.

Still however, one chooses to side with the arguments of tradition, the reality of the Modern era presented Jews with different motivations to move to and settle the ancient Land of Israel. In the next chapter of this thesis, we will read more about the Modern discussions about whether or not to support *aliyah* and notice how the Talmudic conversation about the mitzvah or value of *Yishivat Eretz Yisrael* is virtually absent from the minds of Modern Jewish leaders.

ⁱ *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985. Print.

ⁱⁱ Ramban's Commentary on Numbers 33:53 as found on:
<http://www.tora.us.fm/mfrjim/rmbn/MefarsheyTanach004-33.htm>

נג פסוק לג פרק במדבר על ו"רמב

זו דעתי על אתה לרשת הארץ את נתתי לכם כי בה וישבתם הארץ את והורשתם (נג)
ימאסו ולא, להם נתנה הוא כי אותה ויירשו בארץ שישבו אותם יצוה, היא עשה מצות
ולהתישב חולתן אשור ארץ או שנער ארץ ולכבוש ללכת דעתם על יעלה ואלו ה' בנחלת
בארץ הישיבה במצות (קי כתובות) רבותינו שהפליגו ומה ה' מצות על עברוי, שם
לארץ בעלה עם לעלות רוצה שאינה האשה כמורדת וידונו, ממנה לצאת ושאסור ישראל
ויחזיר עשה מצות היא הזה הכתוב כי, הזו במצוה נצטוונו בכאן, האיש וכן, ישראל
והורשתם, פירש י"רש אבל (ח א דברים) הארץ את ורשו באו, רבים במקומות הזו המצוה
לא לאו ואם, בה להתקיים תוכלו, בה וישבתם אז, מיושביה אותה והורשתם, הארץ את
העיקר הוא שפירשנו ומה, בה להתקיים תוכלו:

ⁱⁱⁱ *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Kesubos*. Schottenstein Edition (Hebrew Edition) Artscroll/Mesorah
2000. Ketubot 110a.

^{iv} Rashi, Mahadura Kamma, cited by Shitah Mekubetzes, as found in Schottenstein Talmud, Ketubot 110b.

^v *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Kesubos*: Schottenstein Edition (Hebrew Edition) Artscroll/Mesorah 2000. Ketubot 110b

^{vi} Sifiri (Re'eh 80), Ramban to Leviticus 18:25

^{vii} Ketubot 110b

^{viii} Schottenstein, Hil. Dei'os 6:1

^{ix} Schottenstein, Derashah LeRosh Hashanah, Kisvei Ramban Chavel ed. Pp 249-251.

^{x x} Schottenstein on Saadia Gaon Emunos VeDei'os 3:7

^{xi} Schottenstein footnote 4 to 111a.

^{xii} Piskei Riaz (13:8:6), Tanchuma Yashan, Hosafah to Devarim. Schottenstein footnote 5 to 111a.

^{xiii} Fishman, Tzvi. "This Sunday, Don't Read the New York Times- Read the Kuzari." The Jewish Press. www.jewishpress.com 11 June 2010.

Chapter 2: A Historical Overview of The Reform Movement's relationship with Zionism

“We affirm the unique qualities of living in אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, the land of Israel, and encourage עלייה, immigration to Israel.” (CCAR Pittsburgh Principles, 1999)

Perceptions of an anti- Zionist Reform Movement still permeate conversations today when it comes to describing the relationship between Reform Judaism and Israel. These perceptions come from a basis in history for sure, when the rejection of Jewish nationalism comprised a key premise in its process of renewal. But more accurately, the Zionist question in the Reform movement demonstrates how a Jewish religious movement underwent the most radical transformation of any in Jewish history.

David Polish, author of *Renew Our Days*, affirms it would be a mistake to regard the Reform Movement's embrace of Zionism around the time of the Columbus Platform of 1937 as having simply come to terms with Jewish nationalism. Additionally, it would be mistaken to say Reform Jews came to accept the Zionist agenda after a period of hostility towards Zionist ideas, or after watching the nascent state of Israel succeed. Instead, the Reform Movement's historical relationship with Zionism emerges through numerous conversations, conferences, debates, and general thoughtfulness about what

Reform founders and leaders wanted their religion to be and what Zionism truly was about.ⁱ In this chapter, we will explore what comprised those debates and conversations by looking at historical records of conversations and the contexts in which they took place.

The Reform Movement and Zionism: Two responses to Emancipation

It is impossible to understand the motivations of a Reform Movement position towards Zionism without understanding the founding principles of Reform Judaism. It is also impossible to understand what the Reform Movement was opposing in regards to Zionism without understanding how Zionist thought came to be. Both ideologies were formed in response to Emancipation and can be seen as two answers to the same question about how Jews understood themselves in light of a new era.

The challenges that the Modern Age posed for the Jewish people are connected to the major discontinuity that the Modern Age constituted for all peoples in the western world. To briefly summarize, we can define the Modern Age as the period beginning with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, which divided medieval philosophy into natural science, political science, theology and metaphysics. It can be described as an age of discovery, both scientific and geographic. The economic and technological changes stemming from this shift in thought led straight to the

Industrial Revolution. Political philosopher John Locke can be credited with identifying the shift from defining the obligations of the individual to his community to ensuring the "rights of the individual"- which provided the opportunity to found and define new communities unfettered by traditional ties. New wealth flowed into the hands of the new classes who had no place in the traditional order.ⁱⁱ Overall, the Modern Age made traditional ways of understanding and looking at the world change in meaning, and the social frameworks and established norms of the past lost their relevance.

The Modern Age uniquely affected the Jewish community in Europe. Over different periods of time across Europe, the Emancipation of the Jewish people occurred. To eliminate all ideas of medieval community and feudal order, Jews had to forego their communal autonomy and become individual citizens of their nation- state. However, this caused conflict in some nations. The Emancipation of the Jews brought about Anti-Semitism, the discrimination that Jews faced when figuring out their new place in a larger nation. The "problem of the Jews" was a secondary effect of the impact of the Modern Age on certain host-societies within which the Jews lived.ⁱⁱⁱ

No doubt, the earliest expressions of Reform Judaism occurred as a result of Emancipation and the Modern Age. It had its beginnings in a radical re-definition of the Jewish people as a solely religious community. As Jews of Western Europe encountered Emancipation, many felt that operative Judaism,

with its communally accepted binding norms (known as *Halacha*), its form of community, and expression of peoplehood, were no longer relevant. Early founders of the Reform Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century in Germany and the U.S., felt that the time of nationalist sentiment was past. They envisioned a universalistic future, where national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries no longer separated them from non-Jewish neighbors. No longer an insular community without a nation, the founders of Reform Judaism began to loosen Judaism's tie to the Land of Israel. Reform Judaism rejected the notion that living outside the Land of Israel was considered to be *galut*, or exile.^{iv} They felt that Jews could fulfill their religious obligations in America or any other part of the world. In dedication of the Reform Temple, Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, Rabbi Gustav Posnanski said, "...This country is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, this House of God our Temple."^v Early Reformers affirmed that dispersion of Jews throughout nations was a necessary experience in the realization of our duty as a people. Instead of being a particularistic, insular, people – Judaism was an affirmation of Israel's universal mission of disseminating a special ethic- in particular to the prophetic ideals of social justice- to all humanity. This shift had theological implications as well. As seen in the above dedication, this included a rejection of the idea that there would be a messiah who would bring about the re-building of a Temple in Jerusalem and a re-established priestly sect. In the eyes of early Reform

Movement leaders, Judaism was to be a religion of universal significance but not a particularistic national community intolerable to the modern nation state.^{vi}

We can understand the roots of Zionism, similar to the foundations of Reform Judaism, as a response to the challenges of what we may broadly describe as the Modern Age.^{vii} Modern Political Zionism emerged towards the very end of the nineteenth century, almost two generations after the beginning of Reform Judaism and a generation after the Eastern European Emancipation or *Haskalah*.^{viii} As anti-Semitism made life unbearable for Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe, Leon Pinsker set forth the first argument for Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state. Theodor Herzl took up the cause and in 1897 convened the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, with the vision of eventually establishing a state where Jews could live in safety and sovereignty.^{ix}

Although one may begin to see how both the Reform Movement and Political Zionist thought responded to the real effects that Emancipation had on the Jews of Europe, the remedies that each movement proposed were very different. Polish describes that in the realm of real politick, Emancipation came to individuals but gave no right to Jews as a national group. Jews were requested to abandon their separate laws and autonomous institutions and to

reject their position as a "state within a state." Except for religious differences Jews wholeheartedly became citizens of their home country. From this time on, a debate persisted about what constituted a Jew in Judaism. The Reform Movement would come to place the weight of its influence behind identifying Judaism solely as a religion in which the collective and political elements would become subordinate to a creedal and far less communal entity. The understanding of Judaism as solely a religion, and not as a collective people, or a nation, put the Reform Movement at odds with both Herzlian Zionism, which understood one significant aspect of Judaism to be about a particular nation of people, whether cultural or religious. When the reformers of Germany denounced nationalism they were responding to the challenges of Emancipation as well as to the emergence of Zionist expression. By the middle of the 19th century, Zionism and Reform Judaism were not just unlike ideologies but adversaries, each responding to the spirit of the age but in a different way. Reform was thoroughly committed to the promise of the Emancipation while Zionism regarded the Emancipation with distrust.

The Reform Movement: Early Zionist Positions

The stance the early Reformers took on Jewish peoplehood and nationality had lasting effects on later Reform Jewish positions on Zionism. In

order to understand how early Reform ideas came to solidify Reform Movement positions on Zionism in America, it is important to look at the documents from the time period, where the denunciation of nationalistic feelings can be seen most clearly. It was the Reform Rabbinate in America that was arguably the most actively engaged in the Zionist debate. At least, it is their statements and papers that are the lasting record of the Reform Movement's position on the issue. Many statements made during deliberations and debates led to official policy recorded in Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) annual yearbooks.

In regard to positions on Israel, founders of American Reform Judaism were both establishing an ideological link with earlier German Reform Judaism as well as maintaining those early views on Jewish peoplehood.^x As Hirsch describes, "Classical Reformers attempted to winnow the component of Jewish peoplehood as if it were chaff and to preserve Jewish faith as if it were the kernel"^{xi} Convening at the call of Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler of New York, Reform Rabbis from around the United States met from November 16, through November 19, 1885, with Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise presiding. The rabbis adopted the following seminal text, known as the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Specially referring to Israel, the document states:

We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the

establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.^{xii}

The Pittsburgh Platform refutes the idea that the Jewish people are a nation. Instead, it envisions Jews as a religious community within a nation. It calls for a more universal and rational understanding of the mission of the Jewish people to bring about a messianic age. It is not through cultic practice but rather through “heart and intellect” that Jews will fulfill their role. In addition, the Jews in America from the very beginning of their immigration viewed themselves as part of the national civilization and not as outsiders. The idea that Jews would need a separate national homeland was not in line with the Reform Movement’s agenda of making American Jews at home in America.

Although the Pittsburgh platform was a highly influential founding document of the Reform movement, it was not a static document. In 1890, only five years later, the following resolution to the Pittsburgh Platform was presented:

Although it has been seen this time and again that Jews are no longer a nation and they form a religious community only, this thought not been thoroughly appreciated by the community at large: we still hear of the Jewish nation and the Hebrew people and therefore this conference feels itself called upon to declare once more that there is no Jewish nation now, only a Jewish religious body, and in accordance with this fact neither the name Hebrew nor Israelite, but the universal appellation Jew is applicable to the adherents of Judaism

today.^{xiii}

While there is no record of whether this statement was formally accepted anywhere, it can be assumed it conveyed an alternate view about Jewish nationalism. And just as the anti-nationalism of German Reform developed within an historical reality, the anti-Zionism of this period must also be seen in relation to issues and events to which the Reform Movement was responding.

Reform leadership was not engaged in a purely theological debate. It was embroiled in a struggle with a political opposition, which was regarded as a threat to the existence of Reform Judaism. The Reform movement position was in response to the security of the movement in America as well as in response to the threat of immigrants from Eastern Europe who came bearing the Zionist message. For example, Herzl's "Judenstaat" was published in 1895 and had been read by many of the Russian immigrants coming to America at this time.^{xiv} Even within the CCAR, Herzl's arguments were known. Records show that one man, Caspar Levias used the Dreyfus case to argue for Zionism. He was greatly outnumbered. In the words of Isaac Meyer Wise, "we want freedom, equality, justice, and equity to reign and govern the community in which we live. This we possess in fullness that no State whatever could improve on it. That new messianic movement over the ocean does not concern us at all."^{xv}

This clear Anti-Zionist sentiment seemed to last until the turn of the 20th century. Anti-Semitism in America was part of the fabric of American Society with Jews routinely barred from many professions, businesses, and the upper echelons of society. They did not have the economic or political clout to secure their place in America. The rationale behind the thought being, if only Jews proved their loyalty to their homeland, anti-Semitism would abate. Perhaps Zionism threatened what many Jews felt was the basis for their successful assimilation into American culture: the assertion that the only difference between them and their Christian neighbors was that they prayed in a synagogue and not a church.^{xvi} At the 1898 convention, the following anti-Zionist resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, that we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission, which from the narrow political and rational field has been expanded to the promoting among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish prophets. Such attempts do not benefit, but infinitely harm our Jewish brethren where they are still persecuted, by confirming the assertion of their enemies that the Jews are foreigners in the countries in which they are everywhere the most loyal and patriotic citizens. We reaffirm that the object of Judaism is not political or national but spiritual, and address itself to the continuous growth of peace, justice, and love in the human race, to a messianic time when all men will recognize they form "one great brotherhood" for the establishment of gods kingdom on earth.^{xvii}

Every successive major platform of the Reform Movement based further ideas about Judaism from those contained in the Pittsburgh Platform.

