# Drawing Boundaries and Limiting Elasticity: What Did the Reform Movement Learn from Beth Adam's Membership Application to the UAHC?

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## Digest

Beth Adam (House of Man) was officially incorporated in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1980. The congregation was founded upon a Humanistic Jewish philosophy, as defined by Rabbi Sherwin Wine. The congregation's rabbi and members were also influenced by the Reform Movement's seminary, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

After breaking with the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) in 1988, Beth Adam explored membership in the Reform Movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). The congregation's application to the UAHC turned into a national debate. Reform Jews wondered if a congregation that removed explicit mention of God from its liturgy could be accepted into the fold of Reform Judaism. This thesis provides a comprehensive history of the growth and development of Beth Adam and its application to the UAHC. The thesis incorporates primary source documents, interviews, and secondary source materials.

Chapter One chronicles Rabbi Sherwin Wine, the co-founder of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. The chapter describes Humanistic philosophy, liturgy, and the mentor relationship between Rabbi Wine and Rabbi Barr. The chapter concludes with a brief account of Barr's growth and development as a rabbi.

Chapter Two establishes the genesis of Beth Adam as a Humanistic congregation and records the congregation's early history.

Chapter Three discusses the congregation's religious school and adult education program, how it acquired a Torah, and the development of the congregation's liturgy. The third chapter also explains the reasons behind Beth Adam's break from the SHJ and its eventual application to the UAHC.

Chapter Four details the congregation's application to the UAHC, beginning in 1990 and concluding in 1994 with its rejection. The fourth chapter includes a detailed discussion of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Responsum arguing for rejection from the UAHC and Dr. Eugene Mihaly's Responsum in favor of acceptance.

Chapter Five includes a brief discussion of the congregation post rejection. The chapter critiques the UAHC's handling of Beth Adam's application and frames the lessons that the Reform Movement can learn from the rejection of Beth Adam's membership application.

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## Acknowledgements

I have developed and refined many of my passions during my years at HUC-JIR. My professors have graciously given me the tools and the methods for my own study. From them, I have learned how to seek answers by asking the right questions and by thinking critically. I am grateful for the opportunity that I have had to study and to learn from them. They have taught me that spirituality can equally be found in the classroom and in the *Beit K'nesset*, and have instilled within me the confidence to be a rabbi.

This thesis, like my experience at HUC-JIR, has also been a journey. Integrity, honesty, and reservation in forming conclusions are important values when writing history. As humans, we understand the experiences of our lives through different lenses. This is further complicated when *many* people live through the same event: each individual synthesizes the events in his or her own way, and there is truth in each person's understanding. Thus, I have learned as a historian that truth -- as much one can hope to understand truth when re-constructing a series of events -- lies more in the grey than in the definitive realms of black and white. The lesson about truth and the values that are required of a historian are equally important for living life and for being a rabbi.

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**Drawing Boundaries and Limiting Elasticity: What Did the Reform Movement Learn from Beth Adam's Membership Application to the UAHC?**

## Introduction

In 1979 a group of Cincinnati's Jews met to discuss their conceptions of Judaism within the modern world. As a group, they agreed upon a Humanistic understanding of the Jewish tradition and God. The group of Cincinnatians worked with then-rabbinical student Robert Barr to form a congregation based on their Jewish awareness. Beth Adam (House of Man) is a congregation that was built on philosophical ideals that lay somewhere between Humanistic Judaism, the teachings of Sherwin Wine's Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) and the Reform Judaism that produced their Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) ordained rabbi.[1] In 1980 the congregation officially incorporated, and in 1981 Robert Barr became the congregation's first rabbi.[2]

In the years that followed, the congregation developed as an independent synagogue and chose not to become a member of a congregational union. Beth Adam's members agreed that while they believed in Humanistic conceptions of Judaism, the SHJ was too quick to throw out Jewish liturgy and Jewish ritual.[3] Over the next eight years, as the congregation grew in size their needs evolved. The congregation's members developed liturgy, held discussions with HUC-JIR faculty about Jewish history and theology, and continued to remain unaffiliated with either the SHJ or the Reform Movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC).[4]

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[1] Beth Adam: *A History*. Cincinnati, OH circ. 1985, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Rabbi Robert Robert , interview with the author, October 2004.
[4] The UAHC is the congregational body of the Reform Jewish Movement. In 1991 the UAHC comprised 865 congregations from throughout North America. In 2004 the UAHC changed its name to the Union for

In 1988 the SHJ asked Beth Adam's leaders to join the Society, which had reconstituted itself as a congregational union. However, Beth Adam's leaders chose not to affiliate because they had a disagreement with the SHJ concerning the creation of a Humanistic rabbinical seminary. In December 1989 the members of Beth Adam, describing themselves as a synagogue with a "Humanistic perspective," adopted the *Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community*.[5] The development and adoption of this policy statement began the congregation's process of applying for membership to the UAHC. The policy explained a few, although not all, of the reasons Beth Adam wanted to join the UAHC.

First, the congregation ideologically agreed with many of the left-leaning stances of the Reform Movement, including egalitarian practice, social action, and civil rights. Second, membership in the Union equated to access to educational opportunities for Beth Adam's members: congregational leadership development, UAHC religious-school curriculums, UAHC summer camps for the children, Israel programs, and the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). Third, membership to the UAHC would give Beth Adam access to a community of Reform Jews and the opportunity to be involved with something larger than their own independent congregation. Fourth, membership in UAHC gave the congregation legitimacy as a Reform synagogue and could help with the prospect of recruiting new members. Fifth, the UAHC supports and is

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Reform Judaism (URJ). For the purposes of this thesis and to maintain consistency with the names of the institutions as they were at the time, I will continue to use "UAHC."

[5] Beth Adam: *Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community*. Cincinnati, OH. 1989.

therefore often served by clergy taught by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR).[6]

In early January 1990, Beth Adam approached the UAHC to ask about membership possibilities. The UAHC's leadership questioned the potential Beth Adam application by requesting a Responsum from the CCAR Responsa Committee and various rabbis within the Reform Movement. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then the president of the UAHC, understood that Beth Adam's application was an opportunity for the UAHC to define itself and its borders.[7] Beth Adam's application caused the Reform Movement to consider a variety of questions: Could the Reform Movement accept a congregation that actively removed God from its liturgy? Does the UAHC demand a theological litmus test? Does the UAHC have the authority to tell member congregations, and therefore congregants, that they must believe in God? What are the boundaries of Reform Judaism's principles of pluralism?

Beth Adam's application sparked debate from within and outside the Reform Movement. Between the years of Beth Adam's inquiry and the presentation to the UAHC board in June 1994, rabbis; congregational laity; nationally and regionally syndicated newspapers; faculty and students at the College-Institute; and Beth Adam's own members all weighed in on the debate.

This thesis is a comprehensive history of Beth Adam and the congregation's application to the UAHC. The thesis sheds light on a unique congregation that developed in the shadows of both the Humanistic and Reform movements. Furthermore, the

[6] Summarized from Rabbi Barr's response to the question "What would your congregation get out of joining the UAHC?" Barr, Robert. Rabb. Personal interview with Rabbi Peter Berg. Date unknown.
[7] More detailed research of Rabbi Schindler's personal papers reveals that Schindler was uniquely aware that Beth Adam's application could serve as a vehicle through which the Reform Movement could define its theological boundaries.

questions that are raised by Beth Adam and its UAHC application will help Reform Jews understand the limits, struggles, boundaries, and future of the Reform Movement in dealing with Jews and Jewish movements that are not theistic. Last, but certainly not least, this thesis discusses a variety of related subjects: the philosophy and theology of Humanistic Judaism; the differences in practice between Beth Adam and the SHJ; the historical development of Beth Adam within the context of the Cincinnati Jewish community; the development of Beth Adam's liturgy and religious practices; and history of Beth Adam's UAHC application process.

## Chapter 1

## Sherwin Wine and His Influence on the Development of Humanistic Judaism in Cincinnati

The history and development of the American Reform Movement is intrinsically tied to the rabbinate of Isaac Mayer Wise and his influence on the movement's founding philosophy and institutions. Similarly, one cannot write about the development of Humanistic Judaism without understanding its seminal leader and founder, Rabbi Sherwin Wine. Through understanding Rabbi Wine, the reader will become better acquainted with the movement, the philosophy, and the person that influenced Beth Adam's rabbinic leader, Rabbi Robert Barr, and the congregation he helped to found.

### Rabbi Sherwin Wine's Life and Influences

Sherwin Wine's parents, Tillie Israelski and Bill Wine (originally Wengrowski), were both first generation immigrants to the United States from Russian-controlled Poland. Tillie and Bill met in Detroit, Michigan in 1924. Though they were married in The Bronx, New York, the Wines settled in Detroit, where they had two children: Lorraine in 1925 and Sherwin in 1928.[1]

Wine attributes his strong Jewish religious and cultural identity to both his parents' *Ashkenazic* heritage and to the influence of the Detroit neighborhood in which he grew up.[2] Tillie and Bill kept a kosher home: They observed the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, and (their son) was trained for his *Bar Mitzvah* at Shaarey Zedek, an Orthodox synagogue, which later became a member of the Conservative Movement.

In addition to this more conventional Jewish upbringing, Wine's experience as an American Jew of Eastern European ancestry during World War II also contributed to his

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[1] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[2] Ibid.

Jewish identity and beliefs. As he listened with his family to radio broadcasts of Hitler's speeches during the war, Wine quizzed his parents about what would have happened had his family stayed in Poland; the realization that the result would assuredly have been tragic had a potent impact on Rabbi Wine's beliefs. Wine ultimately came to believe that Jews had to rely on other Jews for support and protection and not on a supernatural deity that had failed to protect innocent lives. This belief is evidenced by Wine's later writings, particularly, *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* (1988):

> If Jewish history has any message, it is the demand for human self-reliance. In an indifferent universe there is no help from destiny. Either we assume responsibility for our fate or no one will. A world without divine guarantees and divine justice is a little bit frightening. But it is also the source of human freedom and human dignity.[3]

Despite the fact that his family's practice of Judaism was clearly an important formative aspect of his life, Wine sometimes tired of his parent's *halakhic* disposition. His Jewish experience outside of the home, however, was far more varied. The Wine family lived in a predominately Jewish neighborhood in Detroit, a diverse, intense Jewish enclave that Wine, who greatly appreciated and treasured living in the area, described as the "Jewish ghetto."[4] The neighborhood, Wine remembered, was a mosaic of every imaginable type of Jew: Orthodox, Zionist, Nationalist, high class German, and working class Russian. Correspondingly, Wine's high school was also crowded with Jews, most of whom were second generation Americans.

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[3] Sherwin Wine, *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 188.
[4] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

In addition to the almost inherent Jewish influence of family and his peers, Wine found that his relationship with and perception of Rabbis Abraham Hershman and Morris Adler, the two rabbis of Shaarey Zedek, also contributed to the development of his Jewish identity. Wine was drawn to characteristics in the rabbis that were crucial to being a congregational rabbi; he was particularly impressed with Rabbi Hershman's intellectual prowess and scholarship and Rabbi Adler's oratorical skills and comfort with people—the rabbinate's "pastoral presence." It is crucial to note here that Wine's admiration of these Jewish role models was based more on their rabbinical presentation skills than on their spirituality. Nevertheless, nestled in the intersection between a Jewish family, community, and professional role models, Wine formed an unbreakable kinship with both the Jewish people and Jewish religious customs and rituals.[5] Wine's childhood instilled within him strong Jewish cultural experiences. He was not enamored of his parents' religious doctrines so much as he took pleasure in the knowledge of his place along the chain of Jewish history. We can see the influence of Wine's childhood in the service that he wrote for the Birmingham Temple, entitled "Jewish History":

> Jewish history is four thousand years of this Jewish experience. It is the sum total of all the pleasure and pain, triumphs and defeats, fulfilled dreams and disappointments which have entered into our memories through centuries of struggle and striving. We are the children of that Jewish experience.[6]

Yet, as he noted in his essay *Reflections*, Wine was also a product of his white protestant American teachers. "My ghetto was Jewish," he writes, "but my public school teachers, my librarians, my department store clerks, my movies stars, and my language

[5] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[6] Sherwin Wine, *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 184.

were WASP."[7] Wine was deeply influenced by American democracy, the American culture of freedom, and the ethic of individual opportunity—concepts that fueled Wine's drive, desire, and self-made opportunities to succeed in school and in life. In an interview with the author, Rabbi Wine spoke about having done extremely well at Hutchins Junior High School and Central High School, from which he graduated in 1946.[8] He found a home for his love of history in the school library, where he read voraciously and memorized royal genealogies, and remembers excelling in history, theater, debate, and extemporaneous speaking.[9] Wine describes himself as, even from this early age, someone who genuinely enjoyed learning, reading, and challenging himself to achieve academic excellence—traits for which he has been known his entire life.[10] All of these skills and characteristics would prove useful for a life in the congregational rabbinate.

Wine's intellectual interests only grew with time, and he discovered a love for philosophy when he matriculated to the University of Michigan in 1946. He recalls, "I was, in particular, taken by the British empiricists. The idea that truth should be responsible to evidence lies at the foundation of my belief system."[11] As a philosophy major, Wine took classes with the logician Irving Copi and the philosopher Roy Sellars.[12] Sellars, perhaps not coincidentally, wrote several articles addressing the idea of humanism, including "Religious Humanism" (*The New Humanist* vol. 6, No. 3, 1933: 7-12), "The Humanist Manifesto" (*The New Humanist* vol. 6, No. 3. 1933: 58-61), and "Humanism as a Religion" (*The Humanist*, 1941: 5-8).

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[7] Sherwin T. Wine, "Reflections," *A Life of Courage: Sherwin Wine and Humanistic Judaism*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Harry T. Cook, Marilyn Rowens. (Farmington Hills: The International Institute for Secular Judaism, 2003), 280.
[8] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Harry T. Cook, "Courage Is As Courage Does," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 15.
[11] Sherwin T. Wine, "Reflections," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 280.
[12] Harry T. Cook, "Courage Is As Courage Does," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 19.

Wine found that his Jewish identity, so strongly instilled in him by his familial and communal upbringing, began to meld with his newly developed secular intellectual ideas, diverging from the traditionalism of his parents and developing into a new set of beliefs that combined cultural Judaism with philosophical secular and Humanistic intellectualism. In college, Wine came to the conclusion that there was no supernatural force or God. Likewise, in college, Wine came to the conclusion that Judaism, like many religions, was the product of the evolution of Jewish heritage in response to the environmental and social conditions in which the Jews found themselves. Wine's professors opened his eyes to the ideas behind Humanistic religion.[13]

As he neared the end of his undergraduate career, Wine found himself at a crossroads consistent with his uniquely combined but traditionally divergent beliefs. One path would lead him down the road of the academy and schools of higher education; he could pursue a doctorate in philosophy and spend his life writing and teaching at a university. Alternatively, Wine could return to the Jewish religious and cultural influences of his childhood—the Jewish faith that was so important to Wine's father, who died while Wine was still in school in 1948.[14] While both life options drew on his interests and skills, Wine saw the rabbinate as the career that best utilized his passions and inherited traits.[15] Although he had realized that he was an intellectual Humanist, Wine had a strong emotional tie to his Jewish identity, and his skills in and passion for oration and debate complemented his enthusiasm for teaching, leading, and counseling a

[13] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[14] Marilyn Rowens, "Reflections on a Life of Courage," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 55.
[15] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

Jewish congregation.[16] Accordingly, Wine decided to attend the Hebrew Union College (HUC), where he matriculated in 1951.

In an interview with this author, Wine characterized HUC as an "advanced Hebrew school" whose professors, he recalled, did not at all influence the development of his religious philosophy or Humanistic theology, much of which he had already developed while an undergraduate at Michigan.[17] This characterization of HUC is not consistent with Dr. Michael Meyer's assessment in his book, *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875-1975*.[18] Wine did, however, express an appreciation for a few of the professors at HUC, particularly Sheldon Blank, Israel Bettan and Julius Levy. Respectively, these professors were scholars of the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic *midrash*, and linguistics.

Wine also recalled that he was not alone in his atheistic beliefs at HUC, suggesting that during his tenure there, a significant number of the rabbinical students did not believe in God. Indeed, Wine's observation may be confirmed by the 1972 study *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, commissioned by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and conducted by Theodore I. Lenn and a group of research associates. This study concluded that by 1972, 13% of the ordained rabbis in the CCAR viewed themselves as agnostics, and 1% of the rabbis defined themselves as atheists.[19] When one looks at the specific rabbis who graduated from HUC during Wine's tenure, the numbers are even more telling. Eighteen of the 120 respondents who graduated during Rabbi Wine's HUC career (1951-1956) defined themselves as agnostic, and three

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[16] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[17] Ibid. July 6, 2006
[18] Michael Meyer, *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875-1975* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 171-243.
[19] Lenn, Theodore I, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (West Hartford, Connecticut, 1972), 99.

of the respondents defined themselves as atheist.[20] Thus, 15% of the rabbis ordained between the years 1947 and 1956 self identified as agnostic and 2.5% as atheist at the time of the report's publication.[21] Certainly, a 2% difference is not statistically significant, but the larger point remains: Wine was not alone in his beliefs while at HUC. Again, according to Wine, his experience at HUC did not contribute to the development of his theological beliefs.[22]

After his ordination in 1956, and at the encouragement of the HUC-JIR administration, Wine chose to enter military chaplaincy.[23] At the time, he had a six-month gap between his ordination and his induction into the army.[24] Wine took this time to work as an assistant rabbi for Richard Hertz at Temple Beth El in Detroit, Michigan and then left for Korea, where he served as a chaplain for the Thirteenth Combat Engineering Battalion of the Seventh Infantry Division.[25] After his time in the army, Wine returned to Detroit, where again, he worked for Temple Beth El, this time for nineteen months. In an interview with this author, Wine explained that being an assistant rabbi simply did not suit his demeanor.[26] He could not be innovative, he recalled, at a synagogue in which he was not in charge. Accordingly, Wine soon left Temple Beth El to found a Reform synagogue in Windsor, Ontario, which is just over the United States and Canadian border from Detroit.

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[20] Lenn, Theodore I, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (West Hartford, Connecticut, 1972),100.
[21] Please note that I have cited the years 1947-1956. I did this because the Lenn Report broke down the respondents into blocks of five-year periods. Wine's tenure at HUC, between the years 1951 and 1956, fell between two different blocks of five-year periods. Thus, I added the two blocks of time together.
[22] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Harry T. Cook, "Courage Is As Courage Does," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 27.
[26] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

**The Genesis of the Birmingham Temple and Humanistic Judaism in North America**

After serving the congregation in Windsor for a few years, Wine began to question the place of his rabbinate and his beliefs within the Reform Movement, wondering, as he explained, "Could I continue pretending to believe in God?"[27] In 1963, Wine received a phone call from Temple Beth El congregants in Detroit. A group of congregants were disenchanted with their synagogue and had formed a group of eight like-minded couples. This new group wanted Rabbi Wine to consult with them on the formation of a new synagogue.

Initially, the group worked together to form a Reform temple that would function in contrast to Beth El and center around creativity and intellectual curiosity. Because Rabbi Wine was still committed to leading services on *Shabbat* in Windsor, the newly formed group held meetings in the Detroit suburbs on Sunday evenings. During these late-night discussions, Rabbi Wine and his congregants grappled with Jewish philosophy and the meaning of God throughout Jewish history.[28] Soon, the congregants began to take steps to institutionalize their group, choosing leaders and developing a ritual committee for the new synagogue a few months after they held their first religious service in September 1963. Wine was still working for Beth El in Windsor, Ontario during the process of forming the new synagogue. The congregants named the synagogue the Birmingham Temple, after the Birmingham suburb of Detroit, where some of the members lived, and where the congregation frequently gathered.[29] In her essay "The Birthing of Humanistic Judaism: An Eye Witness Account," Judith A. Goren explains, "'Birmingham Temple' was to be temporary…[but] by the time we built our own

[27] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Marilyn Rowens, "Reflections on Courage," in *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 58.

building in Farmington Hills, we were so well known as Birmingham Temple that those who argued for keeping the original name won the battle." The congregants' early discussions led by Rabbi Wine proved to be fundamental to the development of Humanistic Judaism, as Goren explains:

> The Ritual Committee was a self-selected group of about fifteen men and women interested in the evolving philosophy the temple...From the start, Rabbi Wine made it clear that the new congregation should be based not on demographics but on philosophy. The question that Wine posed in our weekly meetings was, "How do our services reflect our true beliefs?" ...The old traditions did not get discarded without a lot of heated debate from the committee. Eventually, however, Wine's logic was persuasive. Our services became meditative words on chosen subjects, and the Torah was respectfully stored on a bookshelf.[30]

The congregation's Ritual Committee—and the synagogue as a whole—eventually declared that the Birmingham Temple believed in "Humanistic Judaism." As Marilyn Rowen eloquently expressed in her essay "Reflections on a Life of Courage," Humanistic Judaism was, for Birmingham Temple's congregants:

> a Judaism that was people-centered rather than God-centered; a Judaism that affirmed that moral and ethical problems were solved from within each individual, not with the assistance of a supernatural force; a Judaism that believed in the strength of ordinary Jewish people to survive a history of persecution.[31]

Wine's congregants firmly believed that Birmingham Temple's liturgical expressions needed to be consistent with their Humanistic philosophy. Wine wrote new Jewish religious services and restructured old ones, removing language mentioning or concerning God from the liturgy. Clearly, he omitted the Shema, Barchu, and Mourners Kaddish, replacing these traditional expressions of and exaltations to God with a new creative liturgy that expressed the power, strength, history, ethics, and uniqueness of human life. It is crucial to note here that although Wine changed conventional Jewish liturgy to center around the potential and power of humanity instead of that of God, his

[30] Judith A. Goren, "The Birthing of Humanistic Judaism: An Eyewitness Account," *A Life of Courage* (see note 5) 174-175.
[31] Marilyn Rowens, "Reflections on a Life of Courage," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 59.

prayers do not worship humanity as traditional Jewish prayer worships God. Rather, Wine's liturgy celebrates humanity and confronts the difficulties that humans create for themselves. In his biography of Rabbi Wine, Harry T. Cook quotes Harry Velick, one of the original founders of the Birmingham Temple, explaining the process of developing the new liturgy: "It was no longer to be what was *geshrieben*—written by the ancients or some enforced tradition—it was to be what *we* wrote."[32]

The essence of Velick's statement speaks to the heart of the Birmingham Temple's core values. The founders of the Birmingham temple believed that their philosophical truths could not be compromised by a liturgy that understood God as Ultimate; their individual philosophies, they maintained, conflicted with Jewish liturgical expressions found within the *siddur*. Rather, they decided that there had to be a new level of integrity to the words that they said; their liturgical expressions had to be consistent with their view of humanity and religion. As such, they reinterpreted, re-wrote, or simply removed the God-centered Jewish traditions, customs, and practices as they saw fit. For them (as described further at the end of the chapter), Jewish tradition was not an autocratic parent. Instead, Jewish tradition was a democratic process in which their voice was equal and just as important as the voices of the Jews that came before them.

By 1964 the congregation was growing and developing quickly and decided to announce its beliefs to Detroit's Jewish and non-Jewish community. The public, particularly many in the Reform Jewish community, were astonished by the story told in the *Detroit Free Press*, which described Wine as an "atheist rabbi."[33] In February 1965, *Time* magazine ran an article discussing Wine and the "Godless congregation." Again,

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[32] Harry T. Cook, "Courage Is As Courage Does," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 29.
[33] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

the Jewish community was appalled; according to Wine, some in the Reform rabbinical community wanted him excommunicated.[34] But Wine and the congregation's leadership marched forward. Wine spoke about Humanistic Judaism throughout the nation, and the congregation published the first edition of its journal, *Humanistic Judaism*, which contained the first public use of the term "Humanistic," describing Birmingham Temple's philosophy.[35] Soon after, the congregation released the first edition of *Meditation Services for Humanistic Judaism*.[36] All the while, Wine was leading a day-to-day congregational life filled with adult learning, committees and meetings, lifecycle events, a burgeoning Sunday school, and religious services.

**Society for Humanistic Judaism**

Between 1967 and 1969, Wine met with various rabbinical leaders who shared similar Humanistic views. According to Wine, the like-minded rabbis began to discuss the formation of a Humanistic Jewish society.[37] The new philosophy was catching on and taking hold, expanding from its formerly small Detroit home. Some of Wine's former congregants who had moved to Westport, Connecticut from Detroit were building a new Humanistic congregation on the East Coast. Rabbi Daniel Friedman had been recently ordained from HUC-JIR and was serving congregation Beth Or in Deerfield, Illinois, which was converting from a Reform synagogue into a Humanistic congregation.[38] Finally, in 1969, the three congregations joined together—with Rabbi Wine and Rabbi

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[34] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[35] Judith A. Goren, "The Birthing of Humanistic Judaism: An Eyewitness Account," *A Life of Courage* (see note 5) 178.
[36] Marilyn Rowens, "Reflections on Courage," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 60.
[37] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[38] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.