However, the next formal platform was not published until 1937. In the time in

between the two publications, much of the social and political tone in America, and in fact the whole world, had changed. The success of Jewish integration in America provided American Jews with a more secure standing in the community. Moreover, Zionism as a movement had entered into the public arena of Jewish life; no longer theoretical, but a living reality. In 1917, the Balfour declaration formalized the idea that a Jewish national home may be established in Palestine and many Jews had already begun to build the Jewish homeland as *Chalutzim* or Pioneers, settling in the land that would in the future be Israel. By the 1930's, it became clear that integration into Western European society did not indicate safety for Jews. Adolf Hitler had already taken power in Germany and a Second World War was brewing. Millions of Jewish refugees were leaving Europe, and defining themselves as a people as well as a religion. Moreover, the nations from which these Jews were coming also saw them as “Jew” over any kind of national citizenship as it was “Jew” which was stamped on their passports. As these Eastern European Jews from Poland and Russia primarily were immigrating to the United States, they brought with them new attitudes about Jewish Peoplehood and a new context for American Jewry.^{xviii} In 1937, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations put forward the Columbus Platform, which included a more nuanced endorsement of Zionism. We find in that platform:

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

This guiding principle struggles with the tension between the early rejection of Jewish nationalism of the Pittsburgh Platform, while at the same it affirms that Palestine is indeed a place where Jews have the potential for new life. The Columbus Platform shows an acceptance of the massive demographic shift caused by previous waves of Eastern European Jewish immigrants attracted to Zionism, as well as influential pro-Zionist Reform rabbis like Stephen S. Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, and Max Raisin^{xx}, the formation of the competing and ardently Zionist American Jewish Congress, and the recent sharp increase in European anti-Semitism brought on by the rise of Fascism. The Columbus Platform, was in effect a negation of the anti-Zionist planks in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 and seen as a major turning point in the development of Reform Judaism's relationship with Israel. Yet as Howard Greenstein points out in his work, *Turning Point*, "The majority of the CCAR was still in the non-Zionist camp. The number of men present when the final vote was taken on the Zionist plank resolution represented but a fraction of the total conference membership."^{xxi}

The Centenary Perspective: Changing History, Changing Views

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is arguably the most influential change between the Columbus Platform and the next formal statement of the Reform Movement's views towards Israel, known as the Centenary Perspective in 1976. However in the span of history between 1936 and 1976 the cultural zeitgeist changed so much, it is important to explore some of the ideas that caused a major shift in the Reform Movement's relationship with Zionism and the Modern State of Israel.

At the end of World War II, when the full horrors of the Holocaust came to light and thousands of survivors desperately sought entry to the new State of Israel, one of the most steadfast of the Reform anti-Zionists, Hebrew Union College president Julian Morganstern, acknowledged that [the events of the Holocaust], "have made Zionists in a certain sense of all of us who are worthy of the name Jew."^{xxii}

The 1960s in Israel became a place to explore both Israeli and Jewish identity. Due to a relatively period of calm in Israel, many Israelis had the opportunity to ponder the question, "Now that we have a Jewish state, what do we do with it? Additionally, after the Eichman trial of 1961 and Yigdal Yadin's Masada dig in 1964, the cultural air was replete with well publicized

manifestations of young Israeli's concern with their identity.^{xxiii}

The Six-Day and Yom Kippur wars were turning points in Israeli identity as well as Jewish identity worldwide. A message was clearly sent to the Jewish community worldwide that only the Jewish people could be committed to Israel's survival. Michael Livni writes about the wars, “[They] were not only a visceral reaction to the possibility of another catastrophe befalling the Jewish people. It was the realization that the Jews stood alone.”^{xxiv} For this reason, Zionism in America gained more respect as term and a respectable way to identify outside of Israel. Initially, the Reform Movement was not actively involved in the creation of the State of Israel. This contributed to the exclusive Orthodox control of religious matters in Israel.^{xxv} If Reform Judaism was going to have an impact on the Jewish State, it needed to get involved. It was clear to certain leaders that a Progressive Jewish presence would have to be established. Many intentional steps were taken to build the Reform Movement in Israel.

In 1963, David Ben Gurion granted the then president of the Hebrew Union College (HUC), the archaeologist Nelson Glueck, a plot of land in Jerusalem. Glueck promised to bring rabbinic students to Israel for a year. The promise came to fruition in 1970.^{xxvi} A dedicated group of Zionist Reform Rabbis under the leadership of Stephen Schafer assumed professional leadership of the UAHC Youth Division, which Schafer directed from 1971-1983. Reform youth began to travel to Israel summer trips under their auspices.

The World Union for Progressive Judaism moved its headquarters to Jerusalem. In January 1976, the World Union for Progressive Judaism formally affiliated with the World Zionist Organization and its Jerusalem based director, Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, became a member of the WZO Executive.^{xxvii} By 1974, The Labor Zionist orientation of key Reform rabbis working with youth, paved the way for the establishment of two Reform kibbutzim, Yahel and Lotan. The initiators of the kibbutzim hoped they would be a focus for Reform Zionist identification in both the Diaspora and in Israel. A real Reform Kibbutz movement also depended on the evolution of a pioneering Reform Movement in North America.^{xxviii}

As The Reform Movement was burgeoning in Israel, it was not always clear what the relationship was between the American Reform Movement and its endeavors in Israel. The Israeli movement relied on American supporters to be champions for their work in Israel and for financial support. Yet, it was clear the small group of Reform leadership dedicated to Israel were already facing some challenges in the relationship with America. In 1976, Hirsch wrote the following about the progressive movement in Israel:

The Israeli movement is not merely an extension of the Diaspora movement. It is an attempt to create a liberal orientation to Judaism in the daily experiences of people...Because Israel is the focus of Jewish concerns, the pattern the Israel movement develops and the problems it encounters are destined to have an impact on the world movement, far beyond its relative number of adherents...The state of Israel offers the movement a test of its Jewish authenticity.^{xxix}

Hirsch's statement can be read as a call to the Diaspora to support the Reform Movement in Israel. Additional impetus to support Israel resulted from the U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism.^{xxx xxxi} This pronouncement galvanized the UAHC biennial of that year. At the Dallas biennial in November 1975, President Alexander Schindler, responded. He stated that if the General Assembly adopts this anti-Zionist account, it would be, "The beginning of the end of a beautiful dream." He termed the draft "a canard, a libel not just of Israel but of the Jewish people as a whole." Rabbi Schindler stressed, "We are all of us Jews and whether we use a small 'z' or a large 'Z,' we are all of us Zionists...At no time in our history have we ever stopped working for Zion. We shall continue to do so for the rest of eternity. And against the scheming and the maledictions of our enemies, we will extend our stake in Israel. We Reform Jews, too. We will stay and we will build."^{xxxii} Reframing Reform Judaism's historical ambivalence towards Israel, this statement marked a huge and bold position about Reform Judaism's support for Israel.

Along with political activism surrounding the foundation of the Reform Movement in Israel, Reform Rabbis and thinkers were reflecting on the new ways that Israel is part of a Jewish identity. In the 1960s in America, Eugene Borowitz, a renowned leader and Jewish Philosopher in the Reform

Movement, published a new work focused on the idea of the Postmodern Jew—one who is committed to individual autonomy, but who still has a relationship with God, Torah, and Israel. In *Renewing the Covenant*, he writes: “A Jewish relationship with God inextricably binds selfhood and ethnicity, with its multiple ties of land, language, history, traditions, fate and faith”^{xxxiii} He elaborates that the State of Israel is the place where Jews can better fulfill the multilayered responsibilities enjoined on them by the covenant. He even goes so far to state that every Jew must face the Covenantal challenge of moving to Israel to join the Jewish people in working out its uniquely full response to God’s demand that we sanctify social existence. However, Borowitz also acknowledges the challenge many Reform Jews feel no sense of urgency or to make this move. He affirms that Jews who do not find themselves able to fulfill the commitment of living in Israel still can live in the Diaspora yet live with an intense tie to the land of Israel and “measure their Diaspora fulfillment of the ethnic obligations of Jewish selfhood by the standard of the State of Israel’s Covenant accomplishments.”^{xxxiv}

Borowitz was not the only philosopher who thought about what a changing Reform Movement meant for its relationship with Israel. Philosopher and Rabbi Dow Marmur, also published an article about the need to “Zionize” Reform Judaism. He calls for an end to the purely faith-based definition of Reform Judaism that the early reformers took and argues that as a movement

we cannot be afraid to embrace our particularistic call. He writes, “To Zionize Reform Judaism means to restore the dimension of distinctive particularistic Jewish commitments and Jewish practices of to the very fabric of our Jewish life.”^{xxxv}

After years of support for the State of Israel, and thinking about its place in the life of Reform Jews, on the 100th anniversary of the Hebrew Union College, Dr. Borowitz discussed with some college alumni the need for a new platform of the Reform Movement. The only way that the leaders of this writing committee agreed to move forward with their project was to agree that their guiding principle had to be majority agreement. No statement would enter the platform without being presented to the CCAR and voted upon.^{xxxvi} It is in this Centenary Perspective that we read of an explicit bond between Reform Jews and the State of Israel as well as an important inclusion about the choice of *aliyah*. It reads:

Our Obligations: The State of Israel and the Diaspora -- We are privileged to live in an extraordinary time, one in which a third Jewish commonwealth has been established in our people's ancient homeland. We are bound to that land and to the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties. We have been enriched by its culture and ennobled by its indomitable spirit. We see it providing unique opportunities for Jewish self-expression. We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security, and defining its Jewish character. We encourage *aliyah* for those who wish to

find maximum personal fulfillment in the cause of Zion. We demand that Reform Judaism be unconditionally legitimized in the State of Israel.

The State of Israel and the Diaspora, in fruitful dialogue, can show how a people transcends nationalism even as it affirms it, thereby setting an example for humanity which remains largely concerned with dangerously parochial goals.^{xxxvii}

In *Reform Judaism Today*, Borowitz shares some of conversations and motivations behind the drafting of the Centenary Perspective of 1976. He reminds us of the number of Reform Rabbis who were now serving and residing in the State of Israel at the time. It was these colleagues who specifically asked that a sentence on *aliyah* be added to extend the open-ended suggestions that the State of Israel provided “unique opportunities for Jewish self-expression.” Importantly, no one on the committee voiced any objection to the principle of including a statement on *aliyah* as long as it was clear that this was a matter of free, personal decision. For political reasons, Borowitz recalls that the committee decided unanimously not to exclude the *aliyah* sentence in the document it would present to the CCAR at the San Francisco meeting. Still, the committee had set its goal as writing the strongest statement that would win the support of an overwhelming majority of CCAR members. It judged that a sentence on *aliyah* could not win votes of the eighty percent of the membership, and it feared that this issue might become so divisive it could be a basis for rallying support to reject the Centenary Perspective as a whole. Yet

Borowitz admits that the committee's assessment of the situation was utterly incorrect. When the Centenary Perspective formally came before the CCAR plenum, the decision of the committee not to include a sentence on *aliyah* was called to the body's attention with a request that they indicate whether they desired such a statement. As Borowitz writes, "The reaction was strong, positive, and almost unanimous. They wanted *aliyah* mentioned, and the Centenary Perspective now does so, including the Hebrew word whose connotations the Reform rabbis have no difficulty accepting as long as it is not presented anything other than another personal opinion."^{xxxviii}

Although we see a major shift in the Reform Movement's acknowledgement that *aliyah* could be a personal choice for an American Reform Jew, the statement shies away from open encouragement of *aliyah*. Borowitz states that the problem of legitimization of Reform Judaism in the State of Israel is a major reason why the committee did not feel comfortable encouraging *aliyah*. For example, Reform rabbis in Israel did not have the right to perform marriages, and Reform conversions carried out anywhere were not considered valid. He writes, "The official discrimination is symbolic of a host of unofficial problems. With Orthodoxy-largely of a modernized, though European sort- the established Jewish religion in the State of Israel, many forms of quiet community discrimination against Reform Judaism exist. To picture these difficulties as a major Israeli denial of freedom of religion seems

to me a distortion of reality. This does not make them any the less objectively repugnant and, in view of the service, energy, and money Reform Jews have given to the State of Israel over decades, utterly unreasonable.”^{xxxix} Here, Borowitz points out the painful tension that this problem caused for many Reform Jews who wanted their relationship with Israel to be more straightforward. Eric Yoffie, responding to Borowitz’s book, *Renewing the Covenant*, reminds us that we must not engage in *sh’lilat ha’golah*, negating the Diaspora in exchange for our Zionism. He writes that as a movement we can only, “recognize the range of religious possibilities which exist in the land of Israel and do not exist in the Diaspora. We cannot unequivocally state that one choice is better than another.”^{xl} The statement the Reform Movement ultimately published in the Centenary Perspective tries to recognize this hurtful exclusion while trying not to push away other American or Israeli colleagues, nor embarrass the State of Israel for its policies. Borowitz affirms that the final statement on Israel and *alyiah* in the document shows a balance of the commitments to both American Reform Judaism and Israel. He writes, “Because we care so much about the State of Israel, we insist upon being granted full rights there. We will encourage our people to go live there, but will not ask them to keep quiet about the rights which are being denied to their movement.”^{xli}

Overall, we see in the Centenary Perspective, the notion that Jewish life as

lived in the State of Israel is only one genuine form of Jewish life. It denies the idea that the State of Israel sets the standard by which the authenticity of Jewish life elsewhere may be measured. It dismisses the contention that Israeli Jewish culture is necessarily central to Jewish existence everywhere else in the world. It spurns the claim that Jews living outside the State of Israel are inferior as Jews to Israeli Jews.

The Pittsburgh Principles

Another significant gap of time, history, and views towards Israel, comes between the Centenary Perspective and the next formal statement of the Movement, known as the Pittsburgh Principles of 1999. In this gap of time, the historical events and changed perceptions of Israel once again influenced the Reform Movement's relationship with the state. The Lebanon War of 1982, Operation Moses of 1984, the First Intifada (1987-1993) and Operation Solomon in 1991 all impacted the way American Jews viewed Israel for better and for worse. Events like Operation Moses and Solomon reminded the Jewish people about the mission of Israel as a home and safe-haven for all Jews while at the same time, perceptions were changing about Israel's military power. No longer was Israel the underdog, "David" fighting and overcoming powerful "Goliaths." More questions were asked about Israel's relationship to her enemies and her responsibility as a strong, able, nation. Additionally, as the

demographics of Israel's population continued to change, a greater awareness emerged about the needs of civil and religious rights for all Israeli citizens.

In this time, the Reform Movement continued working on establishing their presence in the State of Israel through, the founding of Reform Synagogues in Israel, more educational programming, and Israel initiatives in the States. It was the youth faction of the Reform Movement, North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) that took the lead in sending young Jews to Israel. Since 1958, thousands teens have traveled to Israel through NFTY. A longer Israel experience, the Eisendrath International Exchange (EIE), was established in 1961. Michael Langer comments on these program's intentional goals of developing Reform Zionist Youth. He writes, "The best educational resource at our disposal for ensuring that a Reform Zionist commitment will be one of the components in the crystallizing personality of the older adolescent is a properly structured Israel experience of series of experiences."^{lii} He writes about the long lasting impact youth who have traveled to Israel will have in areas of leadership, Hebrew and Jewish literacy, and a Reform Zionist orientation of a congregation as a whole. Even today, Reform Youth programs like camping and EIE are two major influences on shaping one's relationship to Israel (More will be said on this in the next chapter.) Today, EIE's stated vision affirms that the Reform Movement is committed to teaching about

Jewish identity as related to the State of Israel. It reads: “The Reform Movement believes that a fundamental aspect of a healthy Jewish identity is a relationship to Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel) and optimally a love for Eretz Yisrael.” Two of EIE’s specific goals also have to do with building this relationship with Israel. They are: “To give [participants] a better understanding of and appreciation for Israel, Zionism, and Progressive Judaism in Israel” and to immerse [participants] in Israeli society by living with and meeting Israelis involved in the Reform Movement in Israel.”^{xliii} Although undoubtedly participants of EIE and NFTY in Israel will encounter many American Reform Jews who have made the choice of *aliyah*, and are exposed to the work of the IMPJ, it is not a goal of either program to encouragement *aliyah*.

These complex shifts in views on Israel and the more established Israeli Reform presence can be seen in the Pittsburgh Principles. In them we see an emphasized relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, a call to Israel to promote civil, human, and religious rights to all, and an appeal for peace between Israel and her neighbors. But perhaps most interestingly to us, we also see an encouragement of *aliyah*, an emphasis on Hebrew and the use of Hebrew language, and a particular view of Israel. We read:

We are committed to מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Medinat Yisrael*), the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in

אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Eretz Yisrael*), the land of Israel, and encourage עֲלִיָּה (*aliyah*), immigration to Israel.

We are committed to promoting and strengthening Progressive Judaism in Israel, which will enrich the spiritual life of the Jewish state and its people.

We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities. As we urge Jews who reside outside Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language and to make periodic visits to Israel in order to study and to deepen their relationship to the Land and its people, so do we affirm that Israeli Jews have much to learn from the religious life of Diaspora Jewish communities.^{xliv}

Although the Pittsburgh Principles make a bold statement about the Reform Movement's commitment to Israel and *aliyah*, in a way never before expressed, the feelings towards Israel on the ground may be a little more complicated. In 2007, Michael Marmur published an article titled, "Happiness inside the State: Towards a Liberal Theology of Israel. Here he affirms the growing divide between Diaspora and Israeli Jews. He writes, "Progressive Jews in the Diaspora now feel increasingly distant from the Israel they hear about in the media, and very few know anything about cultural and intellectual currents that run beneath the headlines...some seem to be embarrassed to be associated with Israel at a time when it is not in the West's good books."

However, Marmur also affirms the shift in the relationship between the Movement's history and where we are in contemporary times. He goes on to state, "the days of rivalry between Zionism and Liberal Judaism are over: if each side of the great divide can maintain its interest, the potential for mutual

influence is tremendous.^{xlv}

Throughout this paper we have followed the Reform Movement's relationship with Zionism, Israel, and *aliyah*. It can best be described as a journey, one that has moved from rejection, to acceptance, to an undeniable support and sense of independency. Yet documents and platforms can only tell us so much about the relationship. The major challenge of looking at overarching statements put out by the leadership of a movement is that it is hard to tell what the *Amcha*, or average Reform Jews thought about the positions presented. However, we can get an understanding of American Reform Jew's relationship to Israel based on the actions they made, especially *aliyah*, which can be understood as an ultimate support of the State of Israel.

In the next section of our paper, we will look at personal narratives from Reform Jews and their relationship to Israel. By looking at personal narratives compared with the overarching narratives presented by Reform leadership, we can attempt to understand a more nuanced understanding of Reform Judaism's relationship to Israel and with *Alyiah*.

ⁱ Polish, David. *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism*, Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1976.

ⁱⁱ Hertzberg, Arthur. *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*. New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1968. As found in Michael M. Langer, *Reform Judaism and Zionism as Jewish Responses to the Modern Age: Perspectives for an Action Program*. New York: UAHF College Education Department, 1976. pp. 4.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Hertzberg, Arthur. *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*. New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1968. As found in Michael M. Langer, *Reform Judaism and Zionism as Jewish Responses to the Modern Age: Perspectives for an Action Program*. New York: UAHC College Education Department, 1976. pp. 5
- ^{iv} Langer, Michael M. *Reform Judaism and Zionism as Jewish Responses to the Modern Age: Perspectives for an Action Program*. New York: UAHC College Education Department, 1976. pp. 6
- ^v Saxe, Jeffery S. "From Rejection to Support: Reform Judaism's Relationship with Israel." *HaShiur* Dec 2005 Vol. 2 No. 2 pp. 1-2.
- ^{vi} Langer, pp. 6
- ^{vii} Langer, pp. 7
- ^{viii} This discussion refers to Political, Herzlian Zionism. There were expressions before then: e.g., Hess' Rome and Jerusalem (1862) and Hibbat Zion (1881).
- ^{ix} Saxe, pp. 1
- ^x Polish, pp. 49
- ^{xi} Hirsch, Richard. Hirsch, Richard G. *From the Hill to the Mount*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing, 2000. pp. 14
- ^{xii} Central Conference of American Rabbis. (1885) *Declaration of Principles: The Pittsburgh Platform*. Pittsburgh, PA. www.ccarnet.org
- ^{xiii} CCAR Yearbook Index, 1931, pp. 96 as cited in Polish, pp. 51
- ^{xiv} Polish, pp. 54
- ^{xv} CCAR Yearbook, Vol 8 pp. 10-12.
- ^{xvi} Saxe, pp. 2
- ^{xvii} CCAR yearbook Vol 8 pp. 11
- ^{xviii} Schlansky, Hannah R. "Finding Israel Through the Lens of Reform Judaism." Capstone Curriculum. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. May 2009. Unpublished.
- ^{xix} Central Conference of American Rabbis. (1937) *The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism: The Columbus Platform*. www.ccarnet.org
- ^{xx} Richard Hirsch, in For the Sake of Zionism, questions why major proponents of Zionism like Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise did not attempt to organize a Zionist movement within Reform Judaism. However, he concludes they had neither the time nor the inclination to organize one small segment of the American Jewish community into a Reform Zionist movement, particularly since the majority of the members in those days were either non Zionist or anti-Zionist. Hirsch, Richard *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism: A Personal Mission*. New York: URJ Press, 2011. pp. 9
- ^{xxi} Greenstein, Howard. *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism*. Chico: Scholars Press, 1981. pp 28-30. As cited in Meyer, Michael. *Response to Modernity* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988 pp 318-20.
- ^{xxii} Meyer, Michael. *Hebrew Union College: A Centennial History 1875-1975* As cited in Saxe, pp. 3
- ^{xxiii} Langer, pp. 11
- ^{xxiv} Livni, Michael. "The Place of Israel in the Identity of Reform Jews" *Israel, World Jewry, and Identity*. Dr. Daniel Ben Moshe and Zohar Segev, Eds. Sussex Academic Press, 2007. pp 15
- ^{xxv} Saxe, pp. 3
- ^{xxvi} Livini, pp. 16
- ^{xxvii} Langer, pp. 13
- ^{xxviii} Langer, pp. 12

^{xxix} Hirsch

^{xxx} Livni, "The Place of Israel in the Identity of Reform Jews" *Israel, World Jewry, and Identity*. Dr. Daniel Ben Moshe and Zohar Segev, Ed. Sussex Academic Press, 2007.

^{xxxi} The 1975 UN resolution was part of the Soviet-Arab Cold War anti-Israel campaign. The General Assembly voted to repeal in 1991. "Zionism is Racism" Jewish Virtual Library 2013. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org

^{xxxii} Schindler, Alexander. "We are All Zionists" (excerpt from Presidential Sermon) UAHC 53rd General Assembly, Dallas, Texas 7 Nov 1975. In *A Reform Zionist Perspective: Judaism and Community in the Modern Age*. Ed Michael Langer. New York: UAHC, 1977. pp. 292-296.

^{xxxiii} Borowitz, Eugene. *Renewing the Covenant: Theology for the Postmodern Jew*. New York: Berhman House, 1991. pp. 290.

^{xxxiv} Borowitz as quoted in Dow Marmur "Reform Zionism in the Postmodern Age" *Journal of Reform Zionism* pp. 15

^{xxxv} Marmur, Dow. "Reform Zionism in the Postmodern Age" *Journal of Reform Zionism*, page 16

^{xxxvi} Rubin-Schlansky, pp. 30

^{xxxvii} Central Conference of American Rabbis (1976) *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective*. San Francisco, CA. www.ccarnet.org

^{xxxviii} Eugene B. Borowitz *Reform Judaism Today* New York: Behrman House, 1977. pp. 69-72.

^{xxxix} Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today* pp. 74

^{xl} Yoffie, "Building a Reform Zionist Paradigm" *Journal of Reform Zionism*, pp.19

^{xli} Borowitz *Reform Judaism Today* pp. 75

^{xlii} Langer, Michael. "Experiential Education for a Reform Zionist Community." *Compass* No. 37 January 1976, New York: UAHC Department of Education. In *A Reform Zionist Perspective: Judaism and Community in the Modern Age*. Ed. Michael Langer. New York: UAHC. 1977.

^{xliii} "History and Mission" www.nfityeic.org

^{xliv} Central Conference of American Rabbis. (1999) *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Principles*. Pittsburgh, PA. www.ccarnet.org

^{xlv} Marmur, Michael. "Happiness inside the State: Toward a Liberal Theology of Israel." *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*. Spring 2007. pp. 86-87

“As long as I was not living in Israel something was incomplete in me as a Zionist and a Jew.” (Rabbi Rich Kirschen)

In the previous chapter we saw how the Reform Movement’s relationship to Zionism, Israel, and *aliyah* changed dramatically in the last 130 years. Yet, the history of the Reform Movement’s relationship with Zionism, Israel, and *aliyah* only tells a story in broad strokes. It tells the story of how an institution journeyed from rejecting identification with a national Jewish identity to affirming that Zionism and Reform Judaism are indeed compatible. The leadership and visionaries of our movement even went so far as to affirm the individual’s choice to make *aliyah*, settling in *Medinat Yisrael*, the modern State of Israel. However, as is common for large institutions, the positions and values stated by the leadership are not always inclusive or compatible with the various individuals who make up that institution. In order to get a better understanding of *aliyah* in Reform Judaism, we must turn to those individuals who made the choice to settle in Israel. They are the living examples of how the Reform Movement influenced their relationship with the Israel and how they continue to shape the story of Reform Judaism and *aliyah*.

This chapter hopes to paint many smaller pictures of what it means for a Reform Jew to make *aliyah*. It is comprised of stories from individual North

American Reform *Olim* over the last several decades. Their stories include what about their Jewish education helped them build a relationship with Israel, what the Reform Movement's role was in helping them settle in Israel and find a place within the larger Israeli society. The interviewees speak to the unique blessings and challenges of being a Reform Jew in the State of Israel.

Additionally, the stories shared also offer insight into the future of the Reform Movement in Israel and how American and Israeli Reform Jews can work together to help continue the larger Reform Jewish story.

For the project, I reached out to thirteen *olim* who identify with the Reform Movement in Israel in some way. The names were given to me by a variety of mentors who work in the field of Israel Education, primarily through HUC-JIR and the iCenter. The interviews were either conducted over the phone or via a questionnaire sent out over email. Two of the subjects were not able to talk to me personally, but were able to send interviews that they had done previously for *Reform Judaism Magazine*, or in articles published personally. All of the subjects interviewed can be described as having a typical North American Jewish upbringing. This included a formal Jewish education, having a family that cared about Judaism, belonging to a synagogue, and some kind of youth engagement. For most of these interviewees, their upbringing was uniquely Reform, but for one *olah* interviewed, her affiliation with the Reform

Movement solidified in Israel. The years in which these individuals made *aliyah* range from 1976-2012. They range in age from 25-65. The *olim* are geographically diverse both in where they are from in North America (Toronto, Midwest, East Coast US) and where they have chosen to settle in Israel (More in Jerusalem but also in Tel Aviv, Karmiel, Southern and Northern Kibbutzim). One *olah* interviewed moved back to the United States for reasons she discusses in her interview. Finally, it is very important to recognize that all of the *olim* interviewed for this project hold a personal stake in the survival and subsistence of Liberal Judaism in Israel. All are Jewish leaders in some capacity, many being Rabbis and Jewish educators trained and ordained by the Reform Movement. Additionally, most of the subjects work in some respect with the Reform Movement in Israel. This certainly impacts their understanding of Reform Judaism in Israel but also makes them the best people to comment on the questions asked in this paper. The questions (which can be found in the appendix) prompted responses that illustrate how an education and relationship with the Reform Movement inspired one to make *aliyah*, how the relationship with Reform Judaism changed as a result of being in Israel, and a prediction of where Reform Judaism in Israel may be headed according to personal experience.

While each person interviewed had a personal story to share, common, overarching themes emerged about the influences, motivations, and

experiences of Reform *olim*. A first factor that seemed to define the group of subjects is time spent in a URJ Summer camp and/or the Eisendrath International Exchange, High School in Israel Program. The *olim* seem to fall into two separate but related camps concerning the role of Reform Jews in Israel as those who fight for Reform Judaism's place in Israeli society versus those who believe Reform Judaism can play a role in innovating Israeli Society. Finally, all the *olim* interviewed for this project spoke about the ambiguous relationship between the Reform movements of North America and Israel. These are the themes that will be explored through the voices of individual Reform Jews living in Israel. While it is hard to say whether the themes found are representative of larger trends (considering the small sample and the profession of those sampled), connections can be made among their stories, and to the historical descriptions found in the previous chapter. The similarities between the Reform *Olim* suggest that there are at least some aspects of universal experience of Reform Jews who choose *aliyah*.

Israel Relationships are Formed Early

The most striking similarity between the *olim* interviewed for this project is the influence that early engagement with the Reform Movement played in the shaping of their Jewish identities. Almost all of the subjects were affiliated with a Reform Congregation where parents played an active role. Marc Rosenstein, a

Reform Rabbi who made *aliyah* in 1990 was raised with parents active in his congregation (North Shore Congregation Israel, Highland Park, IL). He expands, “My father was a Sunday school teacher and a board member.”^{xi} Sally Klein Katz, a Jewish Educator who teaches at HUC-JIR and the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem made *aliyah* in 1972. She noted that her entire family had a strong connection to the Keneseth Israel in Allentown, PA, with Sally attending religious school from Kindergarten through confirmation.ⁱⁱ Rachel Iscove Peled also had a mother who was a teacher at her home congregation, Holy Blossom Temple, and this is the community where she maintains her connection to North America.ⁱⁱⁱ Josh Weinberg (*aliyah* in 2009) and Cara Katzew (*aliyah* in 2012) were both raised by Reform Clergy. Josh remembers his parents, “sharing stories of volunteering on kibbutzim in the seventies after the Yom Kippur war.”^{iv} For Cara, “Reform Judaism has always been a constant in my various life stages and has been intertwined with my commitment to family.”^v

Even if parents weren’t the direct Israel role models for this entire group, a Reform leader such as a rabbi or youth educator also had a positive influence on them. Marc Rosenstein cites Rabbi Robert Samuels as the person who influenced his own ideas about Zionism, pushed him to participate in EIE, and then made *aliyah* himself. Hadas Levin, an early member of the Kibbutz Yahel community, cites his Rabbi, Leo Wolkow as playing an

influential role on his early Israel relationship. He writes, “Without question, Rabbi Leo Wolkow played a very influential role in getting me into the Reform camping movement (OSRUI) and later in sending me to Israel to Machon Greenberg teachers college. Without his influence and his assistance in obtaining scholarships etc., it would not have happened.”^{vi} Sally Klein Katz poignantly recalls the impact the new Rabbi, had when he came to her home congregation:

Rabbi Stephen Schafer had fought in the War of Independence in Israel and met his wife there. Suddenly, there were posters of Israel on the wall and we switched our Hebrew from the Ashkenazic pronunciation to the Sephardic. I was confirmed with 20 other students on Shavout of 1967. Shortly before our service, the Six-day war broke out and Rabbi Schafer told the confirmation class that we were to lead our service on our own. He was going to Israel. He was an extraordinarily powerful example of someone who was ready to go war for something he believed in.