Friedman leading the way—to found the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ).[39] In June 1970, the SHJ held its first meeting with 150 delegates in attendance.[40]

According to Rabbi Daniel Friedman, the original purpose of the SHJ was to teach, disseminate, and support an individual's path towards Humanistic Judaism. In an interview with this author, Friedman explained that the society did not originally consider working toward establishing Humanistic congregations beyond those already existing in Detroit, Chicago, and Westport. Rather, it was founded explicitly for individual memberships—a mission that aligned with Friedman's beliefs.[41] Rabbi Wine described Friedman as a staunch libertarian who believed that no group could speak for an individual; all people were free to believe what they wished.[42]

At its inception, the SHJ was not a congregational union, as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was for the Reform Movement. Indeed, as Rabbi Friedman had wanted, only individuals, and not congregations, could retain membership in the SHJ.[43] The society began to publish articles and journals focused on Humanistic Judaism, working to encourage individuals to come to Humanistic Judaism through the Humanistic truths being expressed in the society's articles and books. Over time, however, the SHJ found that it needed to change its structure. Ruth Duskin Feldman, a graduate of the International Institute for Secular Judaism, explained in her essay *How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism*: "As new groups emerged

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[39] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.
[40] Harry T. Cook, "Courage Is As Courage Does," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 32.
[41] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.
[42] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[43] Ultimately, the issue of membership affiliation to the SHJ became one of the few issues of contention between Rabbi Wine, Rabbi Friedman, Rabbi Barr and the Beth Adam leadership. This issue will be discussed later in the thesis.

needing help, nurturing, and support, the society, with only individual dues and modest fundraising to depend on, had its hands tied."[44]

Rabbi Wine recalls realizing, along with lay leaders within the movement, that the SHJ needed to offer services, liturgical and educational materials, and leadership training to communities that were organizing. The SHJ, however, was being run only by volunteers, and its organizational structure prevented it from becoming a congregational union.[45] Wine believed, therefore, that the SHJ needed to change course and begin collecting money from congregations and providing services to congregations.[46] Friedman felt differently. Again revealing his libertarian philosophy, Friedman argued that individuals needed to make choices based on what they believed in, not on communal structures.[47] Rabbi Wine explained to this author that he simply did not believe that Friedman's approach was tenable, so he and Miriam Jerris, the newly hired executive director, worked around Friedman.[48] Correspondingly, Friedman explained that he soon "began to withdraw [from the SHJ]."[49]

**Rabbi Wine's Organizations and Writings**

After co-founding the SHJ, Rabbi Wine continued to serve the Birmingham Temple and worked to bring like-minded individuals and organizations from around the world to relevant conferences and lectures. He realized that while the SHJ could provide a number of crucial resources, Humanistic Jews still needed other venues of support. Wine, therefore, began helping to develop a number of other organizations and societies to serve this purpose. In 1967 Wine founded the Association of Humanistic Rabbis

[44] Ruth Duskin Feldman, "How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 140-141.
[45] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.
[48] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[49] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.

(AHR), the aim of which was to provide support for rabbis committed to the teachings of Humanistic Judaism. At the time, most of the rabbis belonging to the AHR had been ordained by HUC-JIR. Today, however, the Humanistic Movement has trained the majority of the AHR's leadership.

In 1983 Rabbi Wine helped to create the Israel Association for Secular Humanistic Judaism with Israeli leaders Yehuda Bauer and Haim Cohen, a retired Israeli Supreme Court justice.[50] Later, in 1985, Wine helped steer the formation of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ), which became the educational arm of the SHJ, and, in 1990, began training rabbinic and non-rabbinic congregational leaders for SHJ congregations. Today, the IISHJ serves as the seminary for Humanistic Judaism and is, in fact, ordaining rabbis.[51] As of the date of this thesis, Rabbi Wine serves as the dean of the IISHJ.

One year following the creation of the IISHJ, Wine helped to found yet another group dedicated to the support of Humanistic Jews. This group, however, offered its support on a *worldwide* level. In 1986, Wine and his colleagues formed the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, a global association of Humanistic Judaism with members in North America, South America, Europe, former Soviet Union States, & Israel.[52] The use of the word "secular" was an important development in the naming of Humanistic organizations. Ruth Duskin Feldman explains, "Our Israeli and European

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[50] Ruth Duskin Feldman, "How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 143.

[51] The issue of rabbinic ordination and the founding of a Humanistic Seminary became the second major issue of contention between Rabbi Wine, Rabbi Friedman, Rabbi Barr, and the Beth Adam leadership. This issue will also be discussed later in chapter 3. It is important to note that Rabbi Barr was seen as the heir apparent to Wine and the leadership of SHJ. However, the SHJ's decision to begin training rabbinical leaders (which was discussed as early as 1988) was a contentious issue for Rabbi Barr and Beth Adam. As we will see, the SHJ's decision to train rabbis created a rift between Beth Adam and the SHJ.

[52] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

allies called themselves secular Jews. Humanistic, to them, meant humanitarian. 'Secular,' in common parlance, meant nonreligious (nontheistic)."[53] Thus, in order to be inclusive of a wider use of language and self-descriptive words, the Humanistic Movement adopted the world "secular."

Without a doubt, Wine is a founder. He has founded or been instrumental in the organization and formation of almost every Humanistic Jewish organization, including: the Center for New Thinking; the Humanist Institute; the North American Committee for Humanism; the International Association of Humanistic Educators Counselors and Leaders; TECHILA (formerly the Israeli Society for Humanistic Judaism); the Leadership Conference for Secular and Humanistic Jews; the Voice of Reason; the Conference on Liberal Religion; and Clergy and Citizens United.[54] As Marilyn Rowens notes in her essay *Reflections on a Life of Courage*, "all of [these] organizations began with the very close supervision of Rabbi Wine; as they grew, they became more autonomous but never far from his influence."[55]

Wine is also a prolific author. He has written numerous articles, books, liturgical services, educational materials, and philosophical treaties and is a regular contributor to the quarterly journal *Humanistic Judaism*. He also wrote most of the books that helped to shape the philosophy of Humanistic Judaism, including, but not limited to: *Humanistic Judaism*, *Judaism Beyond God*, *Celebration* (the collection of Humanistic liturgy written by Wine), and *Staying Sane in a Crazy World*.

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[53] Ruth Duskin Feldman, "How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 144. The addition of the word "secular" also became a flash point for Rabbi Barr and members of Beth Adam.

[54] Marilyn Rowens, "Reflections on Courage," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 59, 63-64.

[55] Rabbi Wine's death may prove to be an insurmountable obstacle for all of the organizations for which he has played an influential role.

**The Philosophic Tenants of Humanistic Judaism**

As Rabbi Wine notes in his forward to *Humanistic Judaism*, summarizing the philosophical principles of Humanistic Judaism is not an easy task.[56] Yet, in order to understand Beth Adam, a congregation with a "Humanistic Perspective," it is vitally important that one also understands the basic tenants of Humanistic Judaism as defined by Rabbi Wine, because in many ways, Beth Adam follows Wine's Humanistic model. Beth Adam's leadership, however, has also identified and institutionalized an interesting compromise between strict Humanistic beliefs and the possibility for theistic conceptions; the similarities and differences between Beth Adam and the SHJ will be discussed in later chapters.

For many Jews, the concept of non-theistic, secular Jewish religious practice is uncomfortable and seemingly oxymoronic. For others, the philosophical groundings of Humanistic Judaism accurately describe their understood, but often unstated, theological beliefs. In an interview with this author, Rabbi Wine rejected the idea that Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist ideas were a cornerstone for Humanistic Judaism—influential, yes—but according to Wine, not a foundation.[57] Yet, students of Jewish philosophy will find it useful to begin the study of Humanistic Judaism with a brief discussion of a few of Kaplan's key concepts in his influential book, *Judaism as a Civilization.*

In this book, Kaplan critiques the Jewish movements that existed in the 1930s and identifies the need for a "reconstruction" of Jewish life. Kaplan calls upon Jews to embrace a broader definition of Judaism—a Judaism that would contain religious celebrations as well as secular components. Thus, Kaplan embraces Judaism's liturgical

[56] Sherwin Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), v.
[57] Rabbi Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

practices while also encouraging the Jewish community to foster the more secular, albeit Jewish, cultural pursuits of Jewish art, music, dance, and philanthropy. Kaplan also encourages American Jews to be involved with their broader secular societies.

Despite his perception of the importance of secular activities and communities, Kaplan is hardly a secularist. Indeed, he views religion as a necessary component of the Jewish experience, explaining that the religion of a group is observable through the religious group's "sancta," the symbols and writings of a particular group (i.e. Jewish expressions of culture). At the same time, however, Kaplan challenges traditional conceptions of God, arguing that God is neither supernatural nor infallible. Kaplan perceives God as limited in power, shifting a level of emphasis off of God and onto people. Thus, Kaplan encourages Reconstructionist Jews to celebrate and emphasize Judaism as a civilization—in other words, a people-hood.

Unlike Wine and the SHJ, however, neither Kaplan nor his followers found it necessary to completely reconstruct their Jewish liturgical expressions to adhere to Kaplan's philosophy and theology. While they did make some changes to the liturgy, Kaplan and his followers felt beholden to the traditional Jewish liturgy of their youths. And, herein is the disconnect between Kaplan's "reconstruction" and Humanistic Judaism: The only way that one can disavow a supernatural God and then pray using theistic liturgy is to always understand the liturgy as a metaphor—a compromise Humanistic Jews were not willing to make. To be fair, Kaplan's reluctance to tamper with the liturgy was born in part from a recognition that most Jews were not ready for radical changes in the liturgy. Indeed, Kaplan's views were seen as heretical ideas in the eyes of many of his congregants at the Jewish Center in Manhattan, and his teachings

both precipitated his departure from the Jewish Center and his creation of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. Kaplan respected the value of tradition and ritual as a glue that united the Jewish people, which is why he attacked classical Reform Judaism for its abandonment of Hebrew and rituals.

While some of Kaplan's philosophy is acceptable for Humanists, the Reconstructionist implementation of Jewish prayer may also contradict both Kaplan's and the Humanistic philosophy. Reconstructionist liturgy, and later, the modern Reconstructionist Movement, opened the door to everything that Kaplan ideologically rejected (even though Kaplan himself was a part of the writing of the liturgy). Unfortunately, Kaplan and his later followers were tied to traditional Jewish liturgy, whose poetic prayers maintain traditional Jewish understandings of God and the relationship between (Jewish) humans and the supernatural. By failing to reconstruct their liturgy, the Reconstructionist Movement left the door open for later generations of Reconstructionists to accept the liturgy as an explanation of Reconstructionist theology. This is a failure that is particularly evident in the modern Reconstructionist Movement, which has, for all intents and purposes, completely veered away from the implementation of Kaplan's teachings. This juxtaposition of a philosophy that leans away from an explicit belief in God with a liturgy that exults God left the Reconstructionist Movement's door open to ambiguity. The strength of Rabbi Wine's philosophy of Humanistic Judaism, on the other hand, is its consistency and its clarity. As Rabbi Friedman accurately stated in an interview with this author, "Wine had the courage of his convictions," as he maintained that it was crucial that liturgy and religious practice accurately reflect

people's beliefs.[58] In defense of Kaplan, however, one can safely argue that Kaplan understood the psychological role of religion and ritual. In making Humanistic Judaism theologically consistent, Wine threw out almost all traditional Jewish forms of liturgy and ritual, whereas Kaplan realized that people are not rational or consistent creatures. In essence, many Jews may agree with Wine theologically, but they still want a prayer service with the recognizable liturgy, such as the *Barchu*, the *Shema*, or the Mourner's *Kaddish*.

For Wine, the Jewish belief in God and the religious practices that are centered on God belief had to be changed. Wine believes that neither God nor another "supernatural" force guides the course of natural events. Rather, "natural events have natural causes."[59] As such, the history of the Jews and of humanity, particularly in light of the Holocaust, does not reveal to Wine a supernatural force that is intimately involved with the day-to-day lives of humans, but rather, proves that nature is entirely indifferent to the suffering of humanity. As Wine explains, "Events happen in accordance with physical laws, not in accordance with ethical ones. Earthquakes and wars cannot defy the law of gravity; they can easily defy the Golden Rule."[60] Ultimately, Wine believes that justice in the world is created and maintained by humans.

With regard to Jewish identity, Wine posits a view similar to Kaplan's, arguing that Jewish people-hood is the foundation upon which Judaism has been sustained. In Jewish history, there has never been a time in which all Jews believed in the same God (or a God at all), or followed the same path toward Jewish practice. The dissenting and

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[58] Rabbi Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June, 12, 2006.
[59] Sherwin T. Wine, "The Meaning of Jewish History," *Judaism in a Secular Age, An Anthology of Secular Humanistic Jewish Thought*, ed. Kogel, Renee ad Katz, Zev. (Farmington Hills: International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, 1995), 230.
[60] Ibid. 231.

minority views of the Talmud, the philosophy of Spinoza, and the birth of the Reform Movement in the post-enlightenment world are all proof of this reality. The spectrum of Judaism is clearly large enough to encompass many different types of Jews, and as such, Wine maintains that a conception of Judaism without—or even beyond—God is as fully acceptable as the secular Jews in Israel.

In 1978 Wine summarized and explained the founding principles and ideology of the SHJ in his book *Humanistic Judaism*. The book lays out the first tenant of Humanistic Judaism as the concept of "self-respect." Wine describes this idea by juxtaposing it with the theistic ideology behind traditional Judaism. Traditional Jews, Wine explains, pray (or hope) that God will find favor with them and with their actions; if God is pleased with the prayers, life should go well. For Humanists, however, self-worth is not based on God's approval, but rather on the understanding of oneself as a worthwhile individual and on the steps one takes to ensure that perception is accurate.[61] Traditional Judaism also emphasizes the idea that man is weak in comparison to God, and therefore encourages its adherents to always turn to God to guide them and to solve even the most basic problems. Man, essentially, is always dependant upon God. Wine contrasts this with the Humanist idea that man is not helpless or dependant upon a supernatural force. Humans have the power to solve their own problems, which renders the idea of turning to God archaic and anachronistic.[62]

The third and fourth tenants of Humanistic Judaism maintain that there must be a balance between autonomy and community. Wine argues that Humanistic Jews have the autonomy to dictate the direction of their own lives, and that this autonomy frees man

[61] Sherwin Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 118.
[62] Ibid. 115-116.

from the authority of God. Yet autonomy does not mean that people can or should live a life of seclusion. Indeed, the Humanistic Jew recognizes that the strength of humanity can be derived the through positive relationships developed between humans.[63]

The last two tenants of Humanistic Judaism, as explained by Rabbi Wine, are rationality and religion. For Wine, there is no such thing as an eternal source of wisdom—it changes and adapts with time and with people. Wine charges each generation with the responsibility of defining humanity's place in the universe. He believes that although Torah and rabbinical writings worked well for the Israelites and the Jews of those particular time periods, today the biblical and rabbinic writings should be understood as only chapters in the evolution of the Jewish people. Wine posits that "Einstein and Darwin will have more to say to us about our place in the universe than will the Torah."[64] The essence of Wine's views is that the Torah was written for people who lived thousands of years ago. For Wine, Einstein and Darwin's scientific writings are more appropriate for a modern and contemporary world.

Finally, Wine explains that Humanistic Judaism is not a religion that worships or services the needs of God. Thus, Humanists are not required to fulfill *mitzvot* (commandments from God) because they have no conception of a *mitzaveh* (a divine commander). Instead, Humanistic Jews respond to the needs of humans—they care for the poor, for example, because the human conscience requires it. Similarly, Jewish Humanists celebrate Jewish holidays or rituals not because they were commanded to by God, but because they have strong interpersonal attachments to the seasonal calendar and

[63] Sherwin Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 116-117.
[64] Ibid. 119.

the human experience of living in a seasonal world.[65] Wine has encouraged Humanistic Jews to celebrate the values that are accepted by Humanists. the celebrations of Jewish culture, various Jewish holidays, various secular holidays, and lifecycle events.[66]

Wine succinctly concludes in *Humanistic Judaism*:

> A Humanistic Jew is an individual, of either Jewish or non-Jewish descent, who believes in the ultimate value of self-respect and in the principles of humanism, community, autonomy, and rationality. He also finds meaning in the celebration of life as expressed through the historic Jewish calendar and seeks to interpret this calendar in a naturalistic way. He perceives that the power he possesses to determine and control his own life is the result of two billion years of evolutionary history. Therefore, his religious feeling reinforces his sense of human dignity.[67]

Later, Wine explained the philosophy of Humanistic Judaism in five basic statements in the winter 1991 issue of the journal *Humanistic Judaism*. He writes:

> (1) Judaism is the culture of the Jewish people, which includes many religious and secular traditions. (2) A Jew is any person who chooses to identify with the fate and culture of the Jewish people. (3) After the Holocaust, it is clear that the meaning of Jewish history is that Jews must be responsible for their own fate. (4) Every person is entitled to be the master of his or her own life, subject to the final authority of his or her own conscience. (5) The power to achieve human survival, happiness, and dignity, is a human power.[68]

The key to Wine's theology is the essential idea that humans cannot depend on an all-knowing, all-powerful, supernatural being. Therefore, Wine encourages Humanistic Jews to take responsibility for themselves into their own hands, and to thus responsibility for the future of the Jewish people as well. For Wine, truth, rationality, and ethical behavior are man-made values and require man-made solutions when they are broken or subverted. Wine's life has taught him that the Jewish narrative knows these truths all too well. Humanistic Jews then, ultimately rely on themselves rather than on the hand of an absent deity. Wine's Humanistic philosophy had a significant influence on Robert Barr, the future Rabbi of Beth Adam.

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[65] Sherwin Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 120.
[66] Sherwin Wine, *Celebration* (see note 3) 12-13.
[67] Ibid. 121.
[68] Sherwin Wine, "Secular Humanistic Jewish Ideology," *Judaism in a Secular Age*, (see note 60), 239.

**Rabbi Wine's Influence on Rabbi Robert Barr and the Development of Beth Adam**

Born on July 5, 1955, Rabbi Robert Barr grew up in Detroit, Michigan, some thirty years after Rabbi Wine. Barr attended Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Barr's family even attended Shaarey Zedek, the same synagogue Wine attended, although the rabbis that influenced Wine during his youth were no longer at the synagogue. Barr dropped out of religious school immediately after becoming a Bar Mitzvah (age 13), but later regained an interest in Judaism. Around the eleventh or twelfth grade, he began studying and learning from the Conservative rabbis and teachers at Share Zedek. As Barr's interest in the rabbinate grew, his own rabbi encouraged him to explore other streams of Judaism, explaining to Barr that his passions for the rabbinate were wonderful but that it seemed as if the Conservative Movement was not the right fit for Barr's personal beliefs and practices.[69]

Inspired to find a type of Judaism that spoke to him more directly, Barr contacted Rabbi Wine to learn about Humanistic Judaism. While neither remembered their first meeting, both Barr and Wine spoke of the special relationship they developed with one another.[70] Barr recalled that Wine was positive about the rabbinate as a career, and that he offered to study with him; Barr readily accepted. Ultimately, Barr taught religious school at the Birmingham Temple and attended college at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, where he doubled majored in Philosophy and Psychology and minored in Judaic Studies. While in college, Barr attended Wine's Monday evening lecture series, volunteered for the SHJ, and edited books and manuscripts for publications. Barr's relationship with Wine eventually extended far beyond the Birmingham Temple's walls, and indeed, Wine became a close and personal friend to

[69] Rabbi Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[70] Rabbis Robert Barr and Sherwin Wine, interviews with the author, May 4, 2006 and July 6, 2006.

Barr. After the lecture series, for example, Barr and Wine would go to dinner and talk well into the evening. Barr recalls Wine as being incredibly supportive and intellectually engaging, and Wine saw Barr as a committed and interested young leader within the Humanistic Movement.[71]

Barr finished college quickly, and in 1975, at the young age of nineteen, he applied to and was accepted by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Barr recalled in an interview with this author that the admissions committee knew about his connection with Rabbi Wine, especially given that Wine had written him a letter of recommendation. Barr said that Wine had wished that the SHJ had a rabbinical training program, but as this was not a reality, encouraged Barr to attend HUC-JIR. Barr remembers Wine advising him to choose HUC-JIR's Cincinnati campus because at the time, Cincinnati was considered to be the most liberal of all the campuses.[72]

Barr worked for the SHJ throughout his student career at HUC. He helped new congregations form, traveled and spoke on behalf of the SHJ, served new congregations' rabbinical needs, and wrote and edited educational materials and manuscripts for the SHJ.[73] Indeed, Bar even helped Wine edit *Humanistic Judaism*, the first book in which Wine explains the tenants and philosophical beliefs of his new movement.[74] Rabbi Wine provided Barr with practical rabbinical training and employed and mentored Barr throughout his student career. The two remained incredibly close. Wine's SHJ also helped to support the fledging group of Cincinnatians who were interested in forming a

[71] Rabbi Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006; Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[72] Rabbi Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[73] Rabbis Robert Barr and Sherwin Wine, interviews with the author, May 4, 2006 and July 6, 2006.
[74] Sherwin Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), vi.

Humanistic group, paying Barr's salary as a rabbinical intern while he taught and helped organize the founding members of Beth Adam.

Interestingly, between 1975 and 1981 the SHJ also helped financially support Rabbi Rami Shapiro, another HUC-JIR rabbinical student. In her essay "How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism," Ruth Duskin Feldman explains that members of the SHJ and the Birmingham Temple believed that the future of Humanistic rabbinical leadership would come from Barr and Shapiro.[75] Feldman also notes, however, that this hope did not come to fruition, as Shapiro soon moved away from Humanistic Judaism and toward Reconstructionism and Jewish Renewal.[76]

Ultimately, it became clear that Rabbi Barr was seen as the heir-apparent to Rabbi Wine. This was confirmed on July 6, 2006, when this author interviewed Rabbi Miriam S. Jerris, the SHJ Community Development Coordinator; Marilyn Rowens, the former executive director of the International Institute for Secular Judaism and the former ceremonial director for the Birmingham Temple; and M. Bonnie Cousens, the executive of the SHJ, all of whom agreed that Barr was understood to be Wine's successor. Yet upon his ordination, Rabbi Barr was not offered a job from either the SHJ or the Birmingham Temple. In fact, while the SHJ had supported both Barr and Shapiro throughout rabbinical school, neither the SHJ nor the Birmingham Temple hired either of them after ordination. This was an unfortunate reality for a movement suffering from anemic growth. The SHJ and the Birmingham Temple were unable to afford to hire a

[75] Ruth Duskin, "How Sherwin Wine Built the Fifth Branch of Judaism," *A Life of Courage* (see note 7), 145-146.
[76] Rabbi Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

professional staff at the salaries that newly ordained rabbis commanded.[77] Yet one wonders if the SHJ could have helped to supplement Barr's salary by hiring him for SHJ projects after his ordination.

For Barr, not being hired by the SHJ meant that he would forge his own road, one that would eventually lead to becoming the rabbi of Beth Adam. While many of Beth Adam's early members belonged to the SHJ, both Barr, and Beth Adam, took a significantly different path, marking a conscious divergence from Wine's organization and philosophy. Beth Adam is a unique synagogue that was significantly influenced by Wine's teachings, Humanistic philosophy, and the friendship that Wine built with Rabbi Barr.

[77] Rabbi Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

## Chapter 2

## The Genesis of Beth Adam:

## The Development of a Humanistic Synagogue in Cincinnati, Ohio

### Dr. Joel Sacks and Mrs. Cynthia Sacks: How Two Became Six

The story of Beth Adam's creation begins with two individuals, Dr. Sacks and Mrs. Sacks. While Dr. Sacks grew up with religiously observant grandparents on both sides of his family, his parents led a more secular Jewish lifestyle, belonging to Jewish socialist and *yiddishist* circles. Dr. Sacks did not have a Bar Mitzvah, and he laughingly jokes that he "was tossed out of so many religious schools that he thought *mamzer* (bastard) was his Hebrew name."[1] After college, Dr. Sacks went on to medical school and became an ophthalmologist. Dr. Sacks' wife, Cynthia, grew up Episcopalian and converted to Judaism before their wedding.[2] In 1969, a few years after they were married, the couple moved from Baltimore, Maryland to Deerfield, Illinois with their first child and a second soon to arrive.[3]

As soon as they arrived in Chicago, the Dr. and Mrs. Sacks decided that they should join a synagogue. As new parents, they wanted to ensure that their children grew up with Jewish identities. They opened their Chicago-area *Yellow Pages* and began looking for Reform synagogues that were closest to their home. Under the Reform synagogue listings, they found Temple Beth Or.[4]

Beth Or had originally been a Reform synagogue. The congregation's leader, Rabbi Daniel Friedman, was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of

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[1] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[2] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

Religion. Yet, soon after his ordination, Rabbi Friedman became concerned with the direction of the Reform movement. Rabbi Friedman observed that "Reform Judaism became more enamored with mysticism," a move which he reacted against by beginning to develop a concept of "Rational Judaism."[5] Working together with the congregation's leaders, Rabbi Friedman led Beth Or in divorcing itself from the Reform movement by resigning from membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations only a few years before Dr. and Mrs. Sacks arrived in Deerfield. As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1969 Rabbi Friedman joined forces with Rabbi Sherwin Wine to form the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ). After the SHJ's creation, many of Beth Or's members became affiliated with the new association of individual Humanistic Jews.[6] It is crucial to note, however, that when Dr. and Mrs. Sacks walked through the doors of Beth Or for the first time, the congregation was still listed as a Reform synagogue in the *Yellow Pages*. While Beth Or had already moved toward a Humanistic approach, Humanistic Judaism was not a stream of Judaism recognized by most Reform Jews or the Chicago phonebook.

For Dr. and Mrs. Sacks, Beth Or was a wonderfully new and different experience. It was nothing like the Reform synagogue they had attended for High Holy Day services in Baltimore. The members of Beth Or were warm and welcoming. They appreciated Rabbi Friedman's honesty and refutation of mysticism, and an interventionist God concept. Similarly, they respected the fact the congregation's liturgy was theologically consistent with the theology of the congregation. Dr. and Mrs. Sacks valued the opportunity to be involved with a religious community that emphasized ritual and cultural

[5] Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June 12, 2006.
[6] Ibid. The founding of the SHJ is covered in Chapter 2.

Judaism and promoted honest dialogue. They particularly appreciated the rigorous intellectualism that pervaded the congregation.[7]

In 1977, the Sacks family moved from Deerfield to Cincinnati, Ohio. Before moving, Dr. Sacks had a conversation with Rabbi Friedman about finding a congregation like Beth Or in Cincinnati. Did Rabbi Friedman, they wanted to know, know of any Humanistic congregations or liberally leaning synagogues in the Cincinnati area? Rabbi Friedman explained to them that there were no Humanistic synagogues in Cincinnati, but that he did know of a student who, at the time of their discussion, was finishing his first year of rabbinical studies at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. The student's application had included a letter of recommendation by his teacher and mentor, Rabbi Wine. Wine was the founder of the Birmingham Temple, the first Humanistic synagogue, and, with Rabbi Friedman, the co-founder of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. Rabbi Friedman gave the Sackses the student's name and phone number. The student was Robert Barr.[8]

The Sacks contacted Robert Barr after he had moved back to the United States in August 1977. Dr. Sacks had just begun a new job as the chief of the ophthalmology department at the University of Cincinnati Medical School, Mrs. Sacks was raising three young children, and Barr was beginning his second year of rabbinical school as a full-time student with student pulpit responsibilities. They all agreed that none of them had time to start organizing a Humanistic *chavurah* (study group) at that time. Instead, Dr. and Mrs. Sacks joined Rockdale Temple and enrolled their two oldest children in its religious school.[9]

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[7] Cynthia Sacks, interview with author, October 29, 2006.
[8] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[9] Ibid. and interview with Robert Barr, May 4, 2006.

For Dr. and Mrs. Sacks, Rockdale Temple was not a perfect fit. Over 150 years old and steeped in a rich Reform Jewish history, Rockdale Temple, officially known as K.K. Bene Israel, was one of the founding congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Despite their relative discomfort with the congregation, Dr. and Mrs. Sacks formed a cordial relationship with Rabbi Harold D. Hahn, then the senior rabbi of the synagogue. Rabbi Hahn, in fact, was interested in forming a *chavurah* for Humanistic leaning Jews and had invited Dr. and Mrs. Sacks to lead the *chavurah*.[10] However, Rabbi Hahn died before the *chavurah* could get off of the ground, and the Sackses explained in an interview with this author that Hahn's rabbinic successor, Rabbi Norman Cohen, did not believe he had enough political clout within the congregation to form a Humanistic *chavurah* so early in his tenure.[11]

In fall 1979, while returning home from High Holy Day services, Dr. and Mrs. Sacks determined that they no longer wanted to be members of Rockdale Temple. The couple explained to the author that they appreciated that the Reform liturgy and educational opportunities spoke to many individuals, but that neither the Reform movement's liturgy nor theology spoke to them. Dr. and Mrs. Sacks believed that human decisions, not an interventionist God, controlled their lives, while, as a Reform synagogue, Rockdale's liturgy expressed the concept of an interventionist God. As Dr. Sacks explained further in an interview with the author, "If I couldn't be honest with myself in *shul*, where could I be honest?"[12] The Sackses decided that they wanted to form a community resembling the Humanistic Judaism they had experienced at Beth Or in Deerfield, Illinois.

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[10] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Dr. and Mrs. Sacks reconnected with student Robert Barr in late fall 1979 and early winter 1980 and began to discuss starting a Humanistic *chavurah* and religious school in Cincinnati. As they continued to discuss what was needed to start a group, Barr and Dr. and Mrs. Sacks decided that the first order of business was to find like-minded individuals.[13]

Dr. and Mrs. Sacks began talking with their friends and colleagues, hoping to engage intellectually interested individuals with whom they could discuss Jewish theology. Mrs. Sacks approached Rennie Greenfield first. Mrs. Sacks and Mrs. Greenfield met originally as parent chaperones on their children's school fieldtrip.[14] During the fieldtrip, they began to discuss their similar beliefs regarding Judaism and God. At the end of the field trip, Mrs. Sacks gave Mrs. Greenfield her own copy of *Humanistic Judaism*, the SHJ's journal. Later, after Mrs. Greenfield had some time to peruse the journal, she and Mrs. Sacks spoke about forming a group of individuals to discuss Humanistic Judaism at an exercise class at a local YMCA. Soon after this conversation, Mrs. Greenfield and her husband David agreed to be a part of the discussion group.[15]

Like the Sackses, the Greenfields previously belonged to a Reform synagogue in Cincinnati, although they attended Temple Sholom, not Rockdale.[16] Mr. and Mrs. Greenfield were born to Jewish parents, but neither felt particularly comfortable with organized religion. Dr. Greenfield explained to this author that he and his wife had never actually intended to join a synagogue. However, when their oldest daughter came home

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Rennie Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[15] Ibid.
[16] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

from school upset because their family did not belong to a synagogue, the Greenfields joined Temple Sholom because they believed it had the best religious school in Cincinnati. Throughout their time as members of Temple Sholom, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Greenfield had identified with the congregation's prayers or the theology. By the time Mrs. Greenfield and Mrs. Sacks discussed Humanistic Judaism, the Greenfield's were desperate for a change.[17]

Around the same time Mrs. Sacks was talking to Mrs. Greenfield, Dr. Sacks met with Dr. Arden Wander, one of his colleagues in the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Cincinnati.[18] Dr. Wander had just completed a fellowship in New Orleans and moved back to his hometown of Cincinnati.[19] Upon their return to Ohio, Wander and his family had decided that they were not interested in rejoining the Wise Center or any of Cincinnati's other Reform synagogues; they welcomed the opportunity to discuss their theological beliefs and interests.[20]

Dr. Wander and his wife at the time, Marilyn Wander, had both grown up Jewish in Cincinnati. As a child, Dr. Wander belonged to both Rockdale Temple and an orthodox *shul* in Avondale, and Mrs. Wander had attended Wise Center.[21] After getting married, the Wanders joined Wise and became close friends with Rabbi Albert Goldman, then the co-senior rabbi with Rabbi Wohl.[22] When the Wanders returned to the city after their time in New Orleans, they found that Wise Center had dismissed Rabbi Goldman, and they decided not to rejoin the congregation. Thus, the Wanders were in a prime

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[19] Arden Wander, interview with this author, November 13, 2006.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid. Dr. Wander did not specify to which Orthodox Shul his parents belonged in Avondale.
[22] http://www.wisetemple.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page_id=233ABFB2-5004-D739-A52395A6F8605FA2

position to explore the formation of a new Jewish *chavurah*.[23] And so the founding core of individuals was formed: the Sacks family, the Wander family, the Greenfield family, and the student rabbi, Robert Barr, and his wife, Terri.

These founding members had somewhat similar profiles. There were all Jewish, either by birth or by choice, and all had a high level of education and intellectual curiosity. All of the founding members, excluding Robert and Terri Barr, had young children, and in many respects, it was the desire to teach their own children through a Humanistic lens that propelled the formation of the adult discussion group. They believed that in order to teach, they had to learn.[24]

The *chavurah* began by holding "evenings with the rabbi" in members' homes.[25] Led by Barr, then a third-year rabbinical student, the evenings consisted of discussions about Jewish theology, philosophy, Humanistic Judaism, and relevant current events. The small group soon began inviting friends and colleagues to participate in the discussions, and slowly, the *chavurah* grew in size. The *chavurah*'s first religious service was held at the Sacks home to celebrate Purim in March 1980. The member families came together with their children and Barr and his wife for a Humanistic Purim service, written by Rabbi Wine for the Birmingham Temple and led by Barr for the *chavurah*. The group sat, listened to Barr tell a story, and later ate and discussed theology and philosophy.[26] Dr. Greenfield explained to this author that the event was the first time he had felt empowered by his Judaism and comfortable within a Jewish social structure. Moreover,

[23] Arden Wander, interview with the author, November 13, 2006.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[26] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

he and the other families agreed that they wanted their children to learn about their Judaism in this smaller, Humanistic environment.[27]

All of the founding and early members explained to this author that there was an immediate sense of community and friendship within the *chavurah*. Additionally, all of the members remember being drawn in by Barr's eloquence and clarity, impressed with the way he "spoke openly and convincingly."[28] Dr. Greenfield reiterated Barr's astounding influence, explaining that he "had his ideas and thoughts so clearly organized that the decision to become a Humanistic Judaism was clear."[29] It was readily apparent that his training, both at HUC-JIR and in study with Wine, had taught Barr to speak fluidly about Jewish philosophy and Humanistic conceptions of God.[30]

In late spring and early summer 1980, Barr and the founding families began discussing what they wanted to achieve as a group, and possibly as a synagogue. One of the first things they agreed upon was the potential synagogue's name. According to Mrs. Sacks, the name "Beth Adam" had originally been used by a disbanded Humanistic *chavurah* in Toronto. Barr liked the name and encouraged the founding Cincinnati members to adopt it.[31]

After a picnic in July 1980, the three founding couples sat down to discuss in earnest the prospect of actually creating a Humanistic congregation. They established that they identified with Humanistic philosophy, appreciated the services and celebrations, cherished the theological consistency, and wanted their children to be raised within the

[27] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[28] Robert Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[29] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[30] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[31] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.

community and social structure they were creating.[32] The families were also seeking an alternative—that did not necessarily involve becoming unaffiliated Jews—to other established streams of Judaism in Cincinnati. Above all, however, the original group realized that if they wanted to build a Humanistic synagogue, they would need a rabbi like Barr. With a year before Barr's ordination, they had to act fast and decisively in order to build the synagogue and recruit enough members to help pay for Barr's salary.

**The Genesis of Beth Adam: How Six Became Thirty**

Beth Adam incorporated in summer 1980. Kenneth B. Baylen, one of the original members and the attorney for the congregation, wrote the congregation's original corporate by-laws and Articles of Incorporation, which named Dr. Greenfield, Dr. Sacks, and Dr. Wander as the three trustees until the first annual meeting was to be called to elect more.[33] The Articles of Incorporation also listed the Sacks residence as the principle office for Beth Adam. Beth Adam's original corporate by-laws deem Dr. Sacks Beth Adam's first president, Dr. Greenfield its vice president, Mrs. Sacks its secretary, and Mrs. Greenfield its treasurer. Dr. Wander, Mrs. Wander, and Kenneth Baylen rounded out the rest of the fledgling congregation's board of trustees.[34]

A careful reading of the congregation's by-laws reveals interesting characteristics and values of the founding members. The congregants concretely proclaimed that the purpose of Beth Adam was to

> affirm the values, ideals, and philosophy of Humanistic Judaism. It shall provide education and services for all members and their children, in accordance with our religious values. In pursuit of one's religious values and ideals, individuals are

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Beth Adam, Articles of Incorporation, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

[34] Beth Adam, Articles of Incorporation, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

> encouraged to employ free and critical inquiry; a belief in the ability to control and be responsible for one's own destiny; and, to apply the valid insights of our Jewish and Humanistic traditions to the solution of personal and social problem. In all things, it shall affirm the unique value of each individual member and sincerely work to fulfill the member's profound religious aspirations.[35]

It is clear that the Humanistic approach of individual choice was valued, as congregants were encouraged to inquire and question. Interestingly, the congregation neither fully rejected nor accepted God. The congregation's members encouraged each other to pursue the path of learning. They wanted the adult congregants to take Jewish learning seriously and to make a commitment to educate themselves while their children were learning in Sunday school. The congregants also forwarded the concept that humans, not a supernatural force, are responsible for their own decisions.[36]

From the congregation's inception, its membership was based on individual membership units. This shows that even at the congregation's earliest stage, it made a point of accepting non-traditional families, single parents, and members of Cincinnati's homosexual community. Thus, a family of two parents and two children counted as two distinct members (accounting for the two adults.)

The congregation's original by-laws also state that the president of the congregation may not spend more than $200 USD without the consent of the Temple's board.[37] Even by 1980's standards, $200 was hardly an excessive amount of money, and this rule suggests that that the congregation had little money. Thus, all of its expenditures

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[35] Ibid., 2.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Beth Adam, Articles of Incorporation, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

were thought through carefully before the money was actually spent.[38] For the first eight months to a year, the six founding members bore the expense of running and paying for all of the congregation's needs.[39]

Article XXII reveals one of the most important values demonstrated by the congregation's by-laws. This section of the document dictates that, as a congregation, Beth Adam could never join any religious, political, or social organizations. This policy specifically states that while individuals are freely allowed to become members of any organization, no member could represent the congregation, in any form, to a larger organization. Furthermore, this meant that the congregation as a whole could not become a member of a congregational union.[40] It is important to understand that at the time, the SHJ based its structure on the libertarian views of Rabbi Friedman; it was a society composed of individual, not congregational, memberships.[41] The SHJ, then, was not a congregational union at the time of Beth Adam's founding. Thus, Beth Adam's Article XXII was in line with the SHJ's policies and espoused the Humanistic value that the congregation would not tell individuals what to believe.

Between July and September 1980, the congregation held a few "evenings with the rabbi" and information sessions about Humanistic Judaism. The new congregation's leadership also met to discuss administrative issues, such as where to hold the first services and how to form committees. The leadership began to compile the liturgy,

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[38] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[39] Beth Adam, Articles of Incorporation, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.
[40] Beth Adam, Corporate By-Laws, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[41] Daniel Friedman, interview with this author, June 12, 2006.

advertise, and recruit new members for the High Holy Days.[42] Both Dr. Sacks and Dr. Greenfield recall sending a letter to the rabbis and leadership of Cincinnati congregations declaring Beth Adam's existence and explaining that they foresaw the congregation's growth coming from the ranks of unaffiliated rather than affiliated Jews.[43] Indeed, Beth Adam's publicity and advertising fell in line with the letter that its leaders sent to the Cincinnati Rabbis and congregational leadership.

On Saturday, August 23, 1980, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published an article by Tony Lang titled "Humanistic Jews Don't Believe in Platitudes." In the article, Lang described Humanistic Judaism as entirely different from Reform Judaism and explained that the Humanistic stream of Judaism had been founded by Rabbi Wine. The article also said that in "September, a group of Humanistic Jews in Cincinnati will meet for the first time to celebrate the High Holy Days."[44] Similarly, in an article written by Beth Adam members that appeared in the *American Israelite*, William Mirbach, Beth Adam's first membership chair, explained, "We consider Humanistic Judaism to be a fourth alterntive [sic] within the faith. . .However, we base our religion on people, not God; on character development, not worshop [sic]; on aesthetics, not ritual."[45] Finally, Beth Adam advertised its Rosh Hashanah services in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, marketing itself as "The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism." Its leadership promoted the congregation as "a fourth alternative to existing Orthodoxy, Conservative, and Reform,"

[42] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[43] Ibid.; and David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[44] Tony Lang, "Humanistic Jews Don't Believe in Platitudes" *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 23, 1980.
[45] "Membership Chair Appointed," *American Israelite*, September 4, 1980.

evidently attempting to position itself as a different stream of Judaism and an alternative option for unaffiliated Jews.[46]

Beth Adam's message worked. Interest amongst both the loosely affiliated and unaffiliated Jewish population rose in anticipation of Beth Adam's first official service. Members of the board continued to talk to everyone they knew in the attempt to expand the original core group into a full-fledged congregation. The success of their early recruitment work was evident when Dr. and Mrs. Smith expressed interest in attending the synagogue just before the 1980 High Holy Days. Born in Dublin, Ireland and Liverpool, England, respectively, Robert and Myfanwy had both been raised in strong Jewish environments. Mrs. Smith grew up in Jerusalem, where her family moved after her birth, and the Smiths married in an orthodox synagogue.[47] Yet, Dr. Smith explained to this author that they never "found that their religion meant much to them in everyday life." In England, the Smiths had joined the Liberal movement (England's version of the Reform movement). Similarly, when they moved to the United States, first to Chapel Hill, North Carolina and later to Cincinnati, Ohio, they joined Reform synagogues.[48]

In 1979 the Smiths unaffiliated with Temple Sholom, the Reform congregation they had joined in Cincinnati. Relatively soon after, while sitting in a meeting with Dr. Sacks at the University of Cincinnati, Dr. Smith turned to Dr. Sacks and asked if he had been doing anything interesting lately. Dr. Smith remembers that Dr. Sacks pulled a Beth Adam informational brochure and application from his coat pocket.[49] Intrigued, he brought the information home to Mrs. Smith. They agreed to go to a "meet the rabbi"

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[46] Advertisement for Beth Adam, *Cincinnati Enquirer and Cincinnati Post*, September 6, 1980.
[47] Robert Smith and Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[48] Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[49] Ibid.

opportunity, where they met Barr for the first time. The Smiths explained to this author that they were originally worried about belonging to a synagogue that did not say the *Shema* or the Mourners *Kaddish*. Their anxieties, however, were quickly quelled after engaging in conversations with Barr and participating in Beth Adam's High Holy Day services. Mrs. Smith felt that for the first time in her life, the words and Humanistic expressions at Beth Adam offered her the opportunity to participate in services with sincerity and honesty.[50]

Barr, at the time, was serving as a rabbinical intern for the SHJ, traveling, teaching, and leading services for Humanistic groups in Washington, D.C., Boston, Toronto, Detroit, and Chicago.[51] Barr's work for Beth Adam came under the auspices of his work for the SHJ; Beth Adam thus found itself sharing Barr with other SHJ congregations and groups around the country. This reality was immediately apparent when the SHJ committed Barr to lead Rosh Hashanah day services and Yom Kippur services for a fledgling Humanistic group in Washington, D.C. Barr ended up leading Erev Rosh Hashanah services (evening services) in Cincinnati for Beth Adam and then flew to Washington, D.C. with his wife at 4:30 the next morning to lead services for the Washington, D.C. group.[52]

Beth Adam held its first official services at 8:15 p.m. at the Northern Hills Fellowship Unitarian Universalist Church on 460 Fleming Road in Wyoming, Ohio on September 10, 1980.[53] Barr had compiled the High Holy Day services using Humanistic services written by Rabbis Wine and Friedman, and he worked to help prepare Dr. Sacks

[50] Ibid.
[51] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[52] Interviews with Robert Barr, May 4, 2006 and confirmed by David Greenfield, Myfanwy Smith, and Joel Sacks.
[53] Tony Lang, "Humanistic Jews Don't Believe in Platitudes," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 23, 1980.

to lead the Yom Kippur services while Barr was in Washington, D.C.[54] Mrs. Smith read Torah for the congregation, Dr. Wander sounded the Shofar, and to the surprise of Beth Adam's leaders, the congregation filled up with interested individuals who had come to learn about Humanistic Judaism and to attend admission-free High Holy Day services. The leaders of the congregation took advantage of the full house to advertise Beth Adam's newly forming religious school that offered educational opportunities for children and adults simultaneously.[55] By the end of the High Holy Days, an additional 24 individuals had joined Beth Adam.[56]

**Building a Synagogue, Hiring a Rabbi, and Creating Tradition**

In October, the congregation was reaching full swing with the publication of a new membership recruitment brochure and the launching of the Beth Adam religious school. On October 5, 1980 the religious school commenced with a class in the Sacks family living room. Mrs. Sacks recalled that Barr arrived with two suitcases filled with Bibles, which he passed out to those in attendance. The children and the adults began learning together, tackling, that first night, the Bible's different creation stories by comparing both the different translations of the Bible and the different accounts of the creation myth.

The congregation's leadership determined that the religious school would meet two Sundays per month and that volunteer parents would teach the children. Barr would teach adult education at the same time. Beth Adam's leadership wanted to create an environment where parents were actively involved in the educational process.[57] The

[54] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[55] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[56] Greenfield, David. "What makes Beth Adam Grow?" *Humanistic Judaism: A Journal for the Fourth Alternative 12* (1984): 29-31.
[57] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.

religious school focused on teaching Jewish holidays and symbols, Torah, and the history of Israel. Older children also learned about Jewish life cycles, decision-making, and the modern State of Israel.[58]

Beth Adam's first promotional brochure echoed the congregation's commitments to individualism, education, religious services and community involvement:

> Beth Adam currently conducts Friday Night services on a rotating basis, as well as celebrating the Jewish holiday calendar. Some of our services are designed with the special needs of children in mind. . . [The congregation's religious school] curriculum is designed to help students develop a realistic and wholesome Jewish identity. They are also taught the tools to explore their past and the skills to create its future. This is done by investigating with them the full range of Jewish history, customs and rituals, coupled with an in-depth study of Humanistic Jewish ethics and values. . . The congregation [also] provides a wide range of educational and learning experiences for its adult members. Some of these programs are intended to teach an understanding of the Jewish experience in the humanistic context. Other activities are planned to help the individual come to better understand her/his own Humanistic Jewish philosophy. Other programs offered by the congregation include regular study groups, evening with the rabbi and guest speakers. . .Because of the variety of life styles recognized by Humanistic Judaism membership in Beth Adam is based on the individual adult.[59]

Barr recalled to this author that the business of the congregation began to move more quickly after the High Holy Days. As the promotional brochure indicates, the original *chavurah* successfully transformed itself into a congregation that offered educational opportunities and services every other week.[60] By mid October 1980, Beth Adam also published its first newsletter, which advertised the largest "meet the rabbi" experience to date: Rabbi Wine and Rabbi Friedman, the co-founders of the SHJ, were coming to Cincinnati to "discuss and answer questions on the meaning, philosophy, and challenges

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Beth Adam, Promotional Brochure, 1980, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 4, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[60] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

of Humanistic Judaism."[61] Held on Tuesday, November 11, 1980 at the Carousel Inn off of Reading Road, the "meet the rabbi" drew over 60 people.[62]

Both the Sackses and the Greenfields recalled that the event with Rabbi Wine and Rabbi Friedman also brought some hecklers who charged that Beth Adam was equivalent to Jews for Jesus.[63] Most outside perceptions of the congregation, however, were difficult to gauge. According to the founders, Beth Adam did not receive an open lack of regard. Rather, Dr. Greenfield believes that Beth Adam was received more warmly because many of the Cincinnati rabbis had already known about the Birmingham Temple in Detroit, Michigan and Beth Or in Deerfield, Illinois.[64] Mrs. Smith added that it also did not hurt that Barr always presented himself professionally and was immaculately dressed. She added that Barr had explained to the early members of Beth Adam that "if you want to do something radical, you need to look conservative."[65] Dr. Greenfield commented, "Beth Adam's members tried hard to never say that anyone who went to another congregation was doing something stupid. We believed that if someone liked something else, it was okay."[66] He reiterated this point in an article he wrote for the *Humanistic Judaism* journal in 1984 titled "What Makes Beth Adam Grow." In the article, Dr. Greenfield explained that

> the most important factor in our acceptance, however, has been the early and persistent decision of our Board of Trustees to present the humanist alternative to the Cincinnati community only in a positive light. At no time have we criticized any other organized group or belief system. We have taken every opportunity to espouse the benefits of a

[61] Sacks, Cynthia, Beth Adam newsletter, October 1980, vol. 1, no. 1, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2 folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[62] Sacks, Cynthia, Beth Adam newsletter, January 1981, vol. 1, no. 2, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[63] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 28, 2006.
[64] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[65] Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[66] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

> rational approach to Judaism. . . But we never presumed that our approach was superior to another or that it was stated to the needs of all Jews. If there are inconsistencies in other forms of Jewish expression, then our efforts at consistency will shine to show our emotional needs. It is not necessary for us to be directly critical of those who have a legitimate need of a more traditional form of Judaism. This non-aggressive attitude has permitted the corporative efforts that have helped our growth and visibility.[67]

This quotation illustrates the crucial fact that Beth Adam's approach was entirely different from Rabbi Wine's antagonistic stance towards the other streams of Judaism in Detroit. Indeed, while many Jews in Cincinnati did not understand Beth Adam's humanistic approach, they did not feel threatened by Beth Adam either.[68]

Quickly outgrowing congregants' homes, the congregation started holding services in various rented locations, including the Unitarian Church where the High Holy Days were held, and the Williamsburg Inn, off of Galbraith Road. Reflecting on these significant changes at Beth Adam, Dr. Sacks expressed confidence and excitement in his February bulletin article. He wrote, "Our religious school is active, our calendar of events is full, and our membership has grown beyond our wildest expectations."[69]

In that same bulletin, Beth Adam advertised its first annual Passover Seder (which was held on April 19, 1981) and the newly developed congregational purpose, which stated that Beth Adam existed to

> ...affirm the values, ideals, and philosophy of Humanistic Judaism. It shall provide education and services for all members and their children, in accordance with our religious values. In pursuit of one's religious values and ideals, individuals are encouraged to employ free and critical inquiry; a belief in the ability to control and be responsible for one's own destiny; and to apply the valid insights of our Jewish and Humanistic traditions to the solution of personal and social problems. In all things, it shall affirm the unique value of each individual member and sincerely work to fulfill the member's profound religious aspirations.