In addition to positive Jewish role models, the impact of immersion programs related to Israel cannot be overstated when forming Israeli identity. The common thread of many of the Reform *Olim* is participating in URJ Jewish camping (notably, OSRUI) and EIE, a semester of high school in Israel. Camping created an opportunity for participants to “live in a Jewish environment,” according to Marc. Cara recalls OSRUI as the place where, “my Zionism and practice of Reform Judaism was developed as a youth. Their extensive Israel-related programming (daily Hebrew lessons, “Israel day”, Israel-themed night programs, etc) and the very structure of the camp playing

on Israeli culture with units named *Tzofim*, *Mosheva*, *Chalutzim*, etc. all helped to create an atmosphere where I felt as if I was connected to Israel and Reform Jewish life. It was EIE however that solidified my relationship with Israel.”

The Eisendrath International Exchange High School in Israel (EIE) started when three boys from NFTY went for a semester of study to the Leo Baeck High School in Haifa.^{vii} EIE is influential because it tangibly connects Reform teenagers to the State of Israel. It immerses them in Hebrew language and Israeli culture and provides encounters with Israelis and other role models living in Israel. Josh Weinberg, who was a participant in EIE and later taught there recalls how Hebrew was a big draw for him. He says, “In EIE there was a big emphasis on ‘Living Hebrew.’ Through EIE, I got a strong base of Hebrew and got to meet Israelis.” Lesley Litman, who made *aliyah* in 1976 to found Kibbutz Yahel also felt very connected to Hebrew through EIE. She describes, “During EIE, I fell in love with Hebrew, learned it quickly and was able to easily integrate into the culture.”^{viii} When describing one’s motivation for making *aliyah*, it was often one’s experience in EIE that was recalled with fondness. Marc Rosenstein refers to EIE as his “formative semester” helping him to imagine himself living in Israel full time. For Josh Weinberg, it was a literally a call from EIE director Baruch Krauss that brought him to Israel on

aliyah. Cara Katzew articulately recalls the simple joy she had during her time in EIE:

My time on EIE was the best 4 months of my life. Everyday I woke up happy, saying to myself, “I’m in Israel!” The things we learned, the places we went, and the people with who I was both leaders and peers came together to create something with much personal impact. My mother recently found a letter that I wrote to myself on the last day of the program. I wrote that I was so happy to be in that place at that time because I knew I was going to come back and make Israel an even bigger part of my life. That was a long time ago and I nearly forgot that feeling. I had school and career goals that I focused on after that. But, it was a trip to Israel in October 2011 to visit an Israeli friend that changed my path. While I was in Israel I met up with a bunch of my peers from that EIE trip. Seeing that many of them had moved their lives here, that they were happy and successful, made me realize that I could do it and not lose myself.

In their work, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen claim that “American Jews have drawn activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family, and the few institutions (primarily the synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate space.”^x While it can be seen that both families, synagogue institutions (including the mentorship from Rabbis and Educators) and Reform immersive programming all played a major role in connecting these individuals to the Reform movement and to Israel, it must be emphasized that the ultimate decision to make *aliyah* was a deeply personal choice based on a number of factors, explored in the next section of this paper.

Reform Anomalies: The Choice to Move

The call to Israel for Reform Jews comes in a number of ways. For most, there is an ideological component of being in Israel. As Rabbi Rich Kirschen describes it, “As long as I was not living in Israel something was incomplete in me as a Zionist and a Jew.”^x To move to Israel meant being a part of something greater, often the unfolding of Jewish history. Sally Klein Katz explains, “To go mattered. It heightened the significance and meaning of our life in every interaction from small to large. In Israel, we were center stage of Jewish history.” Living in Israel seemed to offer personal meaning to one’s life. Israel was a place where a person could find a path for him or herself both Jewishly and professionally.

When reflecting on the professional work of Reform *Olim*, it is important to remember that most of the subjects of this project were deeply engaged in Reform Leadership before making *aliyah*. Many were already working as Reform Rabbis, educators, or for Jewish organizations in the States. Some were very active as youth leaders or at Reform camps. This significantly impacted the motivations for choosing *aliyah* and also impacts one’s relationship with the Reform Movement in Israel after making *aliyah*. When asked about what motivated her to get involved in the founding of the Reform community in Israel, Kibbutz Yahel, Lesley Litman stated bluntly, “I’m a start

up kind of person.” When she met with people at the first meeting about Yahel she thought the people there were interesting, smart, and inspired. She felt, “Wow, this is important. This is important for the Reform movement and for Israel.” Of the interviewed Reform *Olim* that came in the 70’s, there was a definite sense that they could personally contribute to the building of the country by being there. This feeling undoubtedly coincided with Israel’s presence on world’s political stage because of the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. As Diaspora Jews were both celebrating their homeland as well as fearing for her security, the Reform Movement in North America also began to foster a more intentional policy of engagement as an attempt to maintain support for Israel. When the CCAR issued their newest platform in 1976, it is clear that the Movement supported the Jewish State more explicitly and emphatically than ever before.

Still, this change in platform didn’t always translate to those *olim* who had gone to Israel with the intention of promoting Reform Judaism, nor did the Reform *Olim*’s work gather support from the Movement in the States. Litman recalls when she acted as a *schlichah* for Israel and the Yahel campaign in the summer of 1975. She shares, “I was going around to NFTY, camps, and synagogues to be the Reform voice of Israel, but the rabbis and staff were telling me to tone it down. There was support for Israel because of ‘73, but no

one wanted me to mention *aliyah*.” Even years later, there are ambiguous feelings towards those Reform Jews who had chosen Aliyah. Josh Weinberg recollects a conversation with the Camp director of OSRUI, Jerry Kaye, which left him feeling disillusioned with the Reform Movement. He offers, “When we were talking about my *aliyah*, [Jerry] asked me, ‘Where did we go wrong?’ I thought, ‘I made *aliyah* because of you! Because of what you created at camp!’ It was upsetting to feel as if the Movement wasn’t really behind my decision.”

Reform Jews in Israel: Fighting for Recognition, Innovating Israeli Society

While some of the interviewees made *aliyah* in order to found Reform Institutions in Israel, others made *aliyah* after Reform institutions were already established in Israel. Still, the choice of how to affiliate with the Movement and what that role looks like was a question that divided the participants of this project. Some feel as if their role as a Reform Jew in Israel is specifically to fight for recognition on a national level, ensuring equal rights in the eyes of the government and funding for Reform Movement leaders and communities. They connect to Reform Judaism partly through this fight for justice. Others feel that Reform Judaism can serve as a model for Israeli Society. They believe Reform values of egalitarianism, inclusivity, and alternative worship and ritual

could organically have an impact on Israelis who come to know it. Their connection to Reform Judaism is primarily through personal participation and identification as a Reform Jew. It is important to point out that these two camps overlap and are undeniably related. All the *olim* interviewed hope for a wider recognition of Reform Judaism in Israel and feel as it is has something positive to offer Israeli society. It is simply a matter of what is at the forefront of a personal Reform identity and the style in which they addresses the challenges of being a Reform Jew in Israel.

When asked about one's personal role as a Reform Jew in Israel, some *olim* interviewed expressed that a large aspect of being a Reform Jew for them means fighting for greater recognition of the Reform Movement in Israel. Stacey Blank made *aliyah* in 2005 and now serves a Reform congregation in Ramat HaSharon. She believes, "To be a Reform Jew in Israel is to feel discriminated against, an experience I was spared growing up in the U.S."^{xi} Naamah Kelman is the first female rabbi to be ordained in Israel. Although she was raised in the conservative movement in the United States, she currently serves as the Dean of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem and since her *aliyah* in 1976, has devoted her personal and professional life to promoting liberal, egalitarian, and pluralistic Judaism in Israel. She writes, "Starting with my student days at HUC in 1986, I have been involved in many initiatives to put Reform Judaism on the ground."^{xii} Hadas Levin plainly articulates that the Reform Movement should

be politicized to impact Israeli government policies and funding. Stacey Blank offers an example:

The local municipality of Ramat HaSharon doesn't list our congregation in the online directory of local synagogues. My congregation had to fight for 15 years, including appearing before the Supreme Court, to gain the right to build a synagogue, while Orthodox synagogues are built with public funds. Though 90% of our city's residents are secular, the mayor dances with the Chabad community in the main square on *Simchat Torah* and has not accepted our invitations to visit. I am here in the Jewish homeland to fulfill a dream of our people, but achieving it as a Reform Jew requires overcoming many obstacles.^{xiii}

For Josh Weinberg, the fight to authenticate Reform Judaism is through education rather than politics. His goal as a teacher in EIE was to help North American Jewish kids make Jewish identity their primary identity. He wanted to show them that Jewish learning is important, especially in a world where orthodoxy seems to claim the monopoly on Jewish knowledge. Whatever the mode of battle, it is clear that Reform Jews in Israel can choose to fight for acceptance as authentic.

While recognizing that there is a battle to fight, other Reform *Olim* do not find meaning in politicizing their Reform Jewish identities. They express a sincere hope for the organic influence of Reform Judaism on Israeli society, but the means in which they are seeking acceptance are less radical. Sally Klein Katz acknowledges that there “are ways in which it feels like we are swimming upstream because of our liberal interpretation of what Shabbat is, or how we celebrate *hagim*,” but she doesn't seem to mind what others think. Instead, she

feels by living a Reform Jewish life Reform Jews show that alternative expressions of Judaism are legitimate. She adds, "I think we should be identifying ourselves as "*dati'im*" and expanding that definition of what *dati* means." For Sally, it is through personal displays of Jewish practice, rather than through a large-scale campaign that she feels she can impact Israeli society. Cara seems to agree. She feels that by continuing to make meaningful choices in her observances, she is living out the life of an Israeli Reform Jew, not involved in a larger political movement. Still, she has hope that the future will be better. After sharing a story of celebrating Shabbat on the beach with Jews from different backgrounds through a Reform community in Tel Aviv, she reflected, "There we were standing together bringing in Shabbat, singing the songs and prayers, even dancing a little. It gave me hope that more young Jews from different sects can celebrate our Judaism together in Israel and even set an example." Yet others in this camp are upset by the politicization of the Reform Movement by some. Lesley Litman believes groups like Women of the Wall, and others who make large displays of discriminating against liberal Judaism are focusing and promoting a negative image of Reform Judaism. Instead, like Cara, she feels the Reform Movement should promote positive achievements, like the thousands of people having Shabbat on the beach with Beit Tefilah Yisraeli or *Tikkun Leil Shavout* at the Tel Aviv museum. Lesley, like all the Reform *Olim*, wants to live in a country that values egalitarianism,

creative forward thinking, and one that is not controlled by the *dati*. Still, she feels it needs to come more organically from Israeli society.

America and Israel: Best Friends or Estranged Siblings?

The relationship between the Israeli Reform Movement and the American Reform Movement was a place where the *olim* articulated overarching themes of disappointment and indifference. This was true both on a movement leadership level and from individual Reform Jews. The feelings seem to stem from the amount of support Reform *Olim* receive from their American counterparts. Lesley Litman reflected on her frustration with the American movement when she was just starting out on Yahel. While she credits individuals like Alan Levine and Hank Skirball for helping to secure funding, and bringing NFTY kids down to encounter the community, she felt the Reform Movement as a whole was not forthcoming. She recalls, “we felt like the Reform Movement had dumped us in the desert and were paying us a lot of lip service.” Looking back, she acknowledges that at the time, the U.S. was still battling the role that Israel was playing in Reform Jewish life and the resources just weren’t there.

Returning to the last chapter, it wasn’t until in 1999 that the CCAR endeavored to rearticulate its vision of North America’s relationship with Israel

and calls for Israel and the Diaspora to be “inter-dependant, responsible for one another, and partners in the shaping of Jewish destiny.” The platform pledges continued political and financial support as well as intensification of Hebrew instruction, in recognition of the centrality of Hebrew “both in the study of Judaism and in fostering solidarity between Israeli and Diaspora Jews,” a motif that appears in many of our *olim*’s stories. In addition, this platform offers support for those considering *aliyah*. As stated: “While affirming the authenticity and necessity of a creative and vibrant Diaspora Jewry, we encourage *aliyah* to Israel...only in *Medinat Yisrael* do they bear the primary responsibility for the governance of society, and thus may realize the full potential of their individual and communal religious strivings.”^{xiv}

Many of the *olim* interviewed for purposes of this paper made the choice of *aliyah* well before 1999. This speaks to the individualism of their choice and also to the fact that the platforms of our movement are often descriptive rather than prescriptive. Still, Reform Jews who made *aliyah* after 1999, felt as companionless as their earlier counterparts. Josh Weinberg reflects on the change in platform and the reality he feels as an *oleh*:

In my experience, I feel like the Reform Movement is still somewhat reluctant to encourage people to make *aliyah*. We have definitely come a long way from 1885 to 1999. Still, it’s sad to me that for the vast majority of American Reform Jews, Israel isn’t even on the radar. It’s not like they are struggling with the question of should we live there or should we not- and then come to the conclusion that they would rather stay in the U.S., That would be a different conversation. Nine years after making *aliyah*, people still think I’m crazy or

playing around. I get asked when my Israel trip will be over or when I am coming home. I get told, “It's time to come home and be serious.” For the most part people don't comprehend what it actually means to make *aliyah*. I think the big issue is that my wife and myself are major anomalies.