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[67] Greenfield, David. "What makes Beth Adam Grow?" *Humanistic Judaism: A Journal for the Fourth Alternative 12* (1984): 29-31.

[68] Mark Goldman, interview with the author, November 1, 2006.

[69] Sacks, Joel, Beth Adam newsletter, February 1981, vol. 1, no. 2, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2 folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

As previously mentioned, all of Beth Adam's founding members explained to this author that the impetus to form a congregation was the desire to retain Barr as its rabbi after his ordination.[70] Early on, the leadership had realized that the only way for Beth Adam to achieve this goal was to hire Barr as the congregation's professional rabbinical leadership or to engage another rabbinical student after Barr's ordination.[71] By this point, Barr's ordination was quickly approaching, and Beth Adam was not the only congregation interested securing his leadership—Barr was also being wooed to become the rabbi of the small group he had worked for as a rabbinical intern for the SHJ in Washington, D.C.[72] Those two congregations, however, offered the only opportunities for Barr to work as a Humanistic rabbi; otherwise, he could have entered the placement process and been hired by a Reform synagogue.

After Beth Adam's first annual general membership meeting on Tuesday, March 31, 1981, the congregation's leaders, particularly Dr. Wander, Dr. Greenfield, and Dr. Sacks, took steps to hire Barr as the congregation's rabbi.[73] The three founding families agreed to pay Barr's rabbinical salary.[74] As Dr. Sacks explained to the congregation in his article in the May bulletin, "Despite an increase in dues, there will be a significant deficit which will need to be made up by the contributions and fund raising events. Three

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[70] Joel Sacks and Cynthia Sacks interview with the author, October 29, 2006; David Greenfield and Rennie Greenfield interview with the author, Novembe 2, 2006 ; and Arden Wander interview with the author November 13, 2006.
[71] Sacks, Joel, Beth Adam newsletter, May 1981, vol. 1, no. 4, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[72] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[73] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[74] Ibid.

members have already pledged to cover up to five thousand dollars of that deficit in addition to their dues."[75]

Even with the additional pledge of money, Barr's salary and benefits package only totaled $10,000. This was already $20,000 less than the base salary of Barr's classmates, and almost $35,000–$45,000 less than his fellow classmates' packages.[76] As Dr. and Mrs. Sacks explained to this author, "If Terri Barr hadn't had health insurance, we couldn't have employed [Barr]."[77] It was a bold move by a young rabbi and a young congregation that, especially in retrospect, seems incredibly daring. But, as Barr emphasized to this author, "I liked [Beth Adam], wanted to pursue it, was comfortable with it, and believed in it."[78] For Barr, going to Washington, D.C. was even more daring than taking the job at Beth Adam. The Washington group was equally small and he and his wife had no family in the area, whereas Terri Barr's family was in Cincinnati. Plus, Barr couldn't imagine working for a Reform synagogue.[79] From Dr. Sack's perspective, the founding members were "crapping in our pants, because we didn't know how we were going to do it (pay the rabbi's salary). We were young families with children and mortgages. We had to get more members, otherwise we couldn't secure Bob."[80]

On June 6, 1981 Barr was ordained by HUC-JIR. Beth Adam's members sat in a reserved pew at the Plum Street Temple, the location of HUC-JIR's ordination service, in

[75] Sacks, Joel, Beth Adam newsletter, May 1981, vol. 1, no. 4, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[76] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[77] Joel Sacks and Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[78] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Joel Sacks and Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.

downtown Cincinnati.[81] The celebration was short-lived; only five days later, Barr was leading another "evening with the rabbi."[82] The congregation held informal services throughout the summer; began preparing for the second year of religious school, which was set to have 34 students participating; and looked forward to officially installing Barr in early September.

On September 12, 1981, Rabbi Mihaly, the executive dean of HUC-JIR at the time, installed Barr as the rabbi of Beth Adam.[83] Rabbi Wine of the Birmingham Temple sent a letter of congratulations to both Barr and the Beth Adam leadership. In the letter, Wine complimented Barr, his former student and employee, and accurately summarized the task that Beth Adam's leadership, under the tutelage of Barr, was excited to take on. Wine wrote, "You have an important task—to make the alternative of Humanistic Judaism available to the Jewish community of Cincinnati. . .You are setting out on a bold adventure."[84] Beth Adam had indeed set out on a bold adventure. In just over one year, a fledgling *chavurah* had incorporated, built a religious school, held adult education courses, compiled and led services, installed a board, recruited new members, and hired a rabbi. Beth Adam had laid the foundation for a promising future.

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[81] Masking tape with Beth Adam name written on it, Manuscript Collection 696, box 1, folder 4, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[82] Sacks, Joel, Beth Adam newsletter, May 1981, vol. 1, no. 4, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[83] "Dr. Mihaly to Speak at Installation," *American Israelite*, September 3, 1981.
[84] Sherwin Wine to Cynthia Sacks and Beth Adam's board, September 8, 1981.

## Chapter 3
## From Infancy to Application: The Evolution of Beth Adam

### Growth and Development within the Cincinnati Community

Beth Adam's newsletters, advertisements in local papers, and board of trustees' minutes during the first few years of the synagogue's existence reveal much about the young synagogue. As in the year of its inception, the developing congregation continued to focus on expanding its membership through a strong and viable religious school, adult education programming, and a new-to-Cincinnati approach to Jewish ritual and theology. Barr also began to reach out to Reform synagogues in the Cincinnati area, teaching sessions about Humanistic Judaism and becoming an integral member of the larger Cincinnati Jewish community.[1]

Held in rented public schools, Beth Adam's religious school comprised two classes: a six-through-nine-year-old class that focused on Torah and Israel, and a ten-through-thirteen-year-old class that focused on lifecycle events and adult decision-making.[2] In fall 1981, Barr also began a class for post B'nai Mitzvah teens.[3] According to members of Beth Adam interviewed by this author, the congregants prided themselves on having an entirely volunteer-run religious school.[4]

The school was initially directed by Mrs. Wander, the education-committee chairperson and Robert Dunbar, the volunteer principal of the religious school, and it added classes as the congregation grew and more children registered. By fall 1983, the religious school had added two more classes and restructured its curriculum. *Kitah Aleph*,

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[1] Beth Adam newsletter, August 1981, vol. 1, no. 5, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] David Greenfield and Rennie Greenfield; Robert and Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

the class for the youngest children, focused on "Jewish holidays, [Jewish] symbols through art, song ...Hebrew history, and basic philosophy and ethics."[5] In *Kitot Bet* and *Gimmel*, children learned Jewish history, holidays, and values. The students were exposed to rabbinic writings such as the *Talmud* (compilation of rabbinic teachings and laws), *midrashim* (rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Bible), and comparative Jewish liturgy during the school year immediately before their Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. Students also began to engage in discussions about the development of Humanistic philosophy in the latter years of religious school.

It is important to note here that that Beth Adam's Bar and Bat Mitzvah program taught that decision-making was an important framework for Jewish living. Humanistic Jews believe that humans, not God, change the future and the course humanity. While this belief is not unique among liberal Jewish movements, the values and decision-making curriculum is a central tenant of Beth Adam's education program. Keeping with this philosophy, Barr explained to this author that from the very beginning of the congregation, the B'nai Mitzvah curriculum focused on four questions: What does it mean to be a person? What does it mean to be a Jew? How do we make ethical decisions? And how do we make ethical Jewish decisions?[6] Distinguishing between the last two questions, Beth Adam's B'nai Mitzvah program teaches the history of ethical thinking and action that are within Jewish tradition. For example, teaching about how Jews have understood the national issues of the separation of church and state or the Jewish support

[5] Beth Adam newsletter, August 1983, vol. 3, no. 1, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[6] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.

for the civil rights movement.[7] Beth Adam also started a youth group, although its ultimate success and activity fluctuated depending on the skills and time of each youth advisor.

By the end of the 1980s, Beth Adam ran six Sunday school classes. According to a Beth Adam newsletter published by 1989, the religious school classes included

> Bible, Jewish Holidays, Jewish life cycle events, Jewish history, rituals an traditions, ethics an moral values, prejudice, Israeli history and culture, introductory Hebrew, Judaism in America, *midrashim* (Jewish Legends) and comparative religion. As a part of the curriculum at every age level, our children are exposed to Jewish music and traditions from around the world.[8]

Throughout the 1980s Barr and Beth Adam continued to stress adult learning as integral to the congregation's mission. The congregation's leadership saw the adult educational opportunities as part of a larger educational initiative to stress and model the process of life-long Jewish learning to other Jewish adults and to their children. According to Dr. Wander, a founder and a former teacher in the religious school, it was important for "our children to see us as a part of the learning process." He continued to explain that it is "one of the reasons that Beth Adam's religious school classes are taught by volunteer members of the congregation."[9] Often meeting in members' homes during the week or on Sunday mornings during the religious school, the adult education classes focused on teaching Humanistic Judaism through lectures and discussions. According to congregational newsletters, Beth Adam also invited speakers from HUC, including Drs. Mihaly and Rivkin, professors of rabbinics and Jewish history, respectively. Barr himself spoke frequently about such subjects as Jewish history; comparative religion; whether or

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Beth Adam newsletter, August 1989, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[9] Arden Wander, interview with the author, November 13, 2006.

not Judaism is a religion or a people; who qualifies as a Jew; Israel; current events; the nature of the Jewish experience; and the evolution of Jewish life, philosophy, Humanistic philosophy, and ethics after the Holocaust.[10] Beth Adam also began a Jewish book-reading club, reading *The Chosen* and *The Best of Sholom Aleichem* in summer 1982.[11] This book club met throughout the 1980s and was usually led by Terri Barr.

Beth Adam also continued to host holiday celebrations, including its annual Passover *Seder* and Purim party. Further, the congregation regularly held purely social events like progressive dinners, cocktail events, and wine tasting. As expected, as Beth Adam grew, so too did the lifecycle and pastoral care needs of the congregation; the newsletters reveal that Barr found himself tending to increasing marriages, Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations, and baby namings, as well as counseling couples who decided to divorce.[12] By the end of the 1980s, Beth Adam was operating like many synagogues its own size, with a strong religious school, a culture of adult education, social outlets for its members, and regular lifecycle events.[13]

Beth Adam's membership grew accordingly. The board's records show that by 1983 the congregation had 65 members.[14] Soon, however, the congregation's board adopted a long-range plan that determined that Beth Adam needed at least 90 members to remain viable and to continue paying the rabbi; by the end of 1983, it had reached this goal.[15] In 1985 Beth Adam rented office space in the same building as the Jewish Family Services, just off Section Road in Roselawn. The office had a boardroom that also served

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Beth Adam Newsletter, November 1983, vol. 3, no. 3., Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[15] Ibid.

as a classroom and library, a desk for the receptionist, and an office for the rabbi. By 1989, the congregation had also rented the adjoining unit and renovated it to become an 80-seat chapel.[16] When the congregation held events that required a larger space, it rented the Scheuer Chapel at the Hebrew Union College.[17]

Indeed, by the end of the 1980s, growth had become a regular aspect of Beth Adam's existence. Quoting the congregation's board members, the *American Israelite* reported that by the end of the 1980s, the congregation had 166 individual members, with 89 schoolchildren. Twenty-seven adult volunteers staffed the religious school, and the Sunday adult education program regularly pulled between 35 and 65 participants. By the mid-1980s, the congregation had hired a music director, the Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee was developing more services (see below), the social action committee was working actively, the congregation was hosting more and more social affairs, and over 250 people attended High Holy Days services.[18] With this rapid and expansive growth, both Beth Adam and Barr, as the congregation's representative, became more involved in the Cincinnati Jewish community.

Beth Adam was invited to join Cincinnati's Reform synagogues for a variety of co-sponsored events. In 1981, for example, Beth Adam participated in an evening of Baroque music at Plum Street Temple, and in 1982, co-sponsored an evening of dinner and dancing with Cincinnati's Reform synagogues.[19] In 1983, Beth Adam's role grew to a leadership position in Jewish Cincinnati, as Barr began teaching classes for the Jewish

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Dean Ken Ehrlich, interview with the author, December 7, 2006.
[18] "Cincinnati Synagogues," *American Israelite*, Thursday, June 15, 1989.
[19] Beth Adam Newsletter, November 1982, vol. 2, no. 6, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

Community Relations Council. The congregation was also invited to jointly host a service at Plum Street Temple in honor of the 100-year celebration of Glen Manor, the home for the Jewish aged.[20]

Barr continued to headline speaking engagements, lecturing, for example, about Humanistic Judaism at Valley Temple, Rockdale Temple, Isaac M. Wise Temple, and Adath Israel, and began writing *"Parshat Hashavua"* (Weekly Torah Study) for the *American Israelite*.[21] In 1987, Barr was elected president of the Cincinnati Board of Rabbis.

Not seen as a threat to existing Reform congregations, Beth Adam and Barr succeeded in creating a good working relationship with Cincinnati's other liberal-minded synagogues. In many ways, Barr and Beth Adam were even seen as a part of Cincinnati's Reform Jewish community. A letter sent to Barr on January 11, 1983 by Rabbi Alan D. Fuchs, then the senior rabbi at Isaac M. Wise Temple, exemplifies this status quo particularly well. In the letter, Fuchs asks Barr to attend a meeting of the rabbis and presidents of all of Cincinnati's "Reform congregations" in order to "share thoughts and feelings about the UAHC in relationship relation to our congregations."[22] Barr attended this meeting and later received another letter confirming the group's plan of action to foster greater contact between Cincinnati's Reform synagogues and the UAHC.[23]

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[20] Beth Adam Newsletters, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folders 1 & 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Rabbi Allan D. Fuchs to Rabbi Robert Barr, January 11, 1983, Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, OH.
[23] Robert Chaiken to Rabbi Barr and Cincinnati Rabbis, February 11, 1983, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.

**A Unifying Experience: Beth Adam's Torah Scroll**

Since the congregation's inception and into its early period of growth, Beth Adam borrowed Torah scroll for the holidays and for B'nai Mitzvah services from both Rockdale Temple and the Hebrew Union College.[24] Some of the congregants were already discussing Beth Adam's need for a Torah scroll of its own when in, October 1981, Allison Smith, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Smith, died.[25] The Smiths, two of the aforementioned earliest members of Beth Adam, were amazed at the outpouring of support from their fellow congregants; it was evident that Beth Adam had become their congregational home and part of their Cincinnati family.[26] As such, despite their great loss, the Smiths continued to take leadership roles within the congregation, volunteering for committees, serving on the board of trustees, and as did every early member in the congregation, helping with the sundry needs of the developing synagogue.

Dr. and Mrs. Smith returned to their former home country of England in summer 1982 for Mrs. Smith's niece's wedding.[27] While away, the Smiths saw their cousins who had immigrated to England from Czechoslovakia after World War II. During this visit, the Smiths told their cousins about Beth Adam and about their love for the congregation that had been such a great source of support after their daughter's death. As the cousins asked more questions about the Humanistic synagogue, Mrs. Smith explained that Beth Adam had been borrowing a Torah scroll from Rockdale Temple and HUC. The Smiths'

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[24] Robert Barr; interview with the author, May 4, 2006; and Rabbi Mark Goldman, interview with the author, November 1, 2006.
[25] Ibid.; Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Robert Smith and Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

cousins asked if they had heard about the Czechoslovakian Torah scrolls that had been brought from Prague to the Westminster synagogue in London.[28]

The Torah scrolls they mentioned referred to a collection of 1,564 scrolls that had been moved to London after sitting unused and unattended in a warehouse since the Holocaust. The warehouse was a former synagogue that the Germans, based on their assumptions of victory in the war and in the extermination of the Jews, planned to convert to a museum of Jewish artifacts. After World War II, however, the Torah scrolls lay, stacked on top of one another, in the Michle Synagogue, which had been converted into a warehouse, in a Prague suburb. Eventually Artia, Czechoslovakia's official government organization in charge of "cultural properties," took control of the Torahs and its officials approached Eric Estorick, an art dealer, to help determine what to do with the scrolls.

In 1964, after the Torah scrolls had been inspected by Chimen Abramsky, Ralph Yablon purchased them for five-million pounds. Yablon brought the scrolls en mass to the Westminster synagogue, now home to the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust, which was formed to house and repair the Torah scrolls. This trust then gave the repaired Torah scrolls to Jewish communities around the world who agreed to house and respect them.[29]

After Mrs. Smith learned about the scrolls at her niece's wedding, she got in touch with the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust. When the Smiths returned to the United States, they spoke to Barr about Beth Adam's potential interest and need to acquire a Torah scroll. According to the Smiths, Barr was positive about the idea of acquiring a Torah scroll from the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust. He encouraged the Smiths to continue

[28] "Beth Adam Acquires European Torah," *American Israelite*, July 26, 1984.
[29] Joseph C. Pick, *The Jews of Czechoslovakia; Historical Studies and Surveys* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968-83), 584-610.

corresponding with the trust. When the Smiths returned to England for a vacation soon afterward, they set up an interview with the people in charge of the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust.

Mrs. Smith arrived in England before her husband and called the woman with whom she had been in contact at the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust. According to Mrs. Smith, the woman told her, "I don't know you from a bar of soap, and you cannot have one of these Torahs."[30] Mrs. Smith was devastated and called her husband to tell him the bad news. When Robert arrived in England, the two went straight to the Westminster synagogue from the airport. Still, at office of the trust, the woman in charge of the program was, according to the Smiths, extremely cold. She explained that there was a six-week waiting period to get a permit to take one of the Torah scrolls out of the country. Considered an antiquity and a religious artifact, a Torah scroll could not be released to the Smiths. Further, the woman explained, the trust's scribe, who made the recommendations about which Torah scroll could be released and given to applicant Jewish communities, was on vacation.

As she sat, deflated and let down, in the woman's office, Mrs. Smith spotted a magazine on the woman's desk—it was *Humanistic Judaism*, the SHJ journal. Seizing on this possible common ground, Mrs. Smith quickly explained that she and Dr. Smith were representatives from a newly formed Humanistic synagogue in Cincinnati, Ohio. This mention of Humanistic Judaism ignited a spark in the woman, who immediately warmed up to the Smiths. In the course of the subsequent discussion, Mrs. Smith and the woman realized that their parents had been good friends in Jerusalem. After a half-an-hour-long and significantly friendlier conversation about their fathers and common interests, the

[30] Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

woman invited the Smiths to follow her into an adjacent room where five Torah scrolls lay a table. After allowing the Smiths to look at the scrolls, the woman offered to let them take a Torah back to Cincinnati.

Shocked, the Smiths inspected the scrolls. They explained to this author that the bigger Torah scrolls had labels attached to them that explained where the Torah scroll had come from in Czechoslovakia; the Torah scroll that they liked the most, however, and that they ultimately chose for Beth Adam, had a label that said simply, "unknown." The Smiths sat down for a cup of tea as the woman typed up their permit, and together the trio wrapped the Torah in brown paper and tied it with a string for its journey back to the United States.

When they returned to Cincinnati, the Smiths housed the Torah on a bed in their spare bedroom. Robert explained that the Torah scroll was moldy and smelled of mildew, so starting in Genesis, the Smiths opened the Torah, page by page, little by little, until the entire scroll dried out. Barr remembered going over to the Smiths' house to see the Torah scroll and recalled his own excitement about the significance of and opportunities that accompanied the Torah: Beth Adam would no longer have to borrow from other synagogues; Beth Adam had in its possession one of the central and most important Jewish symbols; and Beth Adam's existence was now forever tied to the memory of the Czechoslovakian Jews who died in the Holocaust.[31] Indeed, the acquisition of the Torah scroll was no small matter. Mr. Greenfield, then the president of Beth Adam, said, "Getting the Torah scroll became a central and coalescing event for the synagogue. . . it

[31] Robert Barr, interview with the author, October 10, 2006.

was an amazing experience that brought people together and gave the congregation cohesiveness and, I don't want to say it, legitimacy."[32]

It is important to note that the Torah scroll, while an extremely important facet of the synagogue, is also not the central facet of Beth Adam's religious services. At Beth Adam, the Torah is read on primary Jewish holidays and at B'nai Mitzvah celebrations.[33] Even in the Torah text, where God is a central idea, Barr and Beth Adam's members understand the Torah as a product of humans and of its own time. In essence, Beth Adam's members are a part of the evolutionary process of Judaism, for which the Torah and the Hebrew Bible is one of the major founding texts. Beth Adam does not follow a Torah reading cycle. Rather, Barr (or the B'nai Mitzvah students) usually chooses which biblical readings are important to him, often based on the message or the issues he is trying to confront in his sermons.[34]

After the Torah scroll was back in the United States, the members of Beth Adam soon realized that the Torah scroll needed a mantle (Torah covering) and a wimple (sash or belt to hold the two scrolls together).[35] Joanne Hemmer, the chairman of Beth Adam's Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee, drew up several contemporary and traditional designs. The committee, however, could not decide on any one design and decided instead to use four different designs based on the four seasons, and incorporating *Etz Chaim*, the tree of life, and the Hebrew word, "*adam*," meaning "man" or "humanity."[36] Together, several members of the congregation sewed, cut, embroidered, and put together the design

[32] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[33] Robert Barr, interview with the author, October 10, 2006.
[34] Ibid.
[35] In traditional Jewish communities the Torah mantle and wimple (sash) are modeled after the priestly vestments discussed in Exodus, Chapter 28.
[36] "Beth Adam Makes Special Torah Mantles," *American Israelite*, August 23, 1984.

elements on the four mantles. As Mr. Greenfield recalled, the entire congregation united around the Torah scroll—children learned about the scrolls and the Holocaust, teenagers and adults volunteered to help sew, and others helped plan the Oneg, the dessert party after the dedication ceremony. The Torah scroll, the central symbol of the Jewish experience, also became a central unifying symbol for Beth Adam.

In a congregation founded using the Humanistic philosophy of volunteering and whose members volunteered for every aspect of congregational life, it was hardly surprising that the Torah scroll engendered so much communal activity. Mr. Greenfield explained that the surge of enthusiasm around the Torah scroll was, in fact, representative of Beth Adam's membership philosophy. "It wasn't just a matter of volunteering," Greenfield said, "it was a matter of our Beth Adam philosophy . . . if you wanted the congregation to happen, you had to make it happen." He continued:

> Beth Adam wasn't the type of congregation where if you wanted your kids in religious school, you just dropped your kids off—which is what we had in the Reform synagogues that we first belonged to. In this congregation, if you didn't want to take part in social action and you didn't want to take part in education yourself, and you didn't want to take part in the social activities, or you didn't want to take part in making this congregation viable, then you shouldn't join. The experience of the Torah scroll was emblematic of the participation philosophy of our congregation. And it was the Torah scroll that helped the philosophy coalesce with the actions of our members.[37]

The "all hands on deck" approach is not unique to Beth Adam. Many young congregations and *chavurot* emphasize participation. Yet, within the Cincinnati Jewish environment, particularly among well-established Reform synagogues, the experience of *everyone* in the congregation participating and volunteering was indeed unique.

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[37] David Greenfield, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.

On Friday evening September 14, 1984, Beth Adam held a dedication service for the Torah Scroll at St. John's Unitarian Church.[38] The Smiths donated the Torah in the memory of their daughter, Alison. Over 250 attendees witnessed and participated as the scroll's dedication created a bridge between the memory of the Jews who died in the Holocaust and the Jews who would survive into the future and read the Torah's words.[39] The congregational unification—with itself and with the Jewish people—was both evident and poignant.

**The Development of Beth Adam's Liturgy**

As Beth Adam grew and developed, so too did their rituals and religious services. Beth Adam created a liturgy that was very much its own, corresponding directly to the Humanistic philosophy. Ultimately, however, as will be discussed in the next chapter, it was precisely this non-theistic liturgy that was the primary hindrance to Beth Adam's application to the UAHC. As such, it is important to address the basic components and development of this new and congregationally personalized liturgy—particularly that of the Shabbat Evening service, the most frequently used Beth Adam prayer service. Understanding Beth Adam's liturgical choices will help clarify the importance of Jewish rituals for Beth Adam's members.