Still, there are dedicated parts of the Reform Movement that take the role of building the American/Israel relationship more seriously. ARZA, the Israel arm of the Reform Movement, works to acknowledge the importance of a Reform Movement in Israel and to bridge the two countries. The first line of ARZA's mission statement reads: “ARZA strengthens and enriches the Jewish identity of Reform Jews in the United States by ensuring that a connection with *Eretz Yisrael* is a fundamental part of that identity.” The effects of ARZA's action plan, which includes education, advocacy, fundraising, and creating partnerships between America and Israel can be seen in the programming of many North American synagogues, camps, and youth groups, as well as organizations in Israel.^{xv} But, does the active existence of ARZA and their work translate to the North American Reform Jews who affiliate? This question does not seek to place any blame on ARZA, nor does it place sole responsibility on them to create the Reform Movement's relationship to Israel. However, a feeling that most of the Reform *Olim* seemed to share is that the relationship between American Reform Judaism and Israel Reform Judaism needs work. When asked to describe the relationship, Naamah Kelman speaks to some of the successes. She cites the partnering of Reform synagogues, and the

connection for those who have visited Israel. Still, she laments “not enough American Reform Jews have visited Israel or really know of the flowering Reform Judaism here.” Marc Rosenstein also wonders if the “weak” relationship is partially the fault of the Israeli Reform Movement. He believes, “Too much of it is based on the model that Israeli Reform Jews are a persecuted minority, a view that our institutions have perpetuated, I suppose for fundraising purposes...since the movement has worked to convince American Reform Jews that Israel doesn't consider us Jews, I imagine the disengagement we now see will only increase.” He also acknowledges that the relationship goes both ways. He states, “Personally, the longer I am here, the more distant I feel from the experience of American Jews (reform or otherwise) and their concerns, even though I have never been the kind of Zionist who negates or flees the Diaspora.”

While some *olim* feel that North American Reform Jews don't know about them or care about them, others feel as if American Reform Jews look to them as ambassadors, living out the Reform Movement's Israel ideals in a concrete way in order for the Reform Movement to have a sense of existence and ownership in Israel. Sally Klein Katz believes the Reform Movement is exceedingly proud of American *Olim*. When asked what American Reform Jews think of Reform *Olim*, she reflected, “Wow. Amazing. You are brave; maybe crazy- but that's ok too. I feel like American Reform Jews admire that we are

doing something with our lives and making an active choice to do something that we believe in. American Reform Jews value it, even if it is foreign to their roots.” Still, no matter how the *olim* feel, it became clear from their responses that the challenges we face as Reform Jews and leaders in the States and Israel are so vastly different that we are possibly becoming two different, distinct, movements. Lesley Litman no longer wants to use the term “Reform” Judaism because of some of the negative and outsider connotations it holds for Israelis. Instead, she suggests, “Liberal Judaism”- A Judaism that is egalitarian, creative, forward thinking, and non-*dati*/non-orthodox.”

Many also expressed the strong need for Reform Judaism in Israel to find a unique, indigenous identity, and that a break from North America would help the perception of the movement in Israel. Litman continues, “Reform Judaism in Israel is going to be its own unique, non-orthodox Judaism and it needs to be uniquely Israeli. I also believe it needs to be indigenous; it needs to grow on Israeli soil and not be plopped down from the outside (like Yahel was). I think if the URJ, HUC, and WUPJ were smart, they would do whatever they could to promote a non-synagogue based, non-orthodox movement.”

The increasing number of Israeli Reform Rabbinical students in Israel offer our subjects hope for the future of the movement in Israel, but there is also some hesitation about the financial resources that this will require.

Naamah Kelman comments on the great work that HUC Israeli ordained

rabbis have contributed to the Reform Movement in Israel:

[Israeli Reform Rabbis have] A huge impact that has started to have a ripple effect, along with the scores of graduates of other programs at HUC. We are now training Spiritual Caretakers, Educators, and young leaders. Together, this is moving Israel to a more pluralistic place. We attract Orthodox and secular alike in these (non-Rabbinic) programs. I am very optimistic here, if we can only find ongoing funding. HUC has been the most serious “donor” to Reform Judaism in decades. This began with the building (1962) and later expansion of the campus (1986). This has created a “monument” in the heart of Jerusalem. Now, our goal is to expand our training programs and increase exposure of the Jerusalem campus to really make a difference. Along with the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism and IRAC we are all joined to be a force in this country that so sorely needs this kind of alternative to extreme, messianic ultra-Orthodoxy and Ultra-Orthodoxy and a searching secular population. We will not be the only answer but we have served as a beacon about the possibilities of liberal Judaism that abhors racism and segregation and actively empowers its members to take hold of their Jewish identities and observance.

Possibly, it is the financial connection that keeps Israeli Reform Jews positive and committed to strengthening the relationship between Reform Judaism in America and Israel. Yet no matter what binds us together, Reform Jews on both sides of the ocean can feel proud about the impact they are making on Israeli society.

The early American Reformers declared Judaism to be “no longer a nation, but a religious community.” In the 21st century, we have come full circle. In this paper, members of the Reform Jewish community in Israel have affirmed that a large aspect of their Jewish identity is not defined solely by

religious practice but by affiliation with Jewish peoplehood and a nation. They are full participants in Jewish life in a way that feels authentic and right to them. These interviews suggest that the decision to make *aliyah* is in no way an intellectual or ideological choice alone. Almost all the *olim* of this project had emotional draws to the land that were hard to describe in words. While educational initiatives played a role, many were also drawn to Israel through relationships with people, the Hebrew language, or Israeli culture in a way that they found hard to articulate.

While many Reform *Olim* acknowledge the fight for religious pluralism in Israel and affirm the desire for Reform Judaism to be recognized as a valid expression of Judaism by the government and Orthodox establishment, they don't see those issues as a personally defining element of who they are as Jews. Furthermore, they are hopeful for the future of Reform Judaism in Israel. They see the increased number of ordained Israeli Reform Rabbis and the founding of new Reform communities and educational programs to transform Reform Judaism into something uniquely Israeli that can work for their country. Despite challenges they face of how Judaism is practiced or what forms of Judaism are accepted in Israel, Reform *Olim* on the whole feel privileged to play a role in the living history of these conversations. Their stances on political, social, and religious issues in Israel occupy the spectrum of opinion, but all feel confident that their voice is being heard in Israel.

The choice to live in Israel for many of these interviewees is very much intertwined with a desire to live a Jewish life. There was a sense of yearning from their answers to live in a place where Jewish life felt natural. In Israel, the calendar and rhythms of the country helped Jewish life become second nature. It was a place where a television commercial may wish a “*Shabbat Shalom*.” While this sometimes caused additional challenges, most of the interviewees loved being able to live and absorb Jewish time in Israel. Still, all of the people interviewed were careful to not disregard the choices or practices of Diaspora Jews and all affirmed that we have a lot to continue to learn from one another. It is clear from the conversations for this project that Reform Jews in North America and Israel are continuing to face new and unique challenges about Jewish practice, synagogue life, education, and engagement to cite a few examples. It is the responsibility of every new generation of Jews to remain engaged with finding new ideas and responses to challenges. But, North American and Israeli Jews should continue to work with one another in order to continue to advance the Jewish project.

ⁱ Rosenstein, Marc. “Aliyah Interview.” Email Interview. 18 Feb 2013.

ⁱⁱ Klein Katz, Sally. “Aliyah Interview.” Telephone interview. 18 Feb. 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Iscove Peled, Rachel. “Aliyah Interview.” Email Interview. 18 Feb 2013.

^{iv} Weinberg, Josh. “Aliyah Interview.” Telephone Interview. 20 Feb 2013

^v Katzew, Cara. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 28 February 2013.

^{vi} Levin, Hadas. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 24 Feb 2013.

^{vii} www.nfty.org

^{viii} Litman, Lesley. "Aliyah Interview." Telephone Interview. 19 Feb 2013.

^{ix} Cohen and Eisen page 184. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

^{x x} Kirschen, Rich. "Boundaries of Jewish Life." *The Jerusalem Report*. 2 August 2010. P 45.

^{xi} "Israel by Israelis: My Homeland, Myself." *Reform Judaism Magazine* Spring 2010: n. pag.
Web. <www.reformjudaismmag.org>.

^{xii} Kelman, Naamah. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 25 Feb 2013.

^{xiii} "Israel by Israelis: My Homeland, Myself." *Reform Judaism Magazine* Spring 2010: n. pag.
Web. <www.reformjudaismmag.org>.

^{xiv} Rabbi Jeffery S. Saxe, *From Rejection to Support: Reform Judaism's Relationship with Israel*
HaShiur, December 2005 Volume 2. No. 2

^{xv} "Our Mission." ARZA www.arza.org

If Israel is indeed to fulfill its role as the center of Jewish life, then as a movement we have a responsibility to see to it that its Jewish population is bigger and better...aliyah [is] the life blood of Israel. (Richard Hirsch)ⁱ

This thesis sought to explore the topic of *aliyah* in Reform Judaism. We began in Chapter One, by looking at traditional sources that point to *aliyah* as a Jew's religious decision to reside in Israel as expressed first in one of the Torah's basic commands: "And you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it" (Numbers 33:52-53).

However, this introductory chapter also struggled with the question of whether making *aliyah* was a religious imperative (a mitzvah) or a personal choice. The Ramban, one scholar who believed *aliyah* was indeed a mitzvah, indicates in his addenda to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* that because this mitzvah operates timelessly, each Jew, even the one who has made the *Golah* his home, must at all times strive to make this imperative a tangible reality in his own life'ⁱⁱ From this we gather that the choice to make *aliyah* at any time, in any movement, is always a struggle a Jew must internally face, wherever or not he or she makes a home there.

At one time in the history of the Reform Movement, Jewish leadership and their congregants were struggling with a different challenge. The challenge was how to define themselves in light of new, Modern times. Early Reformers

came to the conclusion that Reform Judaism should be a religious community and not a nation. The first formal Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 exemplifies this stance when they rejected a return to Palestine. Yet over time, the Reform Movement too came to wrestle with the question of making *aliyah* to the Modern State of Israel. In our latest statement of Reform Jewish principles, the Pittsburgh Principles of 1999, we read the affirmation of living in the State of Israel and the encouraging of *aliyah* to anyone who seeks to make that decision. In Chapter Two, we learn the story of how the Reform Movement went from the rejection of Zionism, to the building of their presence in the Modern State of Israel.

Ultimately, after looking at the issue of *aliyah* through both text and history, it seems as if the decision to make *aliyah* comes down to personal motivation and choice. Jac Friedgut, noticing the challenges of *aliyah* in the Conservative movement, proposes specific strategies to help make the choice of *Aliyah* more realistic. He believes the Conservative movement should elevate *aliyah* to among the most crucial mitzvot, along with Shabbat and Kashrut. He believes the commitment to *Aliyah* should be expressed, not by passing resolutions, but by a detailed well thought out action program, initiated by the leadership of all the movement's arms. This action plan includes fundraising, education, and increased identification with liberal programs and organizations in Israel.ⁱⁱⁱ Reform thinker Eugene Borowitz also indirectly addresses the issue

of *aliyah* as “mitzvah” in his work, *Renewing the Covenant*. He realizes that liberal movements face a challenge when turning mitzvot into “folkways” as this sharply reduces the urgency behind them.^{iv} Although living in Israel is may be a mitzvah for all Jews, a very small number of American Jews make *aliyah*, regardless of movement.

To get a better a sense of how a Reform Jew comes to the choice of *aliyah*, Chapter Three is comprised of personal interviews and stories which show how a small segment of Reform Jews have grappled with the choice to live in Israel and what those experiences have been like. This chapter also seeks to explore the lives and experiences of Reform *olim* in order to understand how Reform Jewish educators can build a deeper relationship between American Reform Jews and Israel.

The interviews with Reform *olim* suggest that Reform Jews who make *qlyah* tended to form a bond with Israel through early immersive experiences like camp or EIE. And, many Reform *olim* are at the forefront of promoting liberal religion in Israel in various ways. Still, Reform Jews who make *aliyah* are not all that different from other American Jews who make the choice; they are anomalies for doing so. It seemed as if the more a Reform Jew is interested in a more traditionally Jewish life (that follows patterns of Jewish time and connected with Jewish ritual) the more they were open to *Aliyah*. Still, if it were

not for these inspired individuals, the relationship to Israel for American Reform Jews would be weaker.

In a letter to Rabbi David Lillienthal, chairperson of ARZENU from Michael Livni in 1994, Livni asks that a central aim of ARZENU include a practical program for promoting *Aliyah*. He writes that “Reform Zionist *Aliyah* would not only strengthen our movement in Israel- it would also have a positive effect on Israel-Diaspora relations for Reform Jews in the Diaspora. He suggests practical measures, such as a central office that would link Reform Jews on extended visits to Israel with congregations and Reform Institutions in Israel. He also proposes a loan fund that could help fund housing as well as congregational membership. Additional assistance for Hebrew and vocational adaptation, help organizing young *olim*, students, and singles in a particular area, and debt forgiveness from graduates of HUC-JIR or Leo Baeck College for those who have made *aliyah*.^v While these are wise practical measures, I believe Livni is ahead of himself in assuming that the leaders of the Reform Movement indeed want to promote *aliyah*.

Over thirty years ago, Walter Ackerman wrote about a study on Israel in American Jewish Schools concluding that the major goals of teaching Israel are about the creation of positive attitudes, the strengthening of ties with the Jewish people, and the enrichment of student’s knowledge of Jewish History and heritage. He writes, “All three goals are low-level and ambiguous...they

reflect no ideological principles beyond the assumption that Israel is important, nor do they delineate any clear sense of the meaning of Israel for Jewish life.

The two positions which do reflect a hint of some explicit ideological perspective- *aliyah* and religion are low on the list.”^{vi} I believe that the goals of Israel education that Ackerman cites are no longer be the goals of 21st Century Israel education, as they do not help foster a lasting relationship with Israel. We know old trends in Jewish education have failed and need to be updated to reach a new type of Jewish community. I believe Israel education can serve as a gateway into a larger, meaningful connection with the Jewish people. A relationship with Israel offers a Jewish individual an opportunity to belong to something greater, in an open, particularistic world.^{vii} Therefore, the Reform Movement needs to continue to work on integrating Israel into various aspects of Jewish education. However, I do not go as far as Livni to believe that *aliyah* should be a stated goal of Israel education in the Reform Movement. I instead suggest that Reform Educators should help students foster a relationship with Israel that goes beyond simply loving and supporting Israel, but one that Lisa Grant and Ezra Kopelowitz call “Mature Love” or “Complicated.”^{viii} Finally, I believe Reform *olim* can play a role in helping to understand new goals of Israel education.

I believe we can use the experiences of the Reform *Olim* to better understand what Reform Jews need to address in their Israel education, helping students form a complicated relationship with Israel. Overarching trends that connected *olim* to Israel were Reform Camping, EIE, Modern Hebrew, an understanding of Israeli culture, and positive Israel role models. We can improve on all of these goals in the way we educate about Israel today.

Camping and Israel trips are already known to be two immersive educational experiences that have demonstrated success in helping youth make lasting connections to Judaism.^{ix} Our camp movements are a place where Reform youth connect to values of Jewish living and often Israel, but in our camps, we can make use of new Israel educators from our own youth and staff. On Israel education Lesley Litman writes, “Authenticity...can only be achieved when the deliverer of that education is authentically connected with his or her own feelings and passions about Israel.”^x Yet, in many our camps, the exclusive owners of Israel education are the Israeli *shlichim*. This sends a message to our youth that Israelis are the sole authentic Israel voices. American teens who have had returned from their own immersive NFTY summer trip or semester on EIE, and connected to Israel in a sincere way, aren’t given a place to share their experiences. We can make better use of these alums who may be able to relate and connect to young American Jews in a more personal way than *Shlichim*. While they are not content experts, these teenage alumni can cultivate

enthusiasm and bring about awareness for an Israel experience. While *Schlichim* should still be utilized to bring a deeper taste of Israel to camp, they should be encouraged to work more closely with these teenagers, who have the important advantage of understanding their young American audience. American teenagers who have already undergone an immersive Israel experience can become the Israel role models that our movement needs.