During the first few years of Beth Adam's existence, its members compiled a few Shabbat evening and holiday services utilizing the services already written by Rabbi Friedman and Rabbi Wine.[40] Not only had Barr worked for Rabbi Wine and the SHJ and was thus familiar with the variety of Humanistic liturgy written by the movement's

[38] "Jews' Sacred Torah Has a Home," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 9, 1984.
[39] Myfanwy Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006; "Beth Adam Acquires European Torah," *American Israelite*, July 26, 1984; and "Beth Adam Holds Dedication Ceremony," *American Israelite*, September 27, 1984.
[40] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

founders, but Dr. and Mrs. Sacks, the two founding members of Beth Adam, had also previously been members of Rabbi Friedman's Chicago congregation where new liturgy was used.[41] As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Rabbi Wine had written the Humanistic Jewish Celebrations prayer book as a way of responding to the simultaneous desire to preserve ritual while also accurately reflecting Humanism's religious philosophy.[42] Rabbi Wine maintained that Humanistic Judaism should not entirely throw out Jewish ritual because "the need to celebrate is a human need which would continue to exist even if all memory of traditional religion vanished."[43] Rabbi Wine's liturgy gives structure to this ritual in a way that encourages Humanistic Jews to celebrate the Humanistic values. Consequently, Rabbi Wine wrote "creative" services, which he specifically titled *Celebrations*, with the following themes: "ambition, autonomy, believing, community, courage, desire, dignity . . . equality, ethics, family, freedom, friendship, happiness, honesty, hope . . . humor. . ."[44]

With the exception of a mourner's prayer (a creative *Kaddish Yatom* with no Hebrew), Rabbi Wine's *Celebrations* do not follow the rubrics of traditional Jewish prayer, with the Opening Blessings, *Shema*, *Amidah*, and Concluding Blessings recited in order. His services do contain some Hebrew songs (*Mah Tovu*, for example) and poetry. The majority of his services, however, were written in English prose. Rabbi Wine regularly broke up the themes of each of the services into smaller sub-themes, often with Hebrew songs serving as breaks between the sub-themes.

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[41] Ibid.; see chapter 2, Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[42] Sherwin Wine, *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 188. 12-13.
[43] Ibid., 12.
[44] Ibid., 5.

Both a liturgical expert and the critical reader could conclude that Rabbi Wine's writings are simplistic and, at times, dismissive. In a service about feminism, for example, his liturgy reads, "some people have responded to the silliness of the past with an equal silliness."[45] Or, he wrote sarcastically, "Denying reality is a waste of time. Denying facts is a useless exercise. In the end we must come to terms with what we cannot easily change."[46] Similarly, in a service about the value of freedom, he wrote, "Gods and dictators may indeed be overwhelming. They may be pushy and oppressive. But they love to take responsibility."[47]

In interviews with this author, the founders of Beth Adam explained that they were neither impressed nor satisfied with Rabbi Wine's liturgy. They were equally unimpressed with the creative services that Rabbi Friedman wrote for his congregation. From the moment that Beth Adam was conceived, therefore, members on its Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee strove to compile their own liturgy, taking from the limited collection of Humanistic sources.[48] During the synagogue's first few years, the Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee focused on compiling High Holy Day services using Rabbi Friedman's and Rabbi Wine's High Holy Day services, developing new High Holy Day music with the assistance of Bonia Shur, then the director of liturgical arts at the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College, and compiling Shabbat services with similar Humanistic themes.[49] Later, the Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee put together a pamphlet concerning death and bereavement. According to Harriet Edwards, a past

[45] Ibid., 68-71.
[46] Ibid., 70.
[47] Ibid., 73.
[48] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[49] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006; and Beth Adam's newsletters, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

president and the chair of the congregation's Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee, the pamphlet was primarily a list of names and phone numbers for congregants to have on hand in the event of a death of a loved one.[50] It was when Edwards joined and ultimately took over the leadership of the Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee that Beth Adam truly began the process of developing its own liturgy.

Harriet Edwards was born and raised a Reform Jew in Oakland, California. Growing up, she spent her summers at the Reform movement's Camp Swig in Saratoga, California. Edwards explained to this author that she "was always involved in Reform Judaism through the camping movement. It was there that I learned to love writing creative services."[51] Edwards also met her first husband, Solomon Greenberg, at Swig. At the time, Solomon was a rabbinical student at HUC's Los Angeles campus, though he later finished his rabbinical studies at HUC's Cincinnati campus and was hired as an assistant rabbi at K.K. Bene Israel, familiarly known as Wise Temple. Greenberg spent two years at Wise Temple and then moved to the Valley Temple, also in Cincinnati; soon after Greenberg moved to Valley Temple, the couple divorced.[52]

A few years later, she met Charlie Edwards. The two were married by the assistant rabbi of Rockdale Temple, where she worshipped after her divorce.[53] Edwards explained that after joining Rockdale and no longer being the rabbi's wife, she finally started to pay attention to the language of the prayers. According to Edwards, she could not stomach the liturgy and the theology of the Reform prayer book. "As an English teacher, I tried to read the words as metaphor . . . words and the honesty of my words are

[50] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[51] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

very important to me. So, I just got through the service by listening to the music and tuning out."[54] After two years at Rockdale Temple, Edwards decided that she could no longer sit through services with a liturgy that she felt was not representative of her own theology. She began looking for a change.

Edwards found Beth Adam through Jim Salinger, a good friend, a member of Beth Adam, and one of the former presidents of Rockdale Temple. Edwards attended a service that focused on the theme of Jewish humor.[55] Edwards liked the language of the service and decided, at first, to join Beth Adam as an individual. Her husband joined soon after.

At the time that Edwards joined Beth Adam, the congregation had only 65 members.[56] Edwards explained to this author that, unlike her experience at Rockdale, she could not just blend in at Beth Adam. For Edwards, the decision to join Beth Adam meant that she was making a commitment to be involved with the congregation. Always in need of volunteers, Beth Adam's board immediately asked Edwards to participate in a long-range plan for the synagogue's future and to be on the board of trustees. After the chair of the Ritual and Life-Cycle Committee moved away from Cincinnati, vacating her role as chair, Edwards took over as the committee's chairperson. [57]

When Edwards became the chair of the liturgy committee, the members of the congregation had not yet begun the process of writing and developing their own Humanistic liturgy. The timing was perfect; just as Beth Adam's liturgy committee had finished the death and dying pamphlet and was looking for a new liturgical project, the

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Sherwin Wine, *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 188. 5.
[56] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[57] Ibid.

former wife of a rabbi and a product of the creative liturgy found at the Reform movement's summer camps became the new committee chair.[58]

Edwards explained to this author that when she first became involved with the liturgy committee, it had a habit of meeting frequently and spending a significant amount of time talking without producing very much at all. Further, many of the committee members were so busy that they were unable to find the time to do related work outside of the committee meetings. Edwards remembered that many of the committee members envisioned rewriting the Shabbat and High Holy services by simply cutting and pasting elements of different readings and liturgies. Edwards, however, suggested that Beth Adam members write their own liturgy.[59]

At the beginning of her tenure as chair, Edwards made some quick changes to the committee's structure. She decided that the committee would only meet for one hour, regardless of what was or was not accomplished. She also arranged for Barr to instruct the committee members in Humanistic philosophy as well as in traditional prayer rubrics and Shabbat and holiday liturgy. The group also read the liturgical celebrations written by Rabbis Wine and Friedman and spent a significant amount of time talking through the themes of the prayer services and holidays.[60]

After they had spent a sufficient amount of time learning and reflecting on Shabbat or the holidays during committee meetings, Edwards used some of the allocated time to lead the group in creative writing exercises. The committee's members began writing about Humanistic perspectives on the symbols and meanings behind Shabbat. After sharing pieces with each other, the committee realized that they liked what they

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

were writing. Taking a bit from one person's writing and a bit from another's, they began to edit and create a Shabbat service for the home.[61] Edwards explained: "For the committee, the compilation of Shabbat prayers and readings for the home was an easy limited entry point."[62] And this entry point was successful—the Shabbat home service was well received by the members of Beth Adam. Later, the committee decided to write a Rosh Hashanah service using the same process as before.

As the committee began to write more services, members of the committee were assigned to spearhead entire rubrics or parts of the service. According to Edwards, the committee never had more than one person working on a particular piece at a given time. Rather, one person would write a piece, bring it back to the committee, and share it and the committee would edit it and return it to the writer. The process repeated until everyone was happy with the end result. Every member of the Ritual and Liturgy Committee, therefore, participated in writing and editing Beth Adam's services, and Barr provided the biblical and rabbinic quotations and readings.[63]

The culminating result was a liturgy that is a unique blend of Humanistic philosophy and, on some levels, the traditional rubrics of Jewish prayer. Thus, Beth Adam's liturgy is an interesting middle ground between the Reform movement's creative services and Rabbi Wine's "Celebrations." Unlike Rabbi Wine's liturgy, Beth Adam's services do not hesitate to use rabbinic writings as a centerpiece. For example, the Beth Adam service begins with candle lighting using the formula "*Baruch Ha-Or Ba-Olam, Baruch Ha-Or Ba-Adam, Baruch Ha-Or Ba-Shabat*," translated as "Blessed is the light within the world, blessed is the light within each person, blessed is the light of the

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

Sabbath."[64] Unlike the traditional Jewish prayer, the blessing makes no reference to God, *mitzvot,* or the act of the lighting of the Shabbat candles. It is also interesting to note that Beth Adam has adapted the same music for the lighting of the Sabbath candles as found in many Reform congregations.[65]

The Shabbat evening service contains a *Kabbalat Shabbat* rubric as well, with the first lines of the poem "*L'cha Dodi*" serving as the main Hebrew liturgical element. The English readings at the beginning of the service focus on the concepts of rest, reflection, and the period of Shabbat as a time to recall the values of Jewish heritage.[66] The service also calls on Jews to be together and to be a community with one another. Unlike in a service using Rabbi Wine's liturgy, the participant in a Beth Adam service would immediately recognize it as a Jewish Shabbat service, with familiar themes and music. At the same time, however, Beth Adam's liturgy is consistent with Humanistic philosophy—its services do not contain theistic language. None of the biblical, rabbinic, or creative readings mention, much less center on, God. Rather, they focus on Jewish values and common liturgical themes such as the relationship with Jewish history, finding comfort in community, providing for the stranger and the neighbor in need, and the importance of gaining wisdom.

Edwards explained to this author that many of the decisions surrounding the use (or lack thereof) of God language in Beth Adam services was a result of both the committee members' beliefs and Barr's adamant insistence on being consistent with language.[67] When asked why Beth Adam does not say the *Shema*, Edwards replied, "We

[64] Beth Adam Booklet for UAHC Board Members, Beth Adam Papers. Cincinnati, Ohio.
[65] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[66] Beth Adam Booklet for UAHC Board Members, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.
[67] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.

don't say what we don't believe…People who really find a need to pray to God, to ask God for something, would not be comfortable at all at Beth Adam."

A critical reader might also question whether the language of the candle lighting ritual replaces man with God, arguing that Beth Adam in fact worships man instead of God. This type of conclusion and analysis, however, does not take into account the intent and the complexities of the language. It is crucial to note that the language, and especially the Hebrew language, is weighty. For example, the word "*baruch*," clearly means "praise" or "blessed" and is usually used in the context of worship to God. However, *baruch* is not always used in association with God. For example, in the last paragraph of the traditional *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals) the word *baruch* is used in the line, "*baruch hagever asher yiftach b'Adona,*" which means "blessed is the man who trusts in God." In this case, however, Beth Adam's liturgy committee used the word "blessed" to connote a celebration of the power of humanity. It did not intend to replace the worship of God with the worship of mankind. Yet, by only looking at the Hebrew, one could accurately conclude that the word "*baruch*" was meant to praise mankind. Therefore, the reader must read the full English service to make an accurate philosophical conclusion about Beth Adam's liturgy.

It is also true that in an effort to be consistent, Beth Adam removed all theistic language. This is, of course, in line with Humanistic philosophy. Traditional Jews celebrate Shabbat because God commanded the Israelites to do so in Exodus 20:8-11 and in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Observing the Sabbath is, therefore, the fulfillment of a specific commandment given by the Deity. Because Humanistic philosophy, however, does not believe in a God that gives commandments, Beth Adam could not commemorate Shabbat

by thanking God for creating the day and holiday. Rather, Beth Adam's liturgy celebrates Shabbat as a uniquely Jewish endeavor, created and sustained by Jews; instead of celebrating God, it celebrates humanity and specifically the Jews who developed the Jewish faith. The traditional Friday night *Kiddush* (sanctification of the wine) is designed to commemorate as a reminder the creation of the universe and the exodus from Egypt. Neither of these themes is incorporated into the Beth Adam liturgy.

Not surprisingly, then, Beth Adam's liturgy does not pray to God or ask God for help. Instead it calls for human responsibility for the world, reflecting the belief that all that happens is a result of human interaction. Interestingly, this form of belief is not much different from that in much of the Reform movement. It would be easy to posit, in fact, that most Reform Jews view their congregations and the Jewish faith with a similar framework of human responsibility. The difference, however, is that the Reform Jewish liturgy still maintains prayers that contain the concept of a parental, interventionist God who, upon being asked for help, could (hopefully) provide answers.

Barr, Edwards, and many of the Beth Adam congregants maintain that Beth Adam has a large spectrum of theistic belief among its members. Dr. Smith explained, "In our congregation, you can believe in God if you want to, and if you don't want to, you don't have to."[68] Edwards commented, "A lot of the God language is sexist, and people are ingrained with the old man in the sky mentality. Yet, many at Beth Adam view God as the good within the human action, or God as nature."[69]

Beth Adam's liturgy is written so that liberally minded Jews who have some type of concept of God will not be offended by the words they read, and strict Humanists will

[68] Robert Smith, interview with the author, November 2, 2006.
[69] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.

certainly be happy with the non-theistic language. However, one can critique Beth Adam by arguing that the liturgy only allows for the expression of the Jewish Humanistic common denominator: the power to change the world is in the hands of humans and not an interventionist God. Beth Adam does not forbid members from having theistic beliefs. To the contrary, many of the members this author interviewed expressed beliefs in an Infinite. However, Beth Adam does not allow theistic words within the liturgy. Furthermore, lay or rabbinic leaders cannot utter any theistic language from the *bimah*. Thus, one could also accurately conclude that Beth Adam's liturgy is a type of liberal orthodoxy. Beth Adam's liturgy does not cater to the group that still wonders about God. As becomes apparent in the next chapter, it is precisely this question of Beth Adam's liturgical orthodoxy that is the central issue in the debate over Beth Adam's application to the UAHC.

**Beth Adam's Relationship with the SHJ and the Question of Congregational Affiliation**

During its first decade in existence, Beth Adam's relationship with the SHJ and Rabbi Wine was amicable. Rabbi Wine, after all, was Barr's rabbinical mentor, and Barr had worked for both the SHJ and Rabbi Wine during his student years at HUC. Further, the SHJ had paid Barr's student salary during Beth Adam's first year in existence, and the early members of Beth Adam were involved with the SHJ.[70] By the end of the 1980s, however, Beth Adam had decided not to associate itself with the SHJ, and by December 1989, Beth Adam's board had created an internal document stating that Beth Adam wanted to join the UAHC.[71] This major shift in feeling toward the SHJ leaves the

[70] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[71] Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community, December 8, 1989, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.

observer attempting to understand why—over the course of fewer than 10 years—the relationship between Beth Adam and the SHJ deteriorated to the point at which Beth Adam wanted to disassociate itself from the organization. And perhaps even more interestingly, it begs the question of why Beth Adam, previously among the vanguard of Humanistic congregations and organizations, wanted to join the Reform movement.

Beth Adam and the SHJ were initially close. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rabbis Wine and Friedman, the cofounders of the SHJ, made a trip to Cincinnati in support of Beth Adam. Members of Beth Adam had also served on the SHJ board. In 1982, Barr and Kathy Franklin-Baylen were elected to SHJ's board of directors. Mrs. Sacks, Beth Adam's cofounder, was elected to be the treasurer of the SHJ; and Dr. Wander, one of the founding members of Beth Adam, wrote articles for the SHJ magazine.[72] Clearly, in Beth Adam's early years, many of its members were committed to the SHJ.

Indeed, an analysis of Beth Adam's newsletters reveals that Beth Adam's leadership considered the SHJ to be an important institution. For example, every SHJ adult educational weekend, youth event, and meeting was routinely advertised in Beth Adam's newsletters.[73] Further, in the month following SHJ meetings or events, Beth Adam members would summarize what they had learned or experienced during SHJ

[72] Arden Wander, interview with the author, November 2, 2006; and Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006. This was also reported in the American Israelite, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[73] Beth Adam newsletter, March 1984, vol. 3, no. 6, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

programming.[74] After attending the fourteenth annual meeting of the SHJ, for example, Mrs. Sacks reported to the congregation that the members of the SHJ had discussed Humanistic Jewish philosophy and the future of the SHJ. Beth Adam's youth were also involved with the SHJ, participating in its youth movement and even hosting an event in Marydale, Kentucky.[75] By 1985, Beth Adam had become the third-largest congregation affiliated with the Humanistic movement.[76] As a testament to its own success, the Beth Adam newsletter encouraged members to support the SHJ by explaining that Beth Adam's size "should be a source of pride and pleasure to us … the smaller groups rely largely on the Society, its journal, and period visits from Sherwin Wine for their leadership guidance."[77]

While Beth Adam was very proud of being the third-largest Humanistic congregation, according to both its own by-laws and the by-laws of the SHJ, the congregation could not affiliate itself with the SHJ. In fact, Beth Adam's founding by-laws prohibited its leadership from joining any organization as a congregation. At first, the issue of Beth Adam's congregational membership to the SHJ was not an issue—the SHJ, after all, was founded as an association of individuals.[78] Friedman, a staunch libertarian and the SHJ's co-founder, rejected the idea that a congregation, or any organization, could or should speak on behalf of its members. Rather, he believed that

[74] Beth Adam newsletter, June 1984, vol. 3, no. 8, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[75] Beth Adam newsletter, September 1985, vol. 5, no. 18, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[76] Beth Adam newsletter, June 1985, vol. 4, no. 8, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Daniel Friedman, interview with the author, June 12, 2006.

individuals should have the right to associate themselves with a particular philosophy or theology. Friedman explained that "all people were free to believe what he or she wished. At the very minimum, we called the organization Humanistic so that a congregation could create a definition of itself based on its members."[79] The founders agreed that individuals, not institutions, could pay to become members of the SHJ. The society was originally formed as an organization with the purpose of supporting and disseminating the philosophy of Humanistic Judaism and not supporting a congregational union. The SHJ advertised to Humanistic Jews primarily through the publication of the SHJ magazine.[80] Yet, as the SHJ continued to grow, it became clear to members that the SHJ needed to change. Bonnie Cousens, the Executive Director of the SHJ, explained, "What became clear to us was that we (SHJ) were only able to maintain individual memberships for a period of time. People were looking for communities, and the SHJ needed to support congregational affiliation."[81] Therefore, by 1987, the SHJ had created a dues structure for member congregations, and by 1988 the SHJ formally changed from an association of individuals to a congregational union.[82]

It is important to note here that the SHJ's rabbinical leaders had been trained by HUC-JIR; the Humanistic movement did not have a rabbinical training institute of their own. Rabbis Wine and Friedman, the founders of the SHJ, and Barr and Rabbi Rami Shapiro, considered to be the future of Humanistic rabbinical leadership, were all trained at HUC. As the SHJ began to differentiate itself as a new stream of Judaism, however, and as the movement grew, an internal question arose: should the SHJ train new

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Bonnie Cousens, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[82] Society for Humanistic Judaism, *Policy Motions of the Board of Directors*, Society for Humanistic Judaism, March, 2004.

Humanistic rabbinical leaders, or should the Humanistic leaders come from a Reform seminary?[83]

By 1988, the SHJ had 17 groups of individuals either calling themselves a congregation or looking to form a congregation. The SHJ was also beginning to engage other secular Jewish groups, including the Israeli Association for Secular Humanism, the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, and the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews.[84] Rabbi Wine explained to this author that while the SHJ viewed itself as representing religious humanism, Jews in England, Continental Europe, and Israel tended to view Judaism through the lens of a secular vs. religious (i.e., Orthodox) binary.[85] As Rabbi Wine and the SHJ created ties between themselves and other secular Jewish institutions, the SHJ regularly began to use the word "secular," and in 1985 the SHJ became a member of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism.

The fault line between the SHJ and Beth Adam is easy to identify, as it was based on three central concerns: the SHJ's evolution from a society of individual memberships to a congregational union; the SHJ's insistence on joining forces with secular Jewish organizations; and perhaps most importantly, the SHJ's founding of a rabbinical seminary. In addition to these overriding issues, Beth Adam and the SHJ also disagreed on the future of the SHJ and its leadership.

When the SHJ asked Beth Adam to join as a congregation, Beth Adam's board of trustees turned it down.[86] According to Barr, the issue was clear—Beth Adam's board

[83] Marylin Rowens, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[84] Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.

was bound by the congregation's by-laws. However, the issue was not necessarily so straightforward. According to Cousens, the SHJ determined that the organization's three founding synagogues—The Birmingham Temple in Detroit, Beth Or in Chicago, and the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in Westport, Connecticut—could be grandfathered into the old system and would not have to pay congregational dues.[87] Cousens explained, however, that Beth Adam wanted to the grandfathered into the old membership system alongside the three founding congregations of the SHJ, and thereby retain the structure of individual rather than congregational memberships. The SHJ, Cousens said, rejected Beth Adam's request.[88]

Without knowledge of Cousens's comments, Barr contended that the SHJ had offered Beth Adam the opportunity to be grandfathered into the SHJ under the previous membership guideline. According to Barr, Beth Adam refused to participate in the new membership scheme because no matter the dues structure, the structural change of the SHJ went against Beth Adam's by-laws.[89] On one hand, Barr's explanation does not make sense. It would seem that if the SHJ had allowed Beth Adam to be grandfathered into the SHJ, then Beth Adam's members would have continued their status quo relationship with the SHJ. On the other hand, even with grandfathering Beth Adam into individual memberships, the SHJ's structural change might have required Beth Adam to join as a member congregation—something their by-laws rejected. No matter the situation, it is clear that the SHJ required congregational memberships, and Beth Adam refused to change its by-laws to join the SHJ. Thus, the two groups came to an impasse.

[87] Bonnie Cousens, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Robert Barr, interview with the author May 26, 2006.

Beth Adam's members were also concerned with the SHJ's increased usage of the word "secular" and its association with secular groups in Israel and Europe—they worried that the SHJ was leaving behind religious Humanism for secularism.[90] For its members, Beth Adam was a religious community operating from a set of Humanistic philosophic principles, and its members worried that the association with secular Jews would create a divide between those who saw themselves as religionists and those who saw themselves as secularists.[91]

The Humanistic religionists utilize Jewish ritual and prayer structure and change (or Reform) the words within the rituals to formulate a Humanistic Jewish practice that is consistent with their theological beliefs. Beth Adam's liturgy is an example of a Humanistic religion. Some secularists have made these changes to ritual as well—while using the word secular, they follow a Humanistic religionist tradition. However, a large number of secularists completely refrain from utilizing Jewish ritual—and completely abandon Jewish religious practice. It was the SHJ's association with these types of secularists that Beth Adam was concerned about. Ultimately, this did not play out as the most divisive of issues, as many of Beth Adam's members later came to understand that the word "secular" in Europe meant simply non-theistic, while the word "religious" connoted a clear belief in the Divine. Yet, it was clear that the SHJ's use of the word "secular" was for the purposes of reaching atheistic, agnostic, and rationalist Jews in Europe and Israel—some of whom wanted Jewish ritual and some of whom did not..

The major impasse and disagreement between the SHJ and Beth Adam started and ultimately ended over the issue of rabbinical ordination. Cousens explained to this author,

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[90] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 4, 2006.
[91] Ibid.

"As we had more and more contact with rabbis who came through HUC, who came to us and said that they were Humanists, we found that they were actually Reconstructionist." She added, "The rabbis weren't willing to liberate themselves from the Reform Jewish liturgy. Thus we (the SHJ) realized that sending students through HUC didn't necessarily result in a Humanistic rabbi coming out of HUC." In 1985, therefore, Rabbi Wine, the SHJ, and the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews (IFSHJ) founded the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ) to be the educational arm of the Humanistic movement.[92] The IISHJ has a leadership program, programs for educators and musicians, and a rabbinical seminary that trains rabbis for the Humanistic movement.[93] According to Rabbi Wine, the issue of leadership training was not simply about rabbinical training, but about the training of lay leaders. Wine explained that many of the smaller Humanistic groups were too small to afford a rabbi and thus required lay leaders to lead their communities. It was important to the SHJ, therefore, to have a two-pronged approach to training rabbis but also para-rabbis that could perform many of the leadership functions of the rabbi.[94]

For members of Beth Adam, what had originally started off as a good relationship with the SHJ took a sour turn after Rabbi Wine and the SHJ formally began the rabbinical seminary. According to the leaders of Beth Adam, tensions rose when Barr and Beth Adam's laity decided to oppose the IISHJ. Mrs. Sacks said: "The relationship between the SHJ and Beth Adam was great as long as we played by Sherwin's [Wine's] rules."[95]

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[92] Bonnie Cousens, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[93] International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, http://www.iishj.org/about_iishj.htm
[94] Sherwin Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[95] Cynthia Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.