Modern Hebrew education and Israeli culture are other areas that could be transformed to help create deeper connections to Israel. We have seen from the *olim* that knowledge of Modern Hebrew helps one easily integrate into Israeli society and understand Israeli Culture. Lori Sagarin argues in most American “Hebrew Schools,” prayer book Hebrew and decoding, leaves our youth with no capacity to communicate in Hebrew or to connect with the language of the land [of Israel.]. This leaves our youth ill-prepared to engage with the country on its own terms, in its own language. She argues that learning even a small amount of Modern Hebrew, “tears down cultural and interpersonal barriers.”^{xi} Hebrew can better prepare a youth to encounter the country, culture, and people of Israel. Additionally, using contemporary Israeli art and culture can help American students gain access and understanding to a society, helping them see a place for themselves within it. Integrating Israeli arts and culture into American Israel education offers students a chance to engage in critical thinking, understand historical and cultural context, and

actively be creative, and explore personal Jewish identity. This too all better prepares students for an encounter with the State of Israel, building a longer, complicated relationship with Israel.

Finally, the variety of voices of Reform *olim* must be heard in the greater American Reform movement. Their experiences of living in Israel as Reform Jews allow them to become role models for anyone engaging in a deep and complicated relationship with Israel. We already use the model of *mifgashim* or the creation of authentic relationships with Israelis in our Israel education, so it makes sense to include the voices of those Israelis who share a common background, cultural, and religious language. These individuals are not ambassadors with an agenda of persuading others to make the choice of *aliyah*. They are individual Israeli Jews with unique experiences who can re-ignite a didactic relationship between the people of Israel and North America.^{xii}

With these changes in Israel education, Reform Jewish educators can work on creating deeper connections between American Jewish identity, Israel, and the mutuality between them. *Aliyah* may be an outcome, but it is not a goal. The question of what the future relationship between the Reform Movement and Israel will look like, will fall into the hands of educators who will help Reform Jews articulate answers to the question of where Israel fits into Jewish identity.

ⁱ Hirsch, Richard G. New Directions in Liberal Judaism in the World Today. CCAR 85th Annual Convention, Vol LXXXIV, 1974. In *A Reform Zionist Perspective: Judaism and Community in the Modern Age*. Ed Michael Langer. New York: UAHF, 1977. Pp 279

ⁱⁱ *Deepening the Commitment: Zionism and the Conservative/Masorti Movement*. Ed. John S. Ruskay and David Szonyi. New York: JTS Press, 1900.

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedgut, Jac. "Aliyah: Abroad Thoughts from Home." *Deepening the Commitment: Zionism and the Conservative/Masorti Movement*. Ed. John S. Ruskay and David Szonyi. New York: JTS Press, 1900.

^{iv} Borowitz, 263.

^v Livni, Michael, Perspectives for an Action Program: Reform Judaism and Zionism as Jewish Responses to the Modern Age. Reform Zionism

^{vi} Ackerman, Walter. "Israel in American Jewish Education." *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images for North American Jews*. Ed Allon Gal. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996. Pp186.

^{vii} While other areas of connection to Jewish community are weakening, Grant and Kopelowitz cite Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe to claim that American Jewry is attached to Israel as ever. This can be seen through increased Israel travel and Israel communication through technology. Grant and Kopelowitz, pp 18-21

^{viii} Grant, Lisa D. and Kopelowitz, Ezra M. Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education. 23

^{ix} Wertheimer, Jack. "American Jewish Education in an Age of Choice and Pluralism." *International Jewish Handbook*. Ed. Miller, Grant, Pomson. 1087-1104.

^x Litman, Lesley. "The Educator and Israel Education." *The Alef-Bet of Israel Education*. Ed Anne Lanskey. Chicago: The iCenter, 2011.

^{xi} Sagarin, Lori. "Modern Hebrew in Personal Identity Development." *The Alef-Bet of Israel Education*. Ed Anne Lanskey. Chicago: The iCenter, 2011.

^{xii} Stewart, Adam. "Mifgashim: Creating the Authentic Relationship." *The Alef-Bet of Israel Education*. Ed Anne Lanskey. Chicago: The iCenter, 2011.

Please share a little bit about your Jewish upbringing. How was Reform Judaism a part of your upbringing?

Hadas Levin: *I was brought up in Temple B'nai Yehuda on the South Side of Chicago in the 60's/70's. The congregation was small (c.100-150 families) and many of the congregation's founders were Holocaust Survivors. My family was not, but these survivors played a very auspicious role in shaping the undercurrents and pro-Israel sentiment in the congregation. I was advisor of the Temple's youth group, I taught Sunday school, and after graduation I became a Hebrew teacher at several synagogues in Chicago's southern suburb. Without question, my Rabbi, Leo Wolkow played a very influential role in getting me into the Reform camping movement (OSRUI) and later in sending me to Israel to Machon Greenberg teachers college. Without his influence and his assistance in obtaining scholarships etc., it would not have happened.*ⁱ

Sally Klein-Katz: *I was raised in Keneseth Israel in Allentown, PA, from a very young age. I was enrolled in religious school from Kindergarten through confirmation, and I was active in youth group. My entire family had a strong Reform Jewish identity and a connection to the congregation.*ⁱⁱ

Lesley Litman: *I'm a 5th generation Reform Jew- an old New York/Boston Jew.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Josh Weinberg: *I grew up in Chicago, and I grew up talking about Israel in my home. My father is a Reform Rabbi and he and my mom shared stories of volunteering on *kibbutzim* in the Seventies after the Yom Kippur war. I also attended OSRUI, which was a big influence on me.*^{iv}

Marc Rosenstein: *I grew up in a Reform home. My parents were active in our congregation. My father was a Sunday school teacher and board member. I was active in youth group, attended reform summer camp, and participated in EIE. During college I became more comfortable, liturgically, with the Conservative Judaism; but even after working professionally in the Conservative Movement I remained, ideologically, Reform.*^v

Rachel Iscove Peled: *I have always described myself as a Reform Jew. My mom has been teaching at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto for over 40 years so I had a lot of exposure to Reform Judaism. I went to Religious School there when I was young, had my Bat Mitzvah*

there, chanted Torah on High Holidays, and still go back there for services when I am visiting Toronto.^{vi}

Cara Katzew: *I was adopted as a newborn and was raised by a Reform Rabbi and Cantor. Our home practices have fall more on the conservative spectrum and I was educated in the Conservative, Solomon Schechter Schools. However, the ideals of Reform Judaism (egalitarianism, equality, inclusively, etc) were been instilled in me at a young age. I have always felt committed and proud of Reform Judaism. When I attended a public high school, I continued Jewish studies at my shul (Westchester Reform Temple), had my confirmation there, and stayed on for post confirmation. Also while in high school I decided to go on NFTY EIE semester in Israel 2004. My commitment continued even after I was too old to be a camper, and too young to live at home. While in college, I taught Hebrew school near my university to maintain a connection (my hillel was not so impressive) and whenever I came home, I had Shabbos dinner with my family and attended shul with them. Reform Judaism has always been a constant in my various life stages and has been intertwined with my commitment to family.^{viii}*

Were there any specific URJ Programs that helped foster your relationship to Israel? How?

Sally Klein Katz: *I was born in 1951 and had gone through the Reform Jewish education at that time, which did not include any talk of Hebrew. But after my Bat Mitzvah, Rabbi Stephan Schafer came to my Temple and brought an Israel agenda with him. Rabbi Schafer had fought in the War of Independence in Israel and met his wife there. Suddenly, there were posters of Israel on the wall and we switched our Hebrew from the Ashkenazic pronunciation to the Sephardic. I was confirmed with 20 other students on Shavout of 1967. Shortly before service, the Six-day war broke out and Rabbi Schafer told the confirmation that we were to lead our service on our own. He was going to Israel. He was an extraordinarily powerful example of someone who was ready to go war for something he believed in.*

Lesley Litman: *My congregation in Worcester, MA was an instrumental congregation. At the time I started Youth Group there, I had also just experienced my parents divorce and the death of a parent. I was having a rough time. I went on EIE when I was a senior in high school and something spoke to me. I think you'll find this for a lot of people who make aliyah, there is always a push/pull. (For me, there was a push to Israel but also a personal pull away from the US). Hebrew also resonated for me. During EIE, I fell in love with Hebrew, learned it quickly and was able to easily integrate into the culture.*

Hadas Levin: *I set up the 1st Reform Bayit on the north side of Chicago. I served on staff at OSRUI for many years, established a Garin for Aliya to Kibbutz Yabe called Garin*

Arava, and recruited in all of the Reform movement's summer camps for NFTY trips to Israel. I was also involved as a leader in the process to establish ARZA.

Marc Rosenstein: *Camp created a living Jewish environment for me. (Like Israel in some sense). EIE was especially influential. Also, Rabbi Robert Samuels was an Assistant Rabbi in our congregation when I was a teen, and he strongly influenced me toward Zionism. He was the person who pushed me into EIE, then made Aliyah himself. His aliyah was a model for me.*^{viii}

Josh Weinberg: *In EIE there was a big emphasis on "Living Hebrew." Through EIE, I got a strong base of Hebrew and the Israelis I met while I was on EIE, I thought were cool. I knew I wanted to do something more serious than a summer so when I found out I could go for an entire semester and didn't LOVE high school- I went. I knew it was going to be a major life experience. It opened my eyes to Israel but also to a Judaism that was outside of the Reform world.*

Cara Katzew: *My most significant partaking in the Reform Jewish movement growing up was at the URJ camp OSRUI in Wisconsin. That is where my Zionism and practice of Reform Judaism was developed as a youth. Their extensive Israel-related programming (daily Hebrew lessons, "Israel day", Israel-themed night programs, etc) and the very structure of the camp playing on Israeli culture with units named "Tzofim, Mosheva, Cholutzim, etc. all helped to create an atmosphere where I felt as if I was connected to Israel and Reform Jewish life. It was EIE however that solidified my relationship with Israel.*

What motivated you to make Aliyah?

Sally Klein Katz: *There was a rally at our newly build JCC for the 1967 war and I went. I had never been at a gathering with so many Jews before in my life. We all sang Hatikva together. It was a fundraiser; it was a way to show support, but there was also the element of fear. The people there were truly afraid for the wellbeing of what it might mean if we lose Israel. That changed my life. Judaism was something that left synagogue and became about Israel. It rooted Israel on my map. It helped Israel become important and central to my Jewish identity because I saw that Israel was not something that should be taken for granted. I might not have known all this at the time, but I felt something change with that rally. I realized I wanted to go. To go mattered. It heightened the significance and meaning of our life in every interaction from small to large. In Israel, we were center stage of Jewish history. Every relationship mattered in Israel- with different kinds of Jews and people. It was clear that these relationships were more important than war and boundaries.*

Lesley Litman: *Part way through college, Israeli kids were going into the army and they were looking for American counterparts to be there. Things weren't great for me in the US and things had always just felt better in Israel. I met with people as part of a movement to start Yabel and the people who gathered together at that first meeting were interesting, smart, and inspired. I felt, "Wow, this is important." This is important for the Reform movement and for Israel.*

Josh Weinberg: *I got a job offer to come and teach in Israel from Baruch Krauss of EIE. He was my calling and literal phone call to Israel. I was living in Chicago and I just knew that I had to make Aliyah before it was too late. Within two weeks of that phone call I packed up and left. I trained for two months with Baruch and started teaching right away. I hit the ground running, I knew the way of the land, had friends, and spoke Hebrew so my Aliyah was pretty easy and smooth.*

Marc Rosenstein: *Having spent a formative semester in EIE, and my first years of marriage, in Israel, I had a long time feeling of attraction to and comfort in Israel. That combined with my love for Hebrew made me think I could live there.*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *Jewish education had already been a part of my whole life (Bialik Hebrew Day School kindergarten to grade 8, CHAT - Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto - high school). On top of that I had a specifically Zionist upbringing. After visiting Israel I always asked myself whether I could see myself living here. I became a Human rights lawyer was looking to practice law in Israel. I made Aliyah at age 29 and immediately began a Masters in Public Law at Tel Aviv University in order to combine both of my passions.*

Rich Kirschen: *As long as I was not living in Israel something was incomplete in me as a Zionist and a Jew. I also knew that I would jump at the first chance—any chance, really—to move my family and me to Israel. While working at Hillel in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan, I received a job offer that would have moved us to Haifa. I took it. So we packed and fully prepared to move to Israel but then the intifada canceled my trip. Actually, it eliminated my tourist-based job and the opportunity for me to move my family to Israel. That was when I learned one of the most important lessons about moving to Israel: Aliyah is Hebrew for Catch-22. When you are in North America, it's impossible to find a job in Israel. But when you've got a wife and three small children, you can't move your family to Israel unless you've got a clear source of income. And you can't really get to Israel for enough time to look for a job unless you live there. But you've got to get to Israel—a job—North America—Israel—a job—North America—... In May 2004 I received a job offer in Jerusalem. It was clear immediately what I would do. At the same time, I became completely paralyzed. Fortunately, my wife Cara was compelled equally to move to Israel, having grown up there for a number of years. So, we decided to move to Israel.^{ix}*

Hadas Levin: *In addition to a positive experience in an Israel program, the profound influence of the Holocaust and solidified for me the need for Jewish homeland. I wanted to live an intensely Jewish Lifestyle which was not necessarily prayer driven (as most synagogues are). I was interested in building the country and had a feeling that I could contribute to that process.*

Cara Katzew: *My time on EIE was the best 4 months of my life. Everyday I woke up happy, saying to myself, "I'm in Israel!" The things we learned, the places we went, and the people with who I was both leaders and peers came together to create something with much personal impact. My mother recently found a letter that I wrote to myself on the last day of the program. I wrote that I was so happy to be in that place at that time because I knew I was going to come back and make Israel an even bigger part of my life. That was a long time ago and I nearly forgot that feeling. I had school and career goals that I focused on after that. But, it was a trip to Israel in October 2011 to visit an Israeli friend that changed my path. While I was in Israel I met up with a bunch of my peers from that EIE trip. Seeing that many of them had moved their lives here, that they were happy and successful, made me realize that I could do it and not lose myself. I could still have a career and build a life here. All those fears that my education and career goals would waste away were diminished. However, it was actually that pain I felt upon leaving Israel to go back home that did it. In that very moment I decided that I did not want to feel that again. I was going to come back, for a very long time.*

When coming to Israel, in what ways did Reform Judaism shape certain decisions you made, such as where to live, your work, or circle of friends?