According to Dr. Sacks, "The real break between the SHJ and Beth Adam occurred when Wine said that he was going to ordain his own rabbis. Robert [Barr] didn't think that Sherwin had the authority to ordain rabbis."[96] Mrs. Pat Rosenberg, a board member at the time, recalled reasons behind the board's concern:

> Both Beth Adam and Bob had established a connection with HUC. And there were many liberal thinkers at HUC who understood our philosophy. From Birmingham (IISHJ), we were concerned that we weren't going to get rabbis with the same authenticity as we got from HUC. We saw that we had a great rabbi and we asked ourselves, who is going to be our next great rabbi? And where is that person going to come from? We didn't think that the person was going to be coming from Wine's seminary.[97]

Mrs. Rosenberg's comments raise some questions: Who were the "many" thinkers at HUC who understood Beth Adam's philosophy? And why did Beth Adam have such little faith in the Humanistic Seminary? It is possible that the thinkers that Rosenberg referred to are Dr. Alvin Reines, a professor of Jewish philosophy at the time who argued for Polydoxy, in which Humanism was a recognized part of Polydoxy. It is also possible that Rosenberg was referring to the HUC professors, like Mihaly and Rivkin, who had spoken at Beth Adam and, while they may not share Beth Adam's beliefs, understood what Beth Adam was trying to achieve. It is also clear to this author that Beth Adam's leaders did not believe that Rabbi Wine had the academic credentials to train rabbis. They were concerned that his lack of academic credentials would not place the SHJ-trained rabbis on the same level as HUC-trained rabbis. Jim Cummins, then the treasurer of Beth Adam, also worried that the empowerment of the para-rabbi would water down the stature and interest of the ordained rabbi.[98] Beth Adam's membership ultimately decided

[96] Joel Sacks, interview with the author, October 29, 2006.
[97] Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 20, 2006.
[98] SHJ, minutes from the special meeting of the executive board of SHJ with board members of Congregation Beth Adam, October 28, 1988, SHJ Papers, Farmington Hills, Michigan.

that it was simply not in Beth Adam's interest to support the creation of a competing rabbinical seminary to HUC. Barr explained:

> "The creation of the Humanistic seminary was not good for us [Beth Adam] at all. We had members of our congregation on the Board of Overseers [local group of fundraisers]. We had spent the previous years in Cincinnati building strong friendships with the Reform movement. Our members were donating to HUC's buildings. My wife, Terri, had worked at HUC as the assistant head of the dormitory. I loved my professors, and my professors regularly came to speak to our congregants. . . Sherwin is dismissive of HUC whereas we had a relationship with HUC and I wasn't about to sacrifice our relationship with the college."

Realizing that problems between the groups were quickly arising, Beth Adam's board created a committee of lay members to start reviewing the issues that the congregation was having with the SHJ. The members of the committee were Mr. Cummins, Mr. Marvin Dainoff, the chairman of the ad-hoc group, Mrs. Sacks, and Mrs. Smith.

The differences between Beth Adam and the SHJ came to head on October 28, 1988 in a special meeting of the SHJ executive board and Beth Adam's members. Beth Adam invited the SHJ to come to Cincinnati so that a delegation from the synagogue could have the opportunity to speak with the leadership concerning their disagreements. According to Bonnie Cousens, the meeting did not start well:

> "On Friday night, Bob [Barr] did not invite Sherwin Wine to sit on the pulpit...it was not a feel-good meeting for either side. Beth Adam wanted the SHJ to allow them to be connected to the movement, but not force congregational affiliation. They said that they would have encouraged members to join, but they would not enforce membership. The society refused to give them special status."[99]

The minutes of the board meting, which were provided to this author by the SHJ, show a difficult exchange between the SHJ's executive board, Rabbi Wine, Miriam Jerris, then the Development Coordinator for the SHJ, and the Beth Adam ad-hoc committee. Starting at 3:00 p.m., the meeting lasted two hours and was fairly contentious the entire time. The minutes reveal that after discussing the issues surrounding the IISHJ,

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[99] Bonnie Cousens, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.

one of the SHJ board members decided to return to the issue of individual memberships and complained that only 17 of Beth Adam's members were members of the SHJ. Mrs. Sacks responded, "Come to the adult class on Sunday. You will meet a different group. Maybe you can proselytize."[100] Clearly, the mood was not good.

The bad feelings between the two organizations persisted past the closing of the October board meeting. When Beth Adam's members decided that they did not support the IISHJ, other, sometimes unrelated, disagreements began to arise as well. As Mrs. Sacks explained:

> I got really ticked off with Miriam Jerris. [The SHJ] was no longer welcoming and warm. They tried to tell us how to get more members. And we said there are multiple ways to get members—let us grow naturally. The Society started to become concerned that Beth Adam wasn't growing fast enough and didn't have enough members joining as individuals. Then, they started to argue that Beth Adam wasn't sending kids to the youth programs. We simply replied, "We have five pregnant women in the congregation, and you'll get the kids eventually." The society wanted more and more money but we were barely making enough money to pay Bob's [Barr's] salary and covering the additional expenses of the congregation.[101]

By the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989, Beth Adam and the SHJ had effectively gone their separate ways. As long as the ISSHJ was going to establish a para-rabbinic program and a rabbinical program, Beth Adam wanted nothing to do with the Humanistic movement. Indeed, Beth Adam was fully committed to its strong relationship with the HUC.

The breakup with the SHJ coincided with Beth Adam's tenth year as a synagogue. Looking back at its decade of existence, the members were pleased with Beth Adam's progress: they had created a dynamic community, established a culture of education for both the young and old, and developed religious services that followed both their beliefs

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[100] SHJ, minutes from the special meeting of the executive board of SHJ with board members of Congregation Beth Adam, October 28, 1988, SHJ Papers, Farmington Hills, Michigan.
[101] Ibid.

and, on some level, the rubrics of Jewish prayer.[102] Yet, the congregation was also thinking about its future. Terri Barr, Barr's wife, had earned her Ph.D. and was seriously considering jobs outside Ohio. Suddenly, Beth Adam needed to make contingencies for hiring a new rabbi.[103] Further, after the breakup with the SHJ, Beth Adam's board began to look at itself and at the relationships that the congregation wanted to continue to foster. The board agreed that Beth Adam was committed to HUC.[104] Thus, On December 8, 1989, the congregation's board produced a document titled "Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community." In it, Beth Adam's leadership spelled out its beliefs, its goals, and what it affirmed as a congregation.[105]

The document is fascinating. On one hand it demonstrates that Beth Adam's board had a strong Humanistic philosophy. The board members wrote statements such as "We should not rely on benign providence for the betterment of humanity or the preservation of our planet."[106] Yet, the board also believed that the spectrum of the Reform movement was broad enough to allow Reform Jews to have Humanistic beliefs. They wrote, "Reform is flexible and adapts to new approaches within its overall philosophy and historical context. Humanistic Judaism is consistent with that flexibility." Harriet Edwards, the president of Beth Adam when the policy was written, explained that after long discussions, Beth Adam's board believed that Humanistic Jewish philosophy was within the framework of Reform Judaism.[107]

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[102] Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 20, 2006; and Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[103] Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 20, 2006.
[104] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[105] Beth Adam, Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community, December 8, 1989, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.

Stating that one of the congregation's goals was to "advocate and facilitate a continuity of rabbinic clergy for Humanistic Judaism," the board affirmed that

> 1. HUC-JIR is the keystone of Reform Judaism in America. 2. The branch of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem is testimony to Reform Zionist commitment. It merits support. 3. The academic excellence in all fields emanating from HUC-JIR are invaluable assts to all faiths throughout the world."[108]

These affirmations led the board to an obvious conclusion—in order to support HUC, Beth Adam should participate in the organization that was built to pay for HUC.[109] Thus, Beth Adam's board wrote that one of its goals in the coming years was to "participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the UAHC."[110] In early January 1990, Beth Adam's board began to set the stage for its application to become a member congregation of the UAHC, the Reform movement's congregational union.

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[108] Beth Adam, Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community, December 8, 1989, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.
[109] Harriet Edwards, interview with the author, November 6, 2006.
[110] Beth Adam, Beth Adam Policy and the Reform Jewish Community, December 8, 1989, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, OH.

## Chapter 4

### Drawing Boundaries and Limiting Elasticity: Beth Adam's Application to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations

In his book, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction*, Dana Evan Kaplan aptly notes that one of the fundamental aspects of Reform Judaism has been the movement's acceptance of religious and *halakhic* pluralism.[1] From the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform that established the radical Reform agenda in the United States through the 1976 Centenary Perspective that redefined Reform Judaism post the Egalitarian changes in Reform, the Holocaust, the Creation of Israel, and the Civil Rights Movement, Reform Judaism has regularly defined itself and made boundaries for itself vis-à-vis Ethical Culture and other, more traditional streams of Judaism. At the same time, however, the Reform Movement has also accepted a wide range of diverse practices and beliefs among the congregations and rabbis within its fold. The movement's value of religious pluralism is evident in the wide range of beliefs and ritual practices concerning such issues as Zionism, egalitarianism, patrilenial descent, interfaith marriage, acceptance of gays and lesbians, conceptions of God, and liturgical expressions (from more traditional to classical Reform practice). The movement allows—and perhaps even expects—rabbis and synagogues to shape their beliefs and exercise Judaism with autonomy. While the Reform Movement's major organizations (CCAR, UAHC, and HUC) often suggest and encourage a particular view or solution to a religious problem, individual rabbis and UAHC- (now the URJ) affiliated synagogues determine their own practices independently.

[1] Dana Evan Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 54-58.

Kaplan observes that Beth Adam's application to the UAHC tested the Reform Movement's boundaries of this theological pluralism.[2] Similarly, in *American Judaism: A History*, Jonathan Sarna cites Beth Adam's application to the UAHC as one of the major challenges to the Reform Movement's theological boundaries.[3] As will become evident, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then the president of the UAHC, understood that Beth Adam's application to the union was an opportunity for the Reform Movement to define its theological borders and potentially limit the elasticity of its theological pluralism.

Beth Adam's application to the UAHC raised many questions for the Union's lay leaders: Can the Reform Movement accept a congregation that actively removes God from its liturgy? Is the Reform Movement willing to mandate a theological credo or litmus test for its member synagogues? Do Reform Jews believe in a supernatural God that responds to the personal petitions of individuals or humanity, and if not, is it acceptable to have a congregation that replaces the traditional Reform liturgy with a liturgy theologically consistent with their beliefs? Does the UAHC (URJ) have the authority to tell member or applicant congregations that they must have theistic liturgy that presumes a belief in God? The Beth Adam application encouraged the Reform Movement to scrutinize the implications of and the limits that would be created by answering these questions.

**Beth Adam Looks Inward**

The idea of Beth Adam joining a congregational union, particularly after it had just rejected membership in the SHJ, created much internal discussion about the nature and development of the synagogue. As noted in Chapter 2, when Beth Adam was

[2] Ibid, 54.
[3] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 368.

originally established, the founding members chose to be independent, refusing to affiliate with congregational organizations.[4] To be clear, at the time of the congregation's founding, the SHJ was an association of individuals and not a congregational union, so Beth Adam would not—and could not—have joined the SHJ. As an independent congregation, Beth Adam developed free of many of the external pressures that a congregational union would have imposed on it. For example, because they were not forced to use the SHJ liturgy, Beth Adam had the opportunity to create its own liturgy that was not as secular or as drastically divergent from traditional Judaism as other Humanistic congregations. Further, association with a congregational union requires a significant financial commitment; Beth Adam certainly would not have been able to afford this in its early years, as it barely brought in enough income to pay for its rabbi and operational costs.[5]

As the SHJ and Beth Adam feuded over membership in the late 1980s, Beth Adam's leadership began to think about the broader concept of congregational affiliation. The board moved to evaluate Beth Adam's congregational identity, researching with which organizations Beth Adam's individual members were involved and with which synagogues and organizations Beth Adam's leadership most frequently associated. Beth Adam's board began to fully realize that the synagogue had its roots in both the Reform Movement and Humanistic tradition.[6] Most of the congregation's founders had come from Reform synagogues, although its two initial founding members had come from a Humanistic synagogue. Many of Beth Adam's members had also come to the congregation from Reform synagogues in Cincinnati, including Jim Salinger, a former

[4] Beth Adam, Constitution and By-Laws, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[5] Robert Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[6] Ibid.

president of Rockdale Temple. Additionally, the board recognized that Rabbi Barr was a product of both the Humanistic Movement and the Reform Movement, an excellent testament to Beth Adam's dual background. Barr had, of course studied with and worked for Sherwin Wine and the SHJ, but he was also a product of the Reform rabbinical institution that trained him. Ordained by HUC, Barr was also a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Reform Movement's rabbinical union.

According to Pat Rosenberg, a member of synagogue's board at the time, Beth Adam's members frequently sent their children to GUCI, the UAHC's regional summer camp.[7] The congregational records show that HUC faculty members spoke at Beth Adam, and Barr had been invited to teach practical rabbinic courses at HUC; both Barr and the board were proud that Beth Adam was able to help train Reform rabbinical students.[8] Indeed, members of Beth Adam were even on HUC's Board of Overseers, the college's fundraising organization. In its effort to become counted among the recognized and legitimate Cincinnati synagogues, Beth Adam had co-sponsored events with Reform synagogues.

Beth Adam's decision to begin considering the Reform Movement, however, was influenced by more than simply its congregants' and rabbi's involvements. There was a major concern among board members that Barr and his wife might leave in the near future, leaving Beth Adam in need of access to other rabbis. The congregation's leaders were also interested in utilizing rabbinic interns and taking advantage of the many leadership training resources that were being developed by the UAHC.

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[7] Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 26, 2006.

[8] Beth Adam newsletters, August 1981-1984, Manuscript Collection 696, box 2, folder 1, Beth Adam: Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13; and Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 26, 2006.

The synagogue also realized that it desperately needed to develop their youth programming. Both Pat Rosenberg and Rabbi Barr explained that in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Cincinnati, the Christian evangelical group Young Life was popular among teenagers. Many of Beth Adam's teenagers had unknowingly found themselves at Young Life events and had felt firsthand the effects of Christian conversionary tactics. Beth Adam, however, did not have a strong youth group through which to offer its own programming. Somewhat alienated from other Jewish youth programming resources, Beth Adam's leadership wanted the congregation's teenagers to be able to attend the successful Cincinnati Reform Jewish High School (CRJH), a secondary Jewish education program owned by the four Cincinnati Reform synagogues. Similarly, Beth Adam was interested in having its youth become members of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), a much larger and better developed organization than the SHJ's limited teen programs.[9] By 1990 the synagogue had not changed the original by-laws that prohibited Beth Adam from joining a religious organization. The aforementioned reasons, however, combined with Beth Adam's discontent toward the SHJ, encouraged Beth Adam's leadership to begin thinking seriously about joining the Reform Movement.

Many uninformed individuals have suggested to this author that Beth Adam only applied to become a member of the Union because it was trying to prove a point, trying to convert Reform Jews to Humanistic Judaism, or trying to gain access to the HUC and the Cincinnati Reform Jewish High School (CRJHS). These first two allegations are patently false, and the latter allegation is understandable only if one disregards the big picture. In reality, it is clear that the members of Beth Adam truly saw their synagogue as a unique

[9] Pat Rosenberg, interview with author, November 26, 2006; and Robert Barr, interview with author, May 26, 2006.

amalgamation of Humanistic and Reform Judaism. Additionally, in disagreeing with the direction in which the SHJ was moving (forming a rabbinical school) and not wanting to alienate itself from HUC-JIR, Beth Adam chose the practicalities of its association and location (i.e., Cincinnati) over the ideologically more consistent SHJ (although admittedly, Barr and Beth Adam's leadership did have a prickly relationship with the SHJ).

Beth Adam's leadership also realized that the congregation had needs that were neither being met by their independent, go-at-it-alone approach nor by their association with the SHJ. Essentially, Beth Adam's leaders decided to apply for membership in the UAHC because the Union provided the most bang for their buck. Membership in the UAHC would provide Beth Adam with access to future rabbis, HUC rabbinical students, youth programming, and leadership development. While the members of Beth Adam knew their liturgy was not in the mainstream of the Reform Movement, they did believe that the philosophy and theology reflected in their liturgy was within the spectrum of Reform Judaism. They also believed that the Reform Movement's commitment to pluralism made room for their approach.

Beth Adam's members, however, also knew that being a member in the Union could potentially create problems. They wondered about the future of their liturgy and whether or not they could maintain that liturgy, they worried about their finances, and they questioned whether being a member of the Reform Movement would mean that they had to endorse platforms that conflicted with their Humanistic approach.[10] In the end, however, Beth Adam chose to apply to the UAHC because it would receive far more

[10] "Reform Judaism and Beth Adam," November 30, 1990, notes on a discussion led by Rabbi Barr with Beth Adam's members, Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

from membership with the UAHC than with the SHJ or by continuing as an independent congregation. In this sense, the congregation's ideology was secondary to the practicalities of Union membership.

It is crucial to note here that Beth Adam's members were also purists when it came to their theology and their liturgy; they wanted the benefits of membership in the UAHC without having to compromise their theology. Despite these hopes, however, the leaders of Beth Adam found that normative Reform practice and the beliefs of most of the leaders within the Reform Movement did not believe the synagogue's liturgy to be compatible with their own. While many Reform leaders were comfortable with individuals who questioned God, they did not feel the same about an entire congregation removing God from the liturgy.

**Discussions between Beth Adam and the UAHC and the Emerging National Debate**

Rabbi Barr and Rabbi Jim Simon, then the regional director of the UAHC's Midwest Council, had an early conversation about Beth Adam applying to join the UAHC in April 1988, roughly six months before Beth Adam's contentious meeting with the SHJ.[11] Thus, it is evident that as early as 1988, the problems between Beth Adam and the SHJ had caused Beth Adam's leadership to begin looking elsewhere for organizational resources. Additionally, it is clear that Beth Adam began exploring its options while still in discussion with the SHJ. Yet, it was not until Beth Adam's board had approved the document titled "Beth Adam and the Reform Jewish Community" (see

[11] Rabbi Simon to Robert Barr, April 26, 1988, Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

chapter 3) that Beth Adam began to discuss the application process on a more official level and with the Union's representatives.[12]

In a letter dated January 3, 1990, Rabbi Barr wrote to Rabbi Simon, saying, "I am very excited about exploring the possibility of Beth Adam affiliating with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. . . Beth Adam's board of Trustees has had preliminary discussions and is looking forward to having more formal discussion with the Union."[13] In the mailing, Barr included the aforementioned Beth Adam policy toward Reform Judaism. He also enclosed copies of Beth Adam's liturgy, brochures, and newsletters. Barr concluded the letter by saying, "I look forward to working with you (Simon) on this endeavor wherever it may lead." It is telling that the letter's conclusion did not presuppose that Beth Adam's application was going to be a straight shot; it appears that Barr knew that there could be bumps in the road.

On January 20, 1990, Rabbi Simon held a meeting with members of Beth Adam's board and past president.[14] According to Barr's follow-up thank you letter, Beth Adam's leadership believed that the meeting was positive and the leadership desired to continue a dialogue with the UAHC. At that time, Jim Cummins, then the treasurer of Beth Adam, began to set up meetings with Robert Chaiken, then the president of the UAHC's Midwest Council. Correspondingly, Barr told Simon in his letter that he was going to discuss the possibility of Beth Adam joining the Union with the local Reform rabbis. Most of the letter, however, focused on an emerging theme: the ideological questions that needed to be confronted. In an almost prophetic line, Barr wrote to Simon, "It is through

[12] In letters, both Barr and Simon note that there were informal conversations between the two individuals. Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[13] Rabbi Barr to Rabbi Simon, January 3, 1990, Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[14] Rabbi Barr to Rabbi Simon, February 1990, Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

exploring our commonality and differences that we will come to better understand ourselves."[15]

While supportive of Beth Adam and its application to the Union, Rabbi Simon recognized early on that Beth Adam's application would raise interesting new challenges for the Union's leadership. Years later, Barr explained that Simon had made it clear that theirs was not going to be a run-of-the-mill application to the UAHC. Simon, Barr recalled, was worried from the get-go about whether Beth Adam's liturgy was acceptable amongst Reform Jews.[16]

In late January, after having met recently with Beth Adam's leadership, Rabbi Simon wrote a memo to his colleagues, the other UAHC regional directors, and copied it to Rabbi Schindler, the president of the UAHC. In the memo, Simon summarized some of his contact with Beth Adam and his tentative, exploratory discussions with Beth Adam's leadership. Simon wrote to his colleagues, "I am writing to inquire if you have had any specific contact or experience with a similar congregation or if you yourself have any ideas or guidance for me with respect to the way in which this process can and should be handled."[17]

Simon received only a few replies to his inquiry, and of them, the responses were mixed—they encouraged caution and questioned the congregation's liturgy and religious practices. One such reply was written by Rabbi Daniel Freelander, who urged Simon to "throw the ball into their court. If they wish to affiliate they must be willing to amend their constitution to say that they are a Reform Congregation affiliated with the national

[15] Ibid.
[16] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[17] Rabbi Simon to Regional Directors, January 25, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

bodies of American Reform Judaism." Freelander believed that this constitutional amendment would require Beth Adam to engage in an internal debate about whether it was willing to join and accept all facets of the Reform Movement. Freelander added, "If they do, I think that we have to take them. Our own movement is full of ideological spectrums and I don't want to be in the position of judging another's theology."[18]

One of the most interesting replies to Simon's inquiry came from Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC at the time. In a letter dated February 5, 1990, Schindler wrote to Simon, "I believe we are dealing with a situation which may well arise often in the future Thus, I agree that we should study it now."[19] Schindler felt that the inquiry needed to move beyond the UAHC's regional directors, and so he informed Simon that he was going to "share the query with about eight or nine highly regarded Reform Rabbis to ascertain their insight." Schindler further explained that he would include the UAHC Constitution and by-laws in the letter to his friends so they could comment on whether a Humanistic synagogue could become a member of the Union.[20]

Schindler immediately sent "personal and confidential" letters to Dr. Eugene Mihaly, Dr. Solomon Freehoff, Rabbi Samuel Karff, Rabbi Jack Stern, Rabbi Jack Bemporad, Rabbi Gunther Plaut, and Rabbi Walter Jacob.[21] These rabbis—senior rabbis of distinguished congregations, professors, and writers of Jewish Responsa (Jewish legal

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[18] Rabbi Daniel Freelander to Rabbi Simon, February 13, 1990, Manuscript Collection No. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[19] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Simon, February 5, 1990, Manuscript Collection No. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[20] Ibid.

[21] List of rabbis who received the "personal and confidential" letters, Manuscript Collection No. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

opinions) for the Reform Movement—comprised the time's pre-eminent group of Reform leaders. In the letters, dated February 9, 1990, Schindler explained that he was contacting the recipients in regards to an issue relating to the SHJ. He wrote:

> I really don't know how large that society is, nor how many rabbis are committed to its precepts and the advancement of its work. Some individual rabbis leading Reform congregations may well be members of the society, but no congregation defining itself in that society's terms has sought affiliation with the UAHC. I recently heard from our Regional Director that one of these congregations is presently exploring the possibility of affiliating with the Union. What in your judgment, should the Union's response be?[22]

While Schindler's statement about congregational affiliation is accurate, he knew nothing about the separation between Beth Adam and the SHJ, and thus incorrectly tied Beth Adam to the SHJ. Interestingly, though he did recognize that some Reform rabbis may have been members of the SHJ, Schindler's lack of knowledge about the organization's size and details shows that the SHJ was merely a tiny blip on the radar of the leaders of the Reform Movement.

The responses to Schindler's inquiry are fascinating because they foreshadow what would later become the central theme of the entire affiliation debate: the limits and boundaries of the Reform Movement's pluralism. For example, Rabbi Walter Jacob wrote Schindler, saying, "All Jews who reject God are sinners. Sinners, however, remain Jews (San 44a) and possess the right to attend the synagogue for prayer and study." He added, "There is no question therefore that those individuals who absolutely reject God may be members of our congregations and are welcome." Yet, he also concluded:

> In this instance we are dealing with an entire group which has banded together as a congregation…The UAHC is a group of congregations which affirms Reform Judaism and seeks to strengthen it…Reform Judaism has been defined through Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform, the Centenary Statement as well as numerous resolutions of the UAHC.

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[22] Rabbi Schindler to Dr. Eugene Mihaly, February 9, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

> God, however conceived, is basic to each of those statements. A "congregation" which rejects the centrality of God in Judaism cannot be considered for membership.[23]

Rabbi Sam Karff added to Jacob's concerns, commenting that "To organize a synagogue on the premise that the three dimensional covenant (God, Torah and Israel) is no longer our norm, is to go beyond the boundaries of institutional legitimacy."[24] Dr. Solomon Freehof approached the issue with a simple litmus test, arguing that Beth Adam should be told that if "they . . . accept the [New] Union Prayerbook as the text used in their assemblies, [then we should be] willing to extend our Jewish brotherhood tentatively and hopefully to accept them."[25] Freehoff also encouraged Schindler to ask the head of the theology department of the Hebrew Union College whether Humanistic theology can be accepted as a legitimate form of religious practice.[26] Gunther Plaut advocated a similar course of action, suggesting that Schindler submit the question to the CCAR Responsa Committee so that the CCAR could research and deliver a Reform opinion that could help the UAHC in its decision-making process.[27]

Yet not all of the answers by these esteemed rabbis were negative about accepting a Humanistic congregation into the UAHC. In a letter dated March 6, 1990, Rabbi Jack Bemporad replied to Schindler saying, "I am in favor of accepting Congregation Beth Adam as an affiliate of the Union." He explained, "Judaism is not a creedal religion and

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[23] Rabbi Walter Jacob to Rabbi Schindler, March 1, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[24] Rabbi Sam Karff to Rabbi Schindler, February 20, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5. Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[25] Dr. Solomon Freehof to Rabbi Schindler, February 21, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5. Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Rabbi Gunther Plaut to Rabbi Schindler, February 12, 1990, Manuscript Collection No. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

questions of faith have always been open to wide variation. . . It may be that a non-supernaturalist Judaism is again a solution for some of us as a response to the events of our time."[28] Dr. Eugene Mihaly also encouraged acceptance. Mihaly's letter, however, differed from the other responses because it included information specific to Beth Adam. Mihaly was close with many of Beth Adam's leaders, particularly Jim Salinger and Robert Smith. Mihaly was also close with Barr. It is clear in his response to Schindler that he knew more about Beth Adam's situation with the SHJ than any of Schindler's other consultants. In his letter, Mihaly explained why Beth Adam and the SHJ had split.[29] In a subsequent letter exchange, Schindler asked and received permission from Mihaly to share that letter with the lay-leaders and rabbis of the UAHC. Mihaly also forwarded to Schindler Beth Adam's policy statement about Reform Judaism along with samples of Beth Adam's liturgy.[30]

Mr. Robert Chaiken, then the president of the UAHC Midwest Council, and Rabbi Simon continued to meet and talk with Beth Adam while Simon also worked with Schindler to compile the responses from their rabbinical colleagues. In letters between Chaiken, Schindler, and Simon, the three continued to outline to each other the progress of Beth Adam's application. These letters demonstrate that while Beth Adam's leadership began to become concerned about the theological criteria for admission to the UAHC, Chaiken and Simon continued to encourage Beth Adam's application, even selling Beth

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[28] Rabbi Jack Bemporad to Rabbi Schindler, March 6, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[29] Dr. Eugene Mihaly to Rabbi Schindler, February 15, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[30] Schindler to Mihaly, February 26, 1990; Mihaly to Schindler, February 22, 1990 and February 28, 1990; Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5. Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

Adam's leaders on the "benefits of their belonging to the UAHC vis-à-vis the 100 things that the UAHC does for member congregations."[31] By May 1990, Beth Adam's leaders decided that they would begin the process of making an application to the UAHC and discussed the process with their fellow congregants at the annual congregational meeting that spring.[32]

Around the same time, Simon sent a letter to all of presidents and rabbis of Cincinnati Reform Congregations, telling them about the emerging discussions with Beth Adam.[33] Simon also encouraged Barr to approach his rabbinical colleagues to ask for their support in the UAHC application process. According to Rabbis Walter and Kamrass, the rabbis of Temple Sholom and Wise Temple, respectively, the exchange between Barr and his colleagues did not go well. Rabbi Walter explained to this author, "We were talking before a board of rabbis meeting, and Bob came up to me and said, 'Hi. I want you to know that we are in the process of applying to the UAHC, and I hope that I can count on your support in furthering our application."[34] Walter explained to this author that he immediately expressed reservations and that Barr was taken aback by his reaction. Kamrass recalled that it was difficult telling Barr that he had concerns about Beth Adam's application because the relationship between the rabbis had been so positive; Barr had spoken at Reform synagogues, the congregations had co-sponsored

[31] Robert Chaiken to Rabbi Simon, March 8, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[32] Pat Rosenberg, interview with the author, November 26, 2006.
[33] Rabbi Simon to rabbis and presidents of Cincinnati Reform congregations, Robert Chaiken, and Midwest Council Small and New Member Congregations Committee, January 26, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[34] Rabbi Gerry Walter, interview with the author, June 29, 2006.

events, and the rabbis worked closely with one another on the Board of Rabbis.[35] Once the Cincinnati Reform rabbis learned of Beth Adam's potential application to the UAHC, they began to express concerns about Beth Adam to both Rabbi Simon and the leadership of their synagogues. In November 1990, Simon wrote a letter to Schindler explaining that both Simon and Chaiken had engaged in private conversations with the Cincinnati rabbis and lay-leadership in which representatives of all of the Cincinnati Reform institutions expressed "a strong sentiment against the idea that Beth Adam would become part of the UAHC." Simon added, "We will most likely receive…very strong letters which indicate the fact that they do not believe that Beth Adam should be part of the UAHC."[36] And indeed, at every step of the process, the leaders of Cincinnati's Reform rabbis and congregations drafted letters opposing Beth Adam's application.

The Cincinnati Reform rabbis, for example, argued that Beth Adam's religious practice was not consistent with their understanding of Reform Judaism. They argued that Beth Adam had removed the basic rubrics of Reform Jewish liturgy, which for them, united Reform Jews together. The Cincinnati Reform rabbis also maintained that the removal of God from Beth Adam's liturgy prevented personal religious freedoms, which they claimed, was adverse to Reform Judaism. The rabbis also noted that while Beth Adam was not a threat, in terms of pulling members away from the other Reform synagogues, the decision to allow Beth Adam into the Reform Movement would have a serious affect on the local Reform Congregations. Because the Reform synagogues owned and operated the Cincinnati Reform Jewish High School, if Beth Adam was

[35] Rabbi Lewis Kamrass, interview with the author, June 29, 2006.
[36] Rabbi Simon to Rabbi Schindler, November 21, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

allowed into the UAHC, there would be an immediate question as to whether the Reform synagogues could reject participation of Beth Adam's children in the high school program. The rabbis also feared that Beth Adam might encourage a Humanistic curriculum in the High School.[37]

In mid-April and early May 1990, Rabbis Simon and Schindler wrote more letters to each other describing the state of affairs. In a letter dated April 12, 1990, Schindler proposed that he "begin the process of a formal inquiry with the CCAR Responsa Committee…requesting guidance for the deliberations of your regional New Congregation's Committee."[38] Simon and Schindler also discussed having Simon raise the topic of the applicant congregation at the 1990 summer Midwest Council regional board meeting. Schindler cautioned against turning the discussion into a debate, warning that the board should not take up the issue until Beth Adam received the application. Poetically, and clearly wanting to be fair and impartial toward Beth Adam, Schindler wrote, "Does not this almost constitute an acceptance or rejection of a proposal before the groom is ready to pop the question?"[39]

With Simon set to ask for a Responsum from the CCAR and rabbis from around the country having already submitted their opinions, the question of Beth Adam's application to the UAHC began to take a new form. Likewise, the Cincinnati rabbis and lay-leaders took up the issue. In a span of fewer than six months, Beth Adam's inquiry to

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[37] Rabbi Kamrass to Robert Chaiken, May 29, 1991, Rabbi Kamrass, Unprocessed Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[38] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Simon, April 12, 1990; and Robert Chaiken to Rabbi Simon, March 8, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[39] Ibid.

Rabbi Simon was turning into a far larger discussion, despite the fact that Beth Adam had neither amended its constitution nor applied to the Union.

**The Emerging Debate within the Reform Movement**

Representing the UAHC and as members of the CCAR, Rabbis Schindler, Simon, and Kaplan asked a *she'elah* (a question) to the CCAR Responsa Committee, stating:

> A Humanistic congregation is interested in joining the UAHC whose constitution provides in Article III (1) that 'any Jewish congregation'...may become a member; and in Article II (d) that it is among the objects of the Union "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism." Does this Humanistic congregation comply with these objectives? Its rabbi is a graduate of HUC-JIR and a member of the CCAR.[40]

Rabbi Gunther Plaut, then the chair of the CCAR Responsa Committee, wrote the *teshuvah* (response) to the question. For Plaut and the committee, there was no question that Beth Adam, which they referred to as the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ), was a Jewish congregation that was focused on the celebration of Jewish "festivals, life cycle events, etc."[41] The question that needed to be answered, however, was whether or not the Reform community could accept a congregation that viewed humanity and not a supernatural God as its ultimate reference point.[42]

To address this issue, Plaut dove into Beth Adam's liturgy and was concerned to find that, in line with the congregation's theological consistency, the liturgy did not contain the *Kiddush* (prayer thanking God for wine and a statement of God's special relationship with Israel), the *Kaddish* (prayer exalting God's greatness, associated with mourners), the *Barchu* (traditional call to worship God), nor the *Shema* (pan-ultimate expression of one God). Most psalms and songs expressing a belief in the Divine were

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[40] The CCAR Responsum was widely distributed beginning in early 1991 but it was not formally published until fall 1991. Gunther Plaut, CCAR Journal, fall 1991, 55-63.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

gone as well. Plaut was equally uneasy with Beth Adam's *hagaddah* (Passover prayer book), which replaced in the song *Echad Mi Yodea* the words "two tablets of the Covenant" with the words, "two people in the Garden of Eden."[43] This was a paramount example of Beth Adam's theology for Plaut because it demonstrated that the traditional concept of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jews, i.e., *mitzvot* - commandments, been replaced entirely by humans.[44] Additionally, Beth Adam substituted "all the universe" for "God" in the association with the number "one."[45]

In the Responsum, Plaut wondered if "polydoxy," the Reform philosophy that forwards that every individual has authority over his or her religious beliefs, and forwarded by HUC-JIR professor Dr. Alvin Reines, truly accepted Humanistic worship in place of worship of the Divine. The *Gates of Prayer*, the Reform prayer book, includes a Shabbat evening service (service six), which, for the most part, does not use the word "God" in English translations of the traditional Hebrew service. Plaut concludes that one could argue that the Reform Movement accepted Humanistic belief because the Reform prayer book had already published a religious service in which theological language is mostly omitted from the English. Yet Plaut also argues that the *Gates of Prayer's* sixth service is an attempt to allow for a polydoxy within a Reform synagogue. Thus, it is left to the individual worshiper to fill in the theistic meanings behind purposefully ambiguous English words like "Power." It is also important to note that the Hebrew in the sixth service does contain the traditional liturgy and God language. This attempt at polydoxy within the *Gates of Prayer* is further detailed in the explanatory book, *Gates of Understanding*, which specifically indicates that (emphasis added):

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *The Seder* (Cincinnati: Beth Adam, 1996), 38.

> Service Six for *Shabbat* Eve adheres to Reines' formula: not addressing God in the English sections; and employing Hebrew passages that have lost their literal meaning, to become symbolic and equivocal expressions for the modern Jew. The other services in *Gates of Prayer*, however, represent different theological positions, so that in sum the book affirms the freedom of choice inherent in Reform Judaism.[46]

Indeed, in his article, *Polydoxy and the Equivocal Service*, Reines warns Jews that no single Reform service should be understood as a statement of the principles or beliefs of Reform Judaism. He writes, "To identify a liberal religion with any of its services is to confuse an ocean with one of its waves."[47] In other words, it is one thing for an individual to have different conceptions of God within a Reform service, but it is another thing to assume that the Reform Movement accepts, as a part of its tradition, a congregation that removes theism entirely from its liturgy. Thus, through its diversity in language, the Reform prayer book allows for individual understandings of the Divine. Yet Beth Adam was different, as it chose to exclude all conceptions of God in its liturgy. It was, therefore, by Plaut's standards, outside the boundary of the Reform Movement.

According to Dr. Mark Washofsky, then the vice-chair of the CCAR Responsa committee, the committee fashioned a response by understanding the precedent in Reform Judaism. Washofsky explained, "The documents that Reform Judaism produced are our precedent. In this case, our documents are the platforms."[48] Additionally, Plaut systematically cites the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the 1935 Columbus Platform, and the 1976 Centenary Perspective, the combination of which shows that throughout the history of Reform Judaism, the framers of the movement's platforms have consistently and constantly maintained a strong belief in the God-idea. For the Reformers, the result of the

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[46] Lawrence A. Hoffman, editor. *Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah: Gates of Prayer*. (New York: UAHC, 1977), 98.
[47] Dr. Alvin J. Reines, *Polydox and the Equivocal Service, Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah: Gates of Prayer*. (New York: UAHC, 1977), 98.
[48] Dr. Mark Washofsky, interview with the author, June 14, 2006.

relationship between God and humans was the moral law and Torah.[49] For Plaut and the majority of the Responsa committee, Beth Adam's Humanistic Judaism was acceptable on an individual basis, but not on a congregational level. Again, Beth Adam's organizational system of beliefs was considered to be outside the theological boundaries of Reform Judaism.[50] Furthermore, Plaut explains to those who argued for Reform's principle of pluralism that "*yesh gevul*, there are limits. Reform Judaism cannot be everything or it will be nothing."[51]

Plaut's Responsum, however, was not unanimous. Three members of the committee, Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Rabbi Richard A. Block, and Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus, dissented, arguing for extending Reform's principle of pluralism to include Beth Adam. These dissenting members of the Responsa Committee were also concerned with the language of the UAHC constitution, which in Article III (1) allows "any Jewish congregation" to join. Abrams, Block, and Dreyfus believed that the UAHC, based on its constitution, could not refuse Beth Adam's application to the Union.

Plaut sent the Responsum and the dissents back to Schindler on October 24, 1990, and also sent it to Rabbi Simon and to Beth Adam.[52] Schindler was fascinated by the CCAR Responsum and dissents. In a series of letters between Schindler and Plaut, the two discussed the Responsum-writing process. Regarding the dissenting views, Schindler explained to Plaut, "I have been troubled for some time now about the lack of ideological

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[49] See: 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, 1935 Columbus Platform, 1976 Centenary Perspective and Gunther Plaut, CCAR Journal, fall 1991, pp. 55-63.
[50] Gunther Plaut, CCAR Journal, fall 1991, pp. 55-63.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Rabbi Plaut to Rabbi Schindler, October 24, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

cohesion within our movement."[53] Schindler continued to comment that it was clear that the divergent opinions held by the CCAR Responsa Committee members brought up an important overarching question: What are the theological beliefs of Reform Jews and what are the boundaries and limits of Reform Judaism?[54] Schindler was beginning to see that Beth Adam's application could be seen as a conduit to a larger discussion about the limits and boundaries of Reform Judaism.

Understandably, Rabbi Barr and the members of Beth Adam were disappointed by the CCAR Responsum.[55] They decided that they needed their own Responsum from someone who supported their application to the UAHC.[56] Barr consulted his former professor and friend, Dr. Mihaly, who agreed to write his own Responsum in favor of Beth Adam. Subsequently, Barr wrote a letter on Beth Adam's behalf asking Mihaly if Beth Adam qualified for membership to the UAHC "in light of the purposes and goals…as stated in [the UAHC's] constitution and by-laws."[57] Mihaly forwarded Rabbi Schindler Beth Adam's request along with a handwritten letter commenting:

> One would hardly expect of Gunther (Plaut) to resist the appeal of *Yesh Gevul* (written in Hebrew) with its overtones of "*Es Ist Strong Verboten*" (it is a strong prohibition) especially if he is the acknowledged as the authority to set the limits. And that is the heart of the issue – not whether there are limits, but who is to define them. Since there is now an official *Teshuva* on the subject, the matter is now an issue. I am confident that you will handle it with your usual diplomatic skill…I have decided to write an extensive Responsum on the subject.[58]

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[53] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Plaut, November 27, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[54] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Plaut, November 14, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[55] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.

[56] Rabbi Simon to Rabbi Schindler, November 24, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

[57] Rabbi Barr to Dr. Mihaly, November 8, 1990, Beth Adam papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[58] Rabbi Mihaly to Rabbi Schindler, November 24, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box , folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

As promised, Mihaly wrote his own Responsum to Barr's question. The 14-page reply was a vigorous critique of the CCAR *teshuvah*, and Mihaly sent it to Barr and Beth Adam as well as to Rabbis Plaut, Schindler, and Simon. Mihaly also gave the Responsum to his colleagues at HUC, specifically to Drs. Meyer, Greengus, and Washofsky.

Mihaly's Responsum is masterfully written. Mihaly concludes that the UAHC's constitutional language made the question of Beth Adam's application a legal, not *halakhic,* issue. That said, Mihaly argues that the Union's constitutional language gives full religious autonomy to its members—and that decisions regarding liturgy, ceremonial practice, and theological views are not under the purview of the UAHC board. As such, he accurately recognizes that there is no theological litmus test for member congregations; the only way a member congregation can be removed from the UAHC is by failing to pay MUM dues (the UAHC's proportional dues program). Mihaly concludes that since Beth Adam is wholly liberal and has HUC-JIR ordained rabbi and members that are involved with Reform institutions, rejection of membership because of theological views would violate the intent of the UAHC constitution. With regard to pluralism, Mihaly encouraged the Reform Movement to strive toward inclusion instead of exclusion, and also added that Beth Adam's liturgy and philosophy are not beyond the boundary of Reform pluralism. Mihaly concluded that Beth Adam qualified for membership in the UAHC.[59]

[59] Eugene Mihaly, "Qualifications for Membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations: A Responsum," December 7, 1990, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mihaly was correct to note that the UAHC Constitution, as amended in 1977, failed to fully define the theological boundaries of the Reform Movement.[60] However, the problem with Mihaly's argument is that the UAHC Constitution is largely focused on the structure of the organization and not in defining Reform Judaism. Instead, the CCAR Platforms and prayer book are the documents that Reform Jews generally look toward to help define Reform Judaism. As previously noted, the Platforms clearly explain that God and the worship of God are central to Reform Judaism.

Mihaly correctly asserts the limit of the UAHC to oversee the practices of member congregations, but he failed to recognize that an applicant congregation does not have the same rights as a member congregation.[61] Applicant congregations to the UAHC have no such autonomy—their acceptance into the Union is under the sole purview of the UAHC board, and they could easily be rejected for theological, political, religious practice, or any other reasons.

In a congregational meeting held at Beth Adam on November 30, 1990, Barr explained to his congregants that Beth Adam's potential application was truly testing the nature and the philosophy of the Reform Movement.[62] Nevertheless, it was clear from Barr's notes that, while concerned about the CCAR Responsum, he still felt that Beth Adam had a place within the Reform Movement and likely believed that Mihaly's

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[60] For the purposes of this thesis, I am referencing the UAHC Constitution, which was amended in 1977. This was the constitution in existence at the time of Beth Adam's application. As will be discussed in chapter 5, the UAHC's mission statement was changed after 1994. The new mission statement clearly explains that one of the missions of the Reform Movement is to foster "*avodah*," the worship of God.

[61] At the same time, this very issue shows the weakness of the UAHC Constitution, because the boundaries of what is theologically acceptable and not acceptable are porous. This author does not know of any member congregation that has been ousted from the UAHC based on theological differences. However, based on the UAHC Constitution, if a member congregation became Humanistic, the UAHC would have no recourse for removing the congregation without changing its own by-laws first.

[62] Robert Barr, "Reform Judaism and Beth Adam," personal notes, Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, OH.

arguments would be accepted by a wide range of Reform rabbis and leaders. The congregation followed suit, and on January 7, 1991 ordered 3,500 copies of Mihaly's Responsum to be printed and mailed.[63] Beth Adam sent Mihaly's work to every member of the CCAR, every president of UAHC-affiliated congregations, the 200 members and friends of Beth Adam, the members of the UAHC's national and regional boards, the 100 board members of the HUC, the HUC Library, the American Jewish Archives, and the entire HUC-JIR faculty. Beth Adam also kept copies to be distributed by special request.[64] Between the wide dissemination of the CCAR Responsum to the members of the CCAR and the leaders of the Reform Movement and Beth Adam's dissemination of Mihaly's Responsum, the question of Beth Adam's application had gone, in exactly one year, from a small conversation between Simon and Barr to a full-fledged national debate.

**The Road to Making an Application**

The CCAR Responsum and Mihaly's Responsum garnered huge levels of responses from rabbis, professors, and lay-leaders from around the world. Beth Adam's archives and the American Jewish Archives are filled with letters thanking Mihaly for the Responsum. Mihaly, Schindler, Plaut, and Barr received hundreds of letters in support and in opposition to Beth Adam's application. Reform rabbis began presenting the issue to their congregation, study groups and auxiliary organizations. As a result, many of the auxiliary organizations and religious school classes wrote letters to Barr, Mihaly, Plaut, and or Schindler to express their views. For example, Schindler received two letters, in

[63] "Cost of Producing and Mailing Dr. Mihaly's Responsum," Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati OH.
[64] Ibid.

support and in opposition, from a seventh grade religious school class from Temple Israel, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.[65]

There also continued to be a semi-private debate between Mihaly and Plaut, both of whom were writing letters to Schindler and copying each other as well as Beth Adam and the CCAR Responsum Committee. Dr. Michael Meyer, a Jewish historian at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, also became involved in the Beth Adam debate. In December 1990, Meyer wrote to Mihaly a three-page letter dismantling Mihaly's argument point by point. Meyer's letter to Mihaly was comprehensive, and Meyer copied the letter to both Schindler and Plaut. In an e-mail sent to this author, Meyer explained that after Mihaly received the letter from Meyer, Mihaly told Meyer that he was *Ba-ayt le-kanter* (writing this to be provocative). According to Meyer, "he (Mihaly) seemed especially upset that I had sent copies to Plaut and to Schindler."[66]

Meyer had an earnest interest in questions concerning the boundaries of Reform Judaism. It is important to understand that in 1988 Meyer published *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in America*, his seminal work which all Cincinnati rabbinical students are required to read. Meyer's research made him keenly aware of the issues pertaining to the Reform Movement's past, present and the future. Meyer explained to this author that he "felt strongly that the (Reform) movement had to have strong boundaries for the sake of its own definition . . . my feeling was that orthodoxy and Reform did not go together."[67] Meyer added, "Humanism represented a form of orthodoxy when it [Beth Adam] prohibited the mention of God in its liturgy, as

[65] Letter from Class to Rabbi Schindler, November 24, 1990, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[66] Michael Meyer to the author, July 24, 2006.
[67] Michael Meyer, interview with the author, July 24, 2006.

opposed to a liberal view which said, 'today we will have a Humanistic service, and tomorrow we will have a theistic service'."[68] To be clear, Meyer was not opposed, per say, to Humanistic philosophy on its own. Rather, he felt that the strict adherence to Humanism in the form of a non-theistic liturgy was tantamount to orthodoxy. In essence, Beth Adam was unwavering in its Humanistic dogmatism. For Meyer, dogmatism equates to orthodoxy and is neither liberal nor within the boundaries of the Reform Movement.[69]

On March 13, 1991, Meyer addressed the HUC-JIR professors, students, and Honorary Doctorate recipients at the annual HUC Founder's Day Service. His address, titled *Lines in the Sand*, used the title as a metaphor about the Reform Movement and the questions of boundaries. In it, Meyer specifically mentions, although not by name, Beth Adam and its potential application to the UAHC. In the address, Meyer explained that allowing a congregation that did not believe in God into the UAHC was the same as saying that the UAHC itself was simply an organization of voluntarily affiliated congregations as opposed to a religious movement that had specific lines and boundaries drawn in the sand. According to Meyer, some of his colleagues thought that his address was inappropriate; however, Dr. Gottschalk (President of HUC at the time) told Meyer privately that he agreed with Meyer's assessment.[70] Later, on Thursday, May 30, 1990, Meyer and Dr. Chanan Brichto held a debate before the HUC-JIR Board of Governors, again discussing the boundaries of Reform Judaism.[71]

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

On May 29, 1991, five of the Cincinnati Reform rabbis, representing Cincinnati's four Reform synagogues, wrote to Robert Chaiken, the president of the UAHC Midwest Council. The rabbi's letter explained to Chaiken that none of the Reform rabbis had a problem with Beth Adam as a synagogue or Barr as a capable and well-respected colleague. As previously mentioned, the rabbis voiced a strong opposition to Beth Adam's "possible" application to the UAHC. Interestingly, the rabbis echoed Dr. Meyer's arguments.[72] Kamrass and Walter confirmed that they spoke frequently to Dr. Meyer about Beth Adam's application.[73] It is possible that the letter from the rabbis consciously echoed Dr. Meyer's arguments while also expressing their fear that despite their opposition, if Beth Adam were accepted into the Union, they would have no choice but to include Humanistic Judaism within the high school curriculum.[74]

By early September 1991, Beth Adam's leadership was debating how to sell UAHC membership and UAHC dues to the congregation's membership. Beth Adam still needed to have a majority vote to change its by-laws and formally make an application to the UAHC. In a series of letters and faxes between Jim Cummins, Jim Salinger, David Cooper, and Rabbi Barr, the leaders of Beth Adam agreed that they could sell the idea of membership in the UAHC as a capital investment: First, membership in the UAHC gave Beth Adam credibility as a Reform congregation and opened the door to a larger number of members. Second, membership to the UAHC gave Beth Adam access to HUC-JIR.[75] Barr pushed the members of Beth Adam to join the Union in his Rosh Hashanah sermon on September 8, 1991. Later, in a special meeting of Beth Adam's members held on

[72] Cincinnati Rabbis to Robert Chaiken, May 29, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[73] Rabbis Kamrass and Walter, interview with the author, June 29, 2006.
[74] Cincinnati Rabbis to Robert Chaiken, May 29, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[75] Jim Salinger to Jim Cummins, September 4, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

September 29, 1991, Jim Cummins, then the president of Beth Adam, led the congregation in a series of measures. The congregation's members voted to change Article XXII of Beth Adam's constitutional by-laws to allow the "Congregation to join or become a member of a religious organization, subject to the approval of an affirmative vote of a majority of the Congregation."[76] Out of a possible 191 members, the amendment to Beth Adam's by-laws passed by a vote of 113 for and 1 against.[77] Then the members of Beth Adam took a vote to allow the board of trustees to "prepare and file an application for membership in the UAHC."[78] The vote passed with 111 votes for approval and 2 votes against approval.[79]

Beth Adam's leadership immediately put together its application to the UAHC and also included an introductory brochure of the congregation, a brochure titled *A Concept of God and A Statement on Liturgy*, which described the nature of Beth Adam's religious practice, a copy of Beth Adam's strategic plan that had been passed by the board in May of 1991, and a sample of Beth Adam's liturgical materials.[80] Later the congregation created another packet for UAHC Board members and also included a "frequently asked questions" section.[81]

According to Barr, Rabbis Simon and Schindler had explained to Beth Adam that in order to make an application to the UAHC, Beth Adam needed to submit its application in person to the lay-chairperson of the UAHC. Simon and Schindler explained that the next New Congregations Committee of the UAHC was being held at

[76] Beth Adam minutes, "Special Meeting of the Members of Beth Adam, Inc.," September, 29, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Barr to UAHC Board Members and Concerned Others, November, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[81] Ibid.

the 1991 Biennial (the biennial convention of the UAHC, with around 5000 participants in attendance).[82] So, on Friday morning, November 1, 1991 Rabbi Barr and Jim Cummins flew to Baltimore, Maryland to attend the UAHC Biennial.[83] Barr recalled that the Biennial was an incredible sight. For someone who had been associated with the SHJ for so long, the UAHC was a much larger organization and the sheer magnitude of the Biennial impressed both Barr and Cummins.[84]

The highlight of Barr's and Cummins's trip was to be on Saturday afternoon, when they were to present their application to the UAHC chairman. On Saturday morning, Barr and Cummins attended the large Biennial Shabbat morning service. After the service, the President of the UAHC delivered the *Presidential Keynote Address*, a "state of the Union" in which Schindler outlined the major educational visions, political agendas, and issues facing the Reform Movement. The convention hall was standing room only for the keynote address, with some 4,300 chairs that had been set up for Saturday morning services.[85] Neither Barr nor Cummins was prepared for the content of Schindler's speech.

In the middle of the keynote speech, Schindler addressed the issue of the theological boundaries of the Reform Movement. Schindler explained to the convention attendants:

> "The elasticity of our Judaism has undoubtedly produced the elasticity of our numbers, but stretched too far it can rip us apart. . . The parameters of Reform are especially difficult to draw. Which beliefs have a valid place in Reform Judaism and which do not? Is there *any* ideology that is beyond the pale of Reform? Can we accommodate all theological stances, just so long as they do not claim authoritative revelation or seek to impose their perceptions or practices on all of us? Just what is essential to a Reform

[82] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

> outlook, what is optional – and what, if anything, is forbidden . . . These questions may soon confront us in a less conjectural and more concrete form requiring a resolution. There are, as you know, a half-score of congregations in our land whose leaders and members identify themselves as adherents of a Humanistic Judaism. Their liturgy eliminates all references to God; not even the Sh'ma is included. . . Can we accept one of these congregations which has indicated its desire to join the Union, though it omits for ideological reasons all mention of God? . . . I myself have encouraged this congregation to make its application, not because I have in any sense prejudged this controversy, but rather because I deem the debate which it will generate a boon to our community."[86]

Neither Barr nor Cummins had known that Schindler was going to mention Beth Adam's application. Furthermore, from Barr and Cummins' perspective, it was a rare experience to be the focus of comments in a room of over 4,500 people.[87] Schindler's comments truly made Beth Adam's application a larger national debate for Reform Judaism. It is clear to this author that Schindler viewed Beth Adam's application as a way to develop discussions about the nature of Reform Judaism and about the belief and the nature of Reform Jewish belief.

As Schindler explained to the convention's attendees, the Reform Movement was already "engaged in a clarification of Reform Jewish boundaries, an exploration of the Reform Jewish tradition, [and] a celebration of Reform Jewish identity."[88] Thus, Beth Adam's application did not begin the discussion. Rather, for Schindler, Beth Adam's application served as a focal point and an entrée into a larger conversation and debate. The only problem with this, however, is that Beth Adam was also used, in some respects, as a pawn by Schindler and the UAHC.[89] The media picked up on the story immediately

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[86] Rabbi Schindler, Presidential Keynote Address, November 2, 1991, 8-9. Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[87] Robert Barr's address to the Beth Adam Board, "Beth Adam and UAHC," November 9, 1991, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[88] Rabbi Schindler, Presidential Keynote Address, November 2, 1991, 8-9. Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[89] One bizarre feature of Schindler's private communication to Rabbi Pinsky (June 18, 1992) is that it shows that the process Schindler laid out for the UAHC staff and board members underlines the fact that Beth Adam did not need to submit its application to the national chairman of the UAHC at the 1991 Biennial. Rather, the UAHC created a reason for Beth Adam to submit its application at the National Biennial, and then Schindler used the application as an element of his keynote address.

after Beth Adam submitted its application. *The New York Times*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, and the PR Newswire all published articles about the emerging debate within Reform Judaism.[90]

According to Rabbi Wine, he and the SHJ's leadership found out about Beth Adam's application to the UAHC from reading the *New York Times* article.[91] Interestingly, Wine and the SHJ's leadership sent news releases to media outlets throughout the country condemning Beth Adam's application to the UAHC and arguing that Reform Judaism and Humanistic Judaism were incompatible. Ironically echoing Plaut's Responsum, Wine said, "A movement that stands for everything stands for nothing."[92] It is clear to this author, through a LexisNexis news-search, that the SHJ was jumping on the news bandwagon. The news of Beth Adam's application to the UAHC was the most publicity that any Humanistic Jewish congregation had received since Wine was on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1965.

**The Formal Process: The Regional New Congregation's Committee, the Regional Board of the UAHC, and the Year Hiatus.**

On June 18, 1992, Rabbi Schindler sent a memo to Rabbi Stephen Pinsky, who had replaced Rabbi Simon as the regional director of the UAHC Midwest Council, summarizing and reviewing the process by which the UAHC would proceed with Beth Adam's application.[93] Evident throughout Schindler's communication is that while he was interested in the debate that Beth Adam's application would create, he also wanted to

[90] Ari L. Goldman, *Reform Request*, November 16, 1991, Section 1, Page 26, Column 5, National Desk.
[91] Rabbi Wine, interview with the author, July 6, 2006.
[92] Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Humanistic Judaism and Reform Judaism Incompatible, says Humanist Rabbi," November 20, 1991. PR Newswire Association, Inc.
[93] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Pinsky, June 18, 1992. Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

ensure no one could come back afterward and say that the UAHC had treated Beth Adam unfairly. Schindler stressed to Rabbi Pinsky the following message: "On every level, the representatives of Beth Adam should receive a full hearing, nor should the jury ever be stacked against them."[94] Schindler added, "The entire process must be open and fair."

It is questionable as to whether or not the values and the process that Schindler laid out for the regional director, the regional board, and the UAHC vice presidents were followed through the regional level. Furthermore, in the meeting between Barr, Schindler, and Cummins, Schindler outlined to Beth Adam's leaders that he wanted to create a "debate" between leading scholars to study "the implications of Beth Adam's application to the UAHC."[95] In notes that Cummins took during his communications with Schindler, Schindler had explained that "the debate was supposed to be "Meyer v. Mihaly" and not simply a debate about the limits of the UAHC Constitution. According to Cummins's notes, Schindler promised that the debate would take place on the regional level before the National New Congregations Committee and, potentially, the national board of the UAHC.[96]

The process itself was fairly straightforward. First, the Midwest Council's New Congregations Committee held a hearing about Beth Adam's application on July 26, 1992 in the Mayerson Hall at HUC-JIR. The committee's members were Linda Cohen, Milton Greenbaum, Janet Greenbaum, Nelson Cohen, Sunny Cohen, Jenny Broh, and Neil Feder. Robert Chaiken and Rabbi Pinsky sat as ex-officio members of the committee. The committee heard from Rabbi Barr, Mr. Cummins, and Mrs. Rosenberg—the representatives of Beth Adam. Afterward, the committee heard from Rabbi Kamrass,

[94] Ibid.
[95] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[96] Jim Cummins to File, November, 4, 1992, Beth Adam Papers, Beth Adam.

the senior rabbi of Isaac M. Wise Temple; Mr. Richard Manheimer, Temple Sholom's president; and the vice-president of Rockdale Temple, Rachel Schild. These speakers represented the interests of Cincinnati congregations, whose rabbis and boards and joined together to write letters and pass resolutions opposing Beth Adam's application.[97]

There are some interesting things to note about the July 26, 1992 hearing. First, Beth Adam's representatives were not allowed to hear the testimony of the Cincinnati congregations that opposed Beth Adam's application. Mr. Chaiken, the president of the UAHC Region, promised Beth Adam that he would provide its leadership with the "essence" of the opposing side's remarks.[98] However, Pinsky and Chaiken only sent Beth Adam a one-paragraph summary of the 127-page transcript. Neither Rabbi Pinsky nor Chaiken produced the entire transcript of the hearing for Beth Adam, despite the fact that Cummins and Barr had requested the transcript in multiple letters and phone calls and after Pinsky and Chaiken were directed to do so by Rabbi Schindler and Mr. Melvin Merians, then the lay-chair of the UAHC.[99] Second, members of the committee, specifically Mr. Nelson Cohen and Rabbi Pinsky, made comments to the Cincinnati congregational representatives about Beth Adam's presentation, while Beth Adam was not permitted to have knowledge of the testimony of the Cincinnati Reform congregational group. The transcript also reveals that the doors to the meeting area remained open during Beth Adam's presentation while the Cincinnati Reform contingent

[97] Linda Tuttle, Notary Public State of Ohio, "Hearing: Midwest Council, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New Congregations' Committee: To Consider the Application for Membership of Beth Adam Congregation," Cincinnati, Ohio, July 26, 1992, unpublished papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH,

[98] Ibid., p. 74.

[99] Jim Cummins to Rabbi Pinsky, September 14, 1992, Beth Adam Papers: Cincinnati, Ohio and Melvin S. Merians to Schindler, undated, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A, box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13; and Jim Cummins to Rabbi Barr, November 4, 1992, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

waited outside. Yet, when the Cincinnati Reform group presented, the doors were closed and the Beth Adam contingent could not hear the proceedings. The delegations were treated differently. Ultimately, this meant that the Cincinnati Reform group could respond to some of Beth Adam's arguments but Beth Adam could not respond to the arguments leveled against the congregation.[100] The meeting was weighted against Beth Adam by Pinsky, the UAHC representative who should have remained neutral. Furthermore, because Beth Adam could not have access to the transcript, the process itself appears to have been closed and secretive, which seems to violate Schindler's intention.

Third, in Rabbi Pinsky's re-telling of Beth Adam's testimony to the Reform congregational delegation, he expressed frustration with Beth Adam's presentation of its theology, explaining, "it was almost a certain degree of arrogance (Beth Adam's) that said, 'well, you people (the committee) are not really qualified to debate theology with our principles.'"[101] Ironically, neither Pinsky nor the UAHC New Congregation's Committee asked the theological questions that Rabbi Kamrass raised in his presentation to the committee. The committee failed to ask Beth Adam whether members of Beth Adam were prohibited from saying the *shema*, the mourners *kaddish*, or the name of God in any of their services. Had the process been more open and had Kamrass and the Reform congregational representatives been present at Beth Adam's presentation, or vice versa, this issue would have come to the foreground quickly. The transcript also shows that either the committee members had not received the detailed addenda to Beth Adam's

[100] Linda Tuttle, Notary Public State of Ohio, "Hearing: Midwest Council, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New Congregations Committee: To Consider the Application for Membership of Beth Adam Congregation," Cincinnati, Ohio, July 26, 1992, p. 119.
[101] Ibid.

application (which Beth Adam had printed, made copies of for each member of the board, and sent to Rabbi Pinsky) or that the members of the committee had failed to read the information. Either way, the lay-members of the committee were woefully uninformed about Beth Adam's application, the Plaut CCAR Responsum and dissents, and Mihaly's Responsum. This is evident from the questions the committee asked. The committee members spent an inordinate amount of time focused on the issue of whether or not Beth Adam was a "Jewish" congregation as opposed to a "Jews for Jesus" congregation. This issue was already answered in Plaut's CCAR Responsum. The committee failed to grasp the true theological boundary questions during Beth Adam's presentation, i.e., whether or not Beth Adam was a Reform synagogue.[102]

The New Congregations Committee itself, however, had no power to deny acceptance. After the hearing ended, the committee submitted a negative report to the Regional Board, whose task it was to make a final decision.[103] The Regional Board took up the issue on November 13, 1992 in a special meeting of the UAHC Midwest regional board, which was held in downtown Cincinnati, at a hotel, a few days before the UAHC Regional Biennial (held in the off years from the UAHC Biennial). At this hearing, however, Beth Adam's representatives and the Cincinnati Reform representatives were allowed to speak and listen to the opposing sides. Furthermore, Robert Chaiken, in his role as president of the region and at the request of Rabbi Schindler and Beth Adam, asked Rabbi Zola, then the dean of admissions for HUC-JIR, and Dr. Meyer, to make presentations, in favor of and in opposition to, respectively, Beth Adam's application.[104]

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[102] Rabbi Pinsky to Patricia Rosenberg, August 5, 1992, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[103] UAHC, Resolution of the Special Meeting of the Board of the Midwest Council, Union of American Hebrew Congregations to Discuss the Application of Congregation Beth Adam.
[104] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, June 26, 2006.

They did not ask Mihaly or Plaut to speak, as they had already written their Responsum. Instead, they wanted to open the process to other academics and interested parties.

Dr. Meyer was asked to lend his voice in opposition to Beth Adam because of the stances he took when he successfully challenged Mihaly's Responsum, his address to the HUC community at the Founders Day, and the debate before the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. Meyer's arguments against Beth Adam's admission to the UAHC centered on three main points: First, the UAHC Constitution sates a belief in Benign Providence; second, all Reform liturgy and platforms express God as a central component to Reform Judaism; third, Beth Adam's exclusion of theistic language was dogmatic and outside the boundaries of Reform Judaism.[105] Meyer's presentation was thoughtful and packed with historical evidence.

For Zola, the November regional board meeting was the first time he had spoken out on behalf of Beth Adam's inclusion in the UAHC. It is important to note that Zola had never been involved with Beth Adam and that Beth Adam's theology did not represent his own ideological beliefs.[106] For Zola, the event was a turning point in his rabbinical career because it was also the first time he had made a controversial public statement. Nonetheless, he spoke opposite to Dr. Meyer who was one of Zola's Ph.D. advisors. Furthermore, Zola's own rabbi, Rabbi Walter, and synagogue, Temple Sholom, had both made public statements against Beth Adam's application. Years later, Zola believes that there is continued fallout from his participation in the controversy: "There

[105] Michael Meyer, "Why Beth Adam Should Not Be Admitted to the UAHC," Personal files of Rabbi Kamrass, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[106] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, July 26, 2006.

are, and have been, people who have maligned me because of this (speaking on behalf of Beth Adam) or have wanted to make me an enemy of God."[107]

Titled "A Case of Everything or Nothing," Zola's presentation to the regional board argued a detailed and poignant refutation of many of the arguments being made against Beth Adam. Zola pointed out that, while radical, Beth Adam's educational program exerted incredible energy toward helping its members define and struggle with their own concepts of God. Zola also argued that the Reform Movement had itself been radical in changing its own liturgy, accepting Einhorn's changes to the *Amidah* (central prayer in a Jewish service), which effectively removed the concept of the resurrection of the dead for theological reasons. In essence, Reform also had elements of radicalism as a part of its history.

Zola also questioned how a Humanistic congregation could not be acceptable when the UAHC had recently published a book titled *Finding God*, by Rabbis Rifat Sonsino and then vice-president of the UAHC, Daniel Syme, arguing that Humanistic belief was acceptable within the Reform Movement.[108] Ultimately, Zola's argument focused less on theology than on practice. He asked the UAHC regional board not view Beth Adam's application as a polarizing event in Reform Judaism, for which the UAHC Board had to draw a boundary. Instead, he succinctly made the case that Beth Adam was more like the Reform Movement than not in its practices (Shabbat and festival services, encouraging members to celebrate Judaism in the home, reading Torah, engaging youth and adults in learning, supporting Israel, and wanting to be involved in youth programming). Thus, he maintained that those seeking to exclude Beth Adam (Plaut,

[107] Ibid.
[108] Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme. *Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses.* (New York: UAHC, 1986) pp. 118-128.

Meyer, and the Cincinnati congregations) were viewing the congregation in an incomplete and divisive fashion that did not take into account the full scope of Beth Adam's practices and educational opportunities.[109]

According to Zola, Rabbi Pinsky and some of the regional board members vehemently argued against him for taking the stance that he did. Pinsky even questioned Zola and Barr about what they believed the use of the word God on their ordination certificates meant and challenged how they could be rabbis while questioning God. Zola responded, "Well, I can tell you what it means to me. But, if my name was Baruch Spinoza it would mean something else. If it was Fromm, it would be something else."[110] Zola further explained to this author, "Unfortunately, the association with Beth Adam, for some, made me a pariah."[111]

Pariah or not, Zola's arguments must have been extraordinarily persuasive, as the regional board voted not to recommend membership by a vote of only 10 to 8.[112] In an interview with this author, both Rabbis Walter and Kamrass commented that they felt that the vote was as close as it was because of Zola's presentation.[113] Yet, while as close as the vote was, it was still a vote against Beth Adam. Neither Zola nor Barr felt that the board meeting had been handled fairly. Zola explained, "The feel of it was very heavy handed . . . Rabbi Pinsky (Director of the UAHC Midwest Council at the time) was dead set against Beth Adam."[114]

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[109] Rabbi Gary P. Zola, "A Case of Everything or Nothing," Beth Adam Papers: Cincinnati, Ohio.
[110] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, July 26, 2006.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Beverly Weissenburger, minutes of the Midwest Council Regional Biennial Meeting, November 15, 1992, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[113] Rabbis Kamrass and Walter, interview with the author, June 29, 2006.
[114] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, July 26, 2006.

Beth Adam's leaders decided to appeal the decision of the regional board to the National New Congregations Committee and the national board. The National New Congregations Committee was the third step in the process of Beth Adam's application. Like the regional committee, the process necessitated that the national committee make a recommendation to the national board. Afterward, if Beth Adam's application was given a negative recommendation, Beth Adam could appeal the decision of New Congregations Committee to the UAHC Board. The UAHC Board was the final arbiter of acceptance or rejection from the Union. Yet, feeling deflated and exhausted from the already two-year debate and application process, Beth Adam's board requested that its membership request be postponed for one year.[115] Thus, during 1993 and into the spring 1994, the Beth Adam application was not considered by the UAHC. The UAHC determined that Beth Adam's application would be discussed after the requested year hiatus at the next New Congregations Committee meeting and the UAHC Board of Trustees meeting on June 12, 1994.[116] In the meantime, both Beth Adam and its opponents prepared to debate the application. Similarly, Schindler, UAHC leaders, and rabbis from around the country continued to make Beth Adam's application a focal point in the discussions about the boundaries of the Reform Movement.

**The Final Vote**

The New Congregations Committee of the UAHC scheduled a meeting for the morning of June 11, 1994 at the Capital Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the meeting was to make a recommendation to the UAHC Board concerning Beth Adam's membership application. Then, in the evening of the same day, the UAHC Board

[115] Rabbi Pinsky to Rabbi Kamrass, March 2, 1993, Rabbi Kamrass' Papers: Cincinnati, Ohio.
[116] Stanley R. Loeb to Rabbi Barr, March 3, 1993, Beth Adam Papers: Cincinnati, Ohio.

scheduled a meeting to debate Beth Adam's application. The final vote was taken on June 12, 1994.

According to Barr and Cummins' notes prior to the regional board meeting in 1992, Schindler had promised them that the UAHC Board would hear a "Meyer v. Mihaly" debate while explaining the application process.[117] Indeed, in interviews, both Barr and Mrs. Rosenberg explained to this author that based on Schindler's earlier promises, they had expected a similar type of debate on the national level as had existed between Dr. Meyer and Rabbi Zola on the regional level—both of whom had been invited by the UAHC to speak on the issue.

Yet, in the months leading up to the National board meeting, a series of letters went back and forth between Rabbi Barr, Mr. Cummins, and Rabbis Syme and Schindler discussing the format of the debate. The UAHC no longer agreed to invite and pay for scholars to speak in support of Beth Adam's acceptance. Instead, the Union's leadership, under the direction of Rabbis Schindler and Syme as well as Melvin Merians, wanted Beth Adam to provide and pay for two pro-speakers, while the UAHC would provide and pay for two con-speakers. From the perspective of the UAHC, the Union's regional board had already rejected Beth Adam. Beth Adam had the onus to explain why the decision of the regional board should be overturned. Thus, they should pay for their own representatives to attend the meeting. From Beth Adam's perspective, the change in the format meant that the process had deviated from Schindler's original explanation.

Beth Adam's leadership immediately objected to the set-up of the debate. Beth Adam did not want the UAHC to pay for its representatives to speak. Rather, it believed that the process had become more adversarial than academic. As Rabbi Zola explained to

[117] Jim Cummins to File, November 4, 1992, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

this author, " [Rabbi] Danny [Syme said] you can either speak as one of theirs or not at all. . .That was the only way that they would allow me to speak. I could not say my opinions as a Reform Jew."[118] Zola further explained that when he spoke to Rabbi Syme about how the debate was structured, Syme confirmed to Zola that first "the Union was going to speak and then Beth Adam was going to speak. . .The whole way that it was set up was that it was the Union vs. Beth Adam."[119] Zola was uncomfortable speaking on behalf of the congregation, as Beth Adam's religious practices were not his motive for speaking. Instead, he wanted to express his vision of the plurality of Reform and the parameters of Reform Judaism that might embrace Beth Adam. Considering the framework set by the UAHC, Zola chose not to speak on behalf of Beth Adam. Zola also explained that once it became a "we v. them" argument, he believed that the decision had already been made.[120]

On the other hand, according to Mr. Chaiken, the structure of the debate was fair: the UAHC's Regional New Congregations Committee and Board had already voted against Beth Adam. Thus, for Chaiken, the debate was structured to represent the UAHC's regional decisions.[121] If this were the case, neither Schindler nor Syme ever explained this concept to Cummins, Barr, or Zola in the letters that were exchanged prior to the board meeting.

Rabbis Syme and Schindler chose Dr. Michael Meyer and Dr. Lawrence Hoffman (professor of Liturgy at HUC-JIR New York) to speak against Beth Adam on the UAHC's behalf. Beth Adam was allowed two speakers. It was left up to the congregation

[118] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, July 26, 2006.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Robert Chaiken, interview with the author, November 13, 2006.

as to whether they wanted to invite and pay for an academic to present the congregation's position. Beth Adam stubbornly opted to pay for Barr and Cummins to attend the meeting as the congregation's representatives instead of inviting an academic speaker as one of the two speakers.

Curiously, in a letter from Schindler to Barr, dated April 25, 1994, Schindler explained that "it was a source of embarrassment to learn that without authority Dan Syme sent letters to others who are to speak at our Board meeting offering to pay their expenses."[122] Schindler concluded, "I make it only proper for us to make the like offer to Beth Adam."[123] However, in subsequent letters between Barr and Syme, Barr explained to Syme that Beth Adam declined Schindler's offer of reimbursement. Instead, Beth Adam had hoped that the movement's leaders would invite representatives of Jewish academia to present arguments for inclusion to the Board of Trustees.[124] Beth Adam was inflexible in its principle, even after the UAHC agreed to pay for Beth Adam's representatives.

On May 20, 1994, the UAHC sent out a press release concerning the upcoming vote on Beth Adam's application. The press release presented the vote on Beth Adam's application as a vote on whether the Reform Movement could accept a congregation that had no belief in God. The press release also went into great detail as to why the local Cincinnati congregations objected to Beth Adam's application. It concluded by saying that Barr would present for Beth Adam, while Hoffman and Meyer would speak against

[122] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Barr, April 25, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Rabbi Barr to Rabbi Syme, June 3, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Beth Adam's affiliation.[125] One must question why the Union decided to send out a press release. This author doubts that the UAHC would have sent out the press release had they expected the vote