Lesley Litman: *I went to Israel with the first group of Americans in order to create Kibbutz Yabel in 1976. We first settled on Yotvata because Yabel wasn't established. I'm a start up kind of person.*

Marc Rosenstein: *It really didn't. We joined Shorashim, a conservative moshav, as the Reform communities didn't seem the right fit either because of geography or social and religious environment. Shorashim is a rural community affiliated with the conservative movement, which we chose because of its location, social life, economic structure, as well as its religious life.*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *When I first arrived, I had to write foreign lawyer re-qualification exams and then re-article for a year, so I worked at LACO - Legal Aid Center for Olim, which is part of IRAC, the Israel Religious Action Center, which of course is part of the Reform movement. I then worked there as an Israeli lawyer for a year.*

Hadas Levin: *Reform Judaism greatly shaped my decisions as I made Aliyah to Kibbutz Yabel in 1977. When we decided to leave Yabel, we moved to Har Halutz, a Reform community village near Karmiel.*

Cara Katzew: *While my friends were mostly from EIE, Reform Judaism did not impact my lifestyle decisions such as location, job, activities etc.*

Did you join a congregation? If so, what kind of congregation and how did you choose it?

Sally Klein Katz: *We joined Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem. Our Aliyah has been as successful as it is because of having an incredible community. One reason we joined is because of the ritual obligation of minyan, It teaches Jews cannot do it alone. Not all of our friends are there (We have real friends who are secular, orthodox, and Palestinians)-but it is through our community that we found similarly minded people where we can live out our concerns for social justice and do it as a congregation. It is important for me to not be alone and isolated.*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *I haven't joined a congregation but I attend services at the Reform synagogue in Raanana (called Raanan). I take my kids to holiday programs there and really like it. I live in Tel Mond, which is north of Raanana and east of Netanya. For Yom Kippur, since you have to live walking distance to a synagogue in Israel, we stay at my in-laws and I walk to the Reform synagogue in Netanya.*

Hadas Levin: *Just recently, in 2010, I joined Kehilat Halev for its liturgy, musical style and format, and it's rabbinic style.*

Josh Weinberg: *It was clear to me from the beginning that I was going to be involved in Kol Haneshama. I go to services there and serve on various committees. When I think of Reform congregations in Israel, Rabbi David Ellenson's categories of "serious Jews vs. non serious Jews" apply best. At Kol Haneshama people are committed, knowledgeable, and interesting for us. It's also social for us- we live close by and our daughter is in Gan. Kol Haneshama definitely represents the old school of the Israeli Reform movement. It's very imported; people speak Hebrew with an American accent.*

Cara Katzew: *I have yet to join a congregation but do partake in certain events that are affiliated with the Reform Shul in Tel Aviv. I chose it because I enjoy their Kabbalat Shabbat in the summer and a few other holiday events that they hold.*

How did your relationship with Israel and the Reform Movement change after making Aliyah?

Sally Klein Katz: *1971/72 was our first year in Israel and the country was on an incredible high. The Jewish quarter was one big archaeological dig. It was an exciting place to be and filled with hope. It was exciting seeing the past and present come together. But when we came back in the August of 74, we returned back to a country that was depressed. It had "sobered up" after facing the reality that we could have lost the country during the Yom Kippur war. People had buried so many people. Emotionally, this affected me very deeply. I had to pick up people who we connected with and friends who were broken. It was a powerful and important year. Israel had sobered and matured as did my relationship. The colors with which I would paint Israel took on darker colors that didn't exist before.*

Lesley Litman: *The summer before I left for Israel, I was going around to NFTY, camps, and synagogues to be the Reform voice of Israel, but the rabbis and staff were telling me to tone it down. There was support for Israel because of 73, but no one wanted me to mention Aliyah. Then, there was a decision that came down from Alex Schindler to incorporate Israel into the Reform Movement. After ARZA was formed, I had a sense that Israel was becoming more a part of Reform Jewish identity. Michael Langer was at the center of it all. He laid the conceptual foundation for Reform Zionism- no one but him. 1967-73 was a profound time for a Reform Jew in Israel because it felt like we had support from the movement. Steve Schafer was in the Youth Division of the Reform movement and he said I'll take NFTY and Camp if you give me Israel. He was linking the silos in 73/75 before anyone else. And we were the elite in youth. Steve wanted us out there so we went out there.*

There were four guys and me who made Aliyah that year and we all went up to Arad to a program called WUJES to learn Hebrew. We had a tekes to dedicate Yabel in September of 1976 but we didn't move onto the land until Feb 1977 (Because of the challenge of getting water to the desert). We were Kids. We were babies in our 20's so we had to learn our day to day living. I was learning how to cook/eat. I was also the treasurer of the kibbutz so I spent a lot of time getting supplies.

Josh Weinberg: *I very disillusioned with the Camp director of OSRUI, Jerry Kaye. When we were talking about my Aliyah, he asked me, "Where did we go wrong?" I thought, "I made Aliyah because of you! Because of what you created at camp!" It was upsetting to feel as if the Movement wasn't really behind my decision.*

Rich Kirschen: *After two years of living in Israel, I am slowly feeling like I am a part of this country. It was after the Second Lebanon War, I believe, when I realized I had shifted identities. I was no longer watching Israel from afar. For better or worse, I was here, a part of*

this wonderful madness. And then nafal ha asimon, something clicked for me. I should probably say that something snapped, but I realized I could not live here and not serve in the army. I had to serve. As a citizen, as a father who will have to send his children to serve, and as an educator who teaches about Israel, I suddenly realized that I was about to do something that would truly have made Catch-22's Yossarian lose his mind. I knew in my heart that I had to go and find a way to get drafted.^x

How has self-understanding as a Reform Jew changed since living in Israel? How is this manifest in your life?

Hadas Levin: *Shabbat and Jewish Holidays are an integral part of life.*

Sally Klein-Katz: *As a Reform Jew in the U.S., I didn't know anything about halacha. But I knew we had to carve out a space for ourselves in order to make room for Judaism. Aliyah represented a way of living our lives in a place and way where we are living in Jewish time and Jewish rhythm- where my supermarket sells my havdalah candle. Kashrut was natural here. We didn't come as kosher but being Jewish became normal. There are ways in which it feels like we are swimming upstream because of our liberal interpretation of what Shabbat is, or how we celebrate hagim, but it still feels right.*

Lesley Litman: *I was single and it was hard to be single in my late 20's in the middle of nowhere, so I ended up going to Jerusalem to work for the World Union for a couple of years. I had walked away from Yabel with a mattress and six hundred dollars after spending five years there. Israel economics were bad at that time. Inflation was one hundred percent and I didn't have parents to send me money. It was painful to leave to the kibbutz and it was painful to return to the United States. When I got back here, I was saving up to go to nursing school and ended up in Jewish education as a way to keep me connected to Israel. After I left Israel, I stayed connected to Hebrew through Hebrew College in Boston. It was the only program where you can do the entire degree in Hebrew. I think Hebrew is an important part of the Aliyah process. Hebrew is a curtain between you and Israeli society.*

Josh Weinberg: *My world was opened to a Judaism that I never knew. Like, I didn't know Jews go to shul and then go home to have dinner. I got angry at the Reform Movement. I wanted to know why the movement keeps its people so ignorant (and I'm still angry about that). This was huge for me. I felt empowered to come home and challenge some people who were my rabbis (my dad included) and educators because I suddenly felt like I had a lot of new knowledge. I felt like I didn't really have a place in the Reform Movement. I kept my commitment of going to camp even though I was more observant but I felt like I made my*

friends and mentors angry. Smitty, the head of youth at the time even told me to try Ramah! The Reform Movement had preached, "Choice through knowledge" but I felt that was only true until you know something. Once you do, suddenly, the Reform movement doesn't seem so inclusive and accepting. When I talk with New Reform leadership, they admit they had made some mistakes about the way they handled people in my situation. No one was saying it before that.

Marc Rosenstein: *I have become more sympathetic to and optimistic about the possibility of non-movement-affiliated Jewish renewal, arising from the secular majority. I'm more convinced that Buber, and Hartman are right that this place has to be Jewish in its values.*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *I don't think my self-understanding has changed significantly. I think a lot of Jews in Israel are secular or non-observant because they feel that living in Israel is enough to identify as Jewish. But I have continued to identify myself as a Reform Jew and I attend Reform synagogue.*

Cara Katzew: *It has not changed so much- Only in the understanding that I can maintain a strong connection to Reform Judaism without belonging to a shul or organization. I maintain Reform Jewish ideals in my practices with my friends at Shabbos dinners and chag-related gatherings. One new way that it has manifested is the obligation I feel towards welcoming and including newcomers those dinners.*

What does it mean to you to be a Reform Jew living in Israel?

Stacey Blank: *To be a Reform Jew in Israel is to feel discriminated against, an experience I was spared growing up in the U.S. The local municipality of Ramat HaSharon doesn't list our congregation in the online directory of local synagogues. My congregation had to fight for 15 years, including appearing before the Supreme Court, to gain the right to build a synagogue, while Orthodox synagogues are built with public funds. Though 90% of our city's residents are secular, the mayor dances with the Chabad community in the main square on Simchat Torah and has not accepted our invitations to visit. I am here in the Jewish homeland to fulfill a dream of our people, but achieving it as a Reform Jew requires overcoming many obstacles.^{xi}*

Matthew Sperber: *At Kibbutz Yabel the struggle has been a creative one. For 32 years we've been trying to integrate Reform Jewish values into how we relate to the land and into our business decisions: how we interact with our employees, how we run our hotel business on Shabbat, and how we milk our cows. Early on, for example, we concluded that solving the problem of the Torah's work prohibitions on Shabbat by employing non-Jews was not*

acceptable to us as a principle for religious observance in a modern Jewish state. We understood that once we had decided to operate a dairy business, to grow vegetables in the desert, and to run a small guest house—all businesses which would require us to work on Shabbat and holidays—the best we could do would be to define limitations on these labors. In our guest house, for example, we could limit the services we provided to guests on Shabbat, even though meals would still have to be served and broken air conditioners fixed. In our farm operations, we decided not to tithe our fields,

This has made my life in Israel as a Reform Jew exciting, meaningful, and special in a way that could not happen anywhere else.^{xii}

Rich Kirschen: *Truth be told, many times the inconsistency of my own religious life confuses even me. I often ask myself- as a liberal Jew- how many times a day do I pray? Should I say birkat hamazon (the blessings after eating) only after Friday night meals- but what about all other meals? Dare I daven in a minyan that is not egalitarian? These are the type of questions with which I successfully make myself crazy from Havdala on Saturday night until the next Shabbat. A perpetual wrestling match of indecision and conflict...Living in Israel has had a huge influence on my religious life whether I admit it or not. Here, everything is so infused with being Jewish that suddenly there is no longer the necessity for my Jewish boundaries to only be religious boundaries...Must religious life in Israel be everything or nothing? How do we determine what is too much in terms of observance and how do we determine what is too little? And who determines this?^{xiii}*

What do you think is the future of the Reform Movement in Israel?

Sally Klein-Katz: *Recently, the IMPJ (Israel movement for Progressive Judaism) changed its name to Reform Judaism in Israel and I am not pleased with this decision. I believe there is a stigma against Reform as a term in Israel, and I believe we are sisters but we are not the same. We are distinct and separate. I like to celebrate differences, not to be collapsed into one.*

Lesley Litman: *I don't think that the term Reform Judaism is the term I would use in Israel. I would use "Liberal Judaism"- A Judaism that is egalitarian, creative, forward thinking, non-dati/non-orthodox. Reform Judaism in Israel is going to be its own unique, non-orthodox Judaism and it needs to be uniquely Israeli. I also believe it needs to be indigenous; it needs to grow on Israeli soil and not be plopped down from the outside (like Yabel was). I think if the URJ, HUC, and WUPJ were smart, they would do whatever they could to promote a non-synagogue based, non-orthodox movement.*

I believe groups like Women of the Wall are focused on the wrong issue. They are focusing on the negative instead of focusing on the thousands of people having Shabbat on the beach with Beit Daniel or Tikkun Leil Shavout at the Tel Aviv museum.

Marc Rosenstein: *Not sure. Wonder if it is necessary in the long run, though I think its rabbis can be part of the process*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *Hard to say. Some Israelis are anti-Reform and many government policies are anti-Reform (e.g. don't recognize Reform conversions done in Israel, Reform marriages, etc.). Some Israelis don't know it exists and are either religious or secular with nothing in between. But progress is being made, through the courts, to advance Reform policies. Time will tell.*

Hadas Levin: *I think the future is very uncertain. The funding for programming and salaries are far too dependent on the Jewish Agency and private contributions from abroad. This leaves a high risk and uncertainty for continued long term funding. Additionally, there are few models for building sustainable revenue generation.*

Cara Katzew: *I think the Reform movement has the potential to flourish but it also has quite a few obstacles. The biggest one being that many people here do not see the value in it. Many people here view Reform Judaism as a passive Judaism and that is exactly what the “secular” Israelis practice already. They observe a few holidays and that’s it. They don’t understand what Reform Judaism can really add to their lives.*

What do you see as your personal role in shaping Reform Judaism in Israel?

Naamah Kelman: *Since my Aliyah in 1976, I have devoted my personal and professional life promoting liberal, egalitarian, pluralistic Judaism in Israel. Starting with my student days at HUC in 1986, I have been involved in many initiatives to put Reform Judaism on the ground.^{xiv}*

Hadas Levin: *Politicizing the Reform Movement to impact Israeli government policies/funding.*

Lesley Litman: *When we were starting Yabel, we knew that before we could be on a national agenda we had to figure out what it means to be an indigenous Reform community. We were only twenty percent American and the language was Hebrew, but we still had the perception that we were American. What we needed to do, and we did it, was to create a vibrant Jewish life on the kibbutz. We had tefilah, we kept kosher, we studied Talmud with*

Dr. Chernick and his wife Miriam, and we used Jewish learning to influence the real decisions we had to make day to day, for example-like how to deal with our Chametz during Pesach.

Sally Klein Katz: *I think by living a Reform Jewish life, we show that alternative expressions of Judaism are legitimate. I think we should be identifying ourselves as "dattim" and expanding that definition of what dati means.*

Josh Weinberg: *My goal as a teacher in EIE was to take North American Jewish kids and make Jewish identity their primary identity. I wanted to show them that there is a whole nation of people out there that I wanted them to connect to and feel proud of; to be a part of the story; to show them that Jewish knowledge is important. I feel like the message Reform Jewish education sends is that knowledge doesn't matter; it's all about how you feel. I had an experience with a songleader at Eisner that was a sad moment for me because she told me she could be saying gibberish as long as she could jump and dance with her friends. I believe Jewish identity has to come through some kinds of knowledge. The kids in EIE get a 22 hour course in basic Jewish literacy. Some of the elite had a massive argument with EIE that what we were teaching wasn't "Reform enough." For example, we were asked if we were teaching Eugene Borowitz. My response was that this isn't important if the kids don't know what the Talmud is!*

I want Reform Kids to have as much knowledge as what the orthodox are perceived to have.

Marc Rosenstein: *As the director of the rabbinical program at HUC, I guess I have a role in preparing rabbis to have a Reform connection with Israel. In my NGO and teaching work, I see myself as modeling Reform Judaism for people who don't know what it is.*

Rachel Iscove Peled: *My work at LACO and attendance at Reform synagogue is my small contribution to keep it alive and strong.*

Rich Kirschen: *As a Reform rabbi and the director of the Saltz Education Center at the World Union for Progressive Judaism, I work closely with an army base as part of our educational program.*

Cara Katzew: *I do not feel that I have a role per-se other than being an example of an active, Reform Jew raised with a strong Jewish education, making meaningful choices in my observances and ideals.*

How would you describe the relationship between Reform Judaism and Israel in Israel? (Government, people, general thoughts and feelings)

Naamah Kelman: *This is a very, very complicated question. No government has embraced liberal Judaism. But increasingly, local governments are supporting our local synagogues particularly outside of Jerusalem. Since its founding in 1986, IRAC has led the battle to gain rights, recognition, and funding. Over these decades there has been a slow but dramatic “sea change.” There is no public discussion regarding the Jewish nature of Israel without the liberal denominations. In a recent study commissioned by the Avichai Foundation: 8% of Israelis said that they identified with Reform and Conservative. This is over a half million people!!! Now, they are not in our synagogues or schools yet, but something has happened. I think that our 80 graduates of the Israeli Rabbinic program have led this incredible process!*

Lesley Litman: *The greatest challenge is that the Reform movement is perceived as American.*

Marc Rosenstein: *I felt it changing and becoming more accepted. But at the same time, maybe less necessary as a variety of different non-orthodox forms and organizations and experiences become available. Still battling for acceptance as authentic.*

Sally Klein Katz: *I believe Reform Jews, (not Judaism, but the people who are doing it) are critical for the ongoing definition of what is Israel and the texture of Israeli society. We must place the emphasis on human life and the prophetic tradition of pursuing justice for others and ourselves. If you are someone who is part of a Reform community, whether you belong or are an outside supporter, we want to be thinking, discerning people. We need to stand up against the stronghold that the ministry of religion has on marriage and family status and say, “that’s not my way.” I want to affirm total egalitarian values. All of this requires being assertive, having courage, and being clear about what we believe in.*

Josh Weinberg: *I have come to the conclusion that many Israelis are interested in Judaism. They are angry at the establishment and at the halacha, but they have innocent curiosity about Judaism after spending so long rejecting it. I think Reform Judaism offers a built in, non-threatening, user-friendly model that will attract Israelis. The Reform movement offers a Judaism that is more interested in religious expression than national identity because at its roots, it came from a German/western expression of Judaism without a national identity. I think Reform Judaism can offer Israelis a Jewish identity because they already have a national identity.*

Rich Kirschen: *Maybe it is me, but wherever I go these days in Israel, whenever I mention that I am a Reform rabbi, people say, “Kol ha kavod” “Good for you!” When I gave a series of lectures on Reform Judaism to my army platoon, they loved it. I am optimistic about Reform Judaism taking root here, but it will take time. Remember, Reform Judaism had a*

late start in Israel. We weren't here in 1948. It took us until the '70s to start building institutions that eventually sowed the seeds of today's Reform Israeli Movement. The challenge of achieving Jewish religious pluralism depends on demographics. I am not expecting hundreds of thousands of Reform Jews to move here tomorrow, but such an infusion would greatly improve our status in Israel. Approximately 650,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews live in Israel today. They comprise 20% of the country and now hold 17 seats in the Knesset. If Reform Jews had close to half that number, we could either create our own party or join and influence another party to support religious pluralism and freedom. Religious pluralism will not be handed to us on a silver platter; we have to build facts on the ground, beginning with more Reform schools, camps, synagogues, and rabbis.^{xv}

Matthew Sperber: *The Reform Movement's hope to create a framework in which secular Israelis would feel comfortable with a Jewish lifestyle has been achieved only partially. Yet, I remain an optimist. I believe that after we make peace with the Palestinians, Israelis will deepen their search for a clearer understanding of Jewish identity, and the Israeli Reform Movement will come into its own as it provides answers.*^{xvi}

Hadas Levin: *There are many good programs and services that Reform Judaism are providing in Israel, however the overall scope of influence on Israeli society as a whole is very, very limited. Reform Judaism remains on the periphery of mainstream Israeli society and is completely isolated from orthodoxy, save an exceptional case here and there. There are many cases of exemplary community service, legal struggles, contribution to education and culture and more that occur, however the scope of such is very small relative to the whole. Israeli politicians pay respectful lip service but don't really take the Reform Movement seriously.*

Cara Katzew: *One disillusioning experience for me between me as a Reform Jew and a group of Israelis was when I went to a family friend of my boyfriend's for the second night dinner of Rosh Hashana. I was a new guest knowing no one but my boyfriend and his mother. Firstly, I was criticized for my American English (parts of the family are South African) then, upon hearing what my parents do for a living and my Reform upbringing, I heard- "Reform Judaism...hmm.. Well its better than nothing." This was said by the host of this dinner and it bothered me on so many levels. I felt great disrespect towards me, my family, and the Reform Movement of which I am very proud to be a part. While I wanted to retort, I held my tongue and decided to continue my practices and beliefs and hope that in the future this sort of sentiment will be dispelled. Yet on a happier note, in the summers, the Reform congregation of Tel Aviv hosts "Kabbalat Shabbat on the Namal" It is a beautiful service full of joyous Shabbat music and prayers and there is a significant attendance of local families that come to bring in Shabbat (with a beautiful sunset to boot). One of these shabbatot I invited EIE friends to come. There were about 10 of us that came together, even joined by our madrichim. Most of us are Reform but a couple in the group have become more religious and affiliate with the more traditional communities. However, there we were standing together*

bringing in Shabbat, singing the songs and prayers, even dancing a little. It gave me hope that more young Jews from different sects can celebrate our Judaism together in Israel and even set an example.

How do you think the American Reform Movement feels about American Olim?

Lesley Litman: *Especially in the early days, we wanted more support from the Reform movement from the US. Alan Levine and Hank Skirball were two people who were constant advocates for Yabel. They both played major roles in helping to secure funding, and bringing NFTY kids down to meet us. The Reform Movement as a whole was not forthcoming; we felt like the Reform Movement had dumped us in the desert and were paying us a lot of lip service. The Israeli reform movement was weak and had little to give and the U.S. was still battling the role that Israel was playing in Reform Jewish life. It's easy to yell and scream as a kid for help but it wasn't clear to us at the time that all the resources for us just weren't there.*

Marc Rosenstein: *Not particularly interested.*

Naamah Kelman: *Ambivalent. There is nothing done to promote Reform Aliyah. In the last Pittsburgh Platform in 1999, Aliyah was affirmed; but that's about it.*

Sally Klein Katz: *I think the Reform Movement is exceedingly proud of American Olim. It used to be, "Wow. Amazing. You are brave; maybe crazy- but that's ok too. I feel like American Reform Jews admire that we are doing something with our lives and making an active choice to do something that we believe in. American reform Jews value it, even if it is foreign to their roots. Spending time in OSRUI, I meet a lot of pro-Israel Reform Jews. As a teacher at HUC, I meet some Reform students who would never be there if it wasn't required and now have the chance to be reflective on what it means for them to be in Israel.*

Josh Weinberg: *In my experience, I feel like the Reform Movement is somewhat reluctant of encouraging of people to make Aliyah. We have definitely come a long way from 1885 to 1999. Still, it's sad to me that for the vast majority of American Reform Jews, Israel isn't even on the radar. Its not like they are struggling with the question of should we live there or should we not- and then come to the conclusion that they would rather stay in the U.S., That would be a different conversation. Nine years after making Aliyah, people still think I'm crazy or playing around. I get asked when my Israel trip will be over or when I am coming home. I get told, "It's time to come home and be serious." For the most part people don't comprehend what it actually means to make Aliyah. I think the big issue is that my wife and myself are major anomalies.*

Hadas Levin: *Respectful of the Oleh's right to make that choice, but I don't see any real deep connection/bond on the whole except for very dedicated relatively small groups (e.g. ARZA.)*

Cara Katzew: *I think there is a feeling of pride and hope that the generation of American Reform Jews can plant the seeds of developing Reform Judaism in Israel while also maintaining that bridge with the American communities.*

How would you describe the relationship between American and Israeli Reform Judaism?

Naamah Kelman: *Getting warmer. Not enough American Reform Jews have visited Israel or really know of the flowering of Reform Judaism. They hear too much about our struggles with the Orthodox establishment and that is a turn off. There are synagogues that have successfully twinned with our synagogues. There is a lot to be done here.*

Sally Klein Katz: *In the States, I see for many members of Reform congregations, being a reform Jew is the default. Here it is the opposite. It is an assertion and active choice.*

Josh Weinberg: *I think Israelis have a romanticized view of what it means to be Jewish in the States. They believe that everyone there is tolerant and welcoming, but the whole American Jewish world isn't BJ. Reform Judaism has to take on its own character here in Israel and it isn't going to be like the States for very practical reasons. There is a lot to learn, especially about congregational life. Israelis are just learning about having to pay for congregations. Americans are learning that we don't want to pay for congregational life. Still now, if Israeli Reform congregations don't fundraise in North America, they won't exist.*

Marc Rosenstein: *The relationship is sort of weak. Too much of it is based on the model that Israeli Reform Jews are a persecuted minority, a view that our institutions have perpetuated, I suppose for fundraising purposes. I don't see that narrative as useful. As North American Reform Judaism becomes less ethnic and more faith-based (exacerbated, I suppose by mixed marriage and by marriage to converts), and Israel becomes more real and complicated, and since the movement has worked to convince American Reform Jews that Israel doesn't consider us Jews, I imagine the disengagement we now see will only increase. Personally, the longer I am here, the more distant I feel from the experience of American Jews (reform or otherwise) and their concerns, even though I have never been the kind of Zionist who negates or flees the Diaspora.*

Stacey Blank: *Diaspora Jews need to be well informed and proceed with humility when criticizing Israel, recognizing that, because they don't live here, their perspective lacks firsthand experience.*

Rich Kirschen: *While serving in the army with eighteen year olds, I thought about how would Dalit, a young commander in the Israeli army relate to Jewish students at Brown University where I had worked before? I constantly reflected upon questions about the experiences of one nation (the Jewish people) in two different places (Israel and America) and whether they are so radically different that soon we won't see the connection? Are we becoming two different peoples?^{xvii}*

Hadas Levin: *Minimal. The Reform Movement leadership maintains a relationship but is very busy with other issues.*

Cara Katzew: *I would describe it as a partnership. Many Reform communities in America have "sister" congregations in Israel. The American communities sometimes provide funding or other resources while the Israel based communities provide a way to retain a connection to Israel.*

What do you think the impact will be of increasing numbers of Israelis being ordained?

Lesley Litman: *- I have heard of an Israeli Rabbinical student who doesn't want to say he was from HUC because of the stigma it holds for Israelis about Americans. But as more Israeli and Argentinean rabbis ordained in Israel I am hopeful this will change.*

Marc Rosenstein: *A general development of a more open, liberal, pluralistic approach to Judaism among wider circles of the public, not limited to members of our congregations. I'd like to see our rabbis in education, politics, NGOs, journalism and other non-traditional rabbinic roles.*

Naamah Kelman: *A huge impact, that has started to have a ripple effect, along with the scores of graduates of other programs at HUC. We are now training Spiritual Caretakers, Educators, and young leaders. Together, this is moving Israel to a more pluralistic place. We attract Orthodox and secular alike in these (non-Rabbinic) programs. I am very optimistic here, if we can only find ongoing funding. HUC has been the most serious "donor" to Reform Judaism in decades. This began with the building (1962) and later expansion of the campus (1986). This has created a "monument" in the heart of Jerusalem. Now, our goal is to expand our training programs and increase exposure of the Jerusalem campus to really make a difference. Along with the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism and IRAC we are all*

joined to be a force in this country that so sorely needs this kind of alternative to extreme, messianic ultra-Orthodoxy and Ultra-Orthodoxy and a searching secular population. We will not be the only answer but we have served as a beacon about the possibilities of liberal Judaism that abhors racism and segregation and actively empowers its members to take hold of their Jewish identities and observance.

Rachel Iscove Peled: *It will hopefully add Reform congregations throughout the country expand to include day schools and more Reform educational programs. Hopefully they will help increase knowledge of Reform Judaism among Israelis.*

Hadas Levin: *Very Challenging. There are not enough jobs or rabbinic positions presently to employ all the Reform Rabbis, and at the present rate of movement growth, there will certainly not be enough job opportunities in the future. Subsidization of rabbinic salaries is placing a greater and greater financial strain on the Israel Reform Movement's budgets and forever increasing, due to increased number of salaries, COL increases, sabbatical subsidies etc., This further limits funds available for Reform programming.*

Cara Katzew: *I think the impact will be a growth in educating Israelis and bringing them into communities. However, there may also be a backlash from the religious communities speaking out against them, and even acting out against them with legislation.*

ⁱ Levin, Hadas. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 24 Feb 2013.

ⁱⁱ Klein Katz, Sally. "Aliyah Interview." Telephone interview. 18 Feb. 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Litman, Lesley. "Aliyah Interview." Telephone Interview. 19 Feb 2013.

^{iv} Weinberg, Josh. "Aliyah Interview." Telephone Interview. 20 Feb 2013

^v Weinberg, Josh. "Aliyah Interview." Telephone Interview. 20 Feb 2013

^{vi} Iscove Peled, Rachel. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 18 Feb 2013.

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- ^{vii} Katzew, Cara. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 28 February 2013.
- ^{viii} Rosenstein, Marc. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 18 Feb 2013.
- ^{ix} Kirschen, Rich. "Boundaries of Jewish Life." *The Jerusalem Report*. 2 August 2010. P 45.
- ^x Kirschen, Rich. "Confessions of A Reform Rabbi and an Unorthodox Soldier: Reflections on Serving in the Israeli Defense Forces." Unpublished Copy.
- ^{xi} "Israel by Israelis: My Homeland, Myself." *Reform Judaism Magazine* Spring 2010: n. pag. Web. <www.reformjudaismmag.org>.
- ^{xii} "Israel by Israelis: My Homeland, Myself." *Reform Judaism Magazine* Spring 2010: n. pag. Web. <www.reformjudaismmag.org>.
- ^{xiii} Kirschen, Rich. "Boundaries of Jewish Life." *The Jerusalem Report*. 2 August 2010. P 45.
- ^{xiv} Kelman, Naamah. "Aliyah Interview." Email Interview. 25 Feb 2013.
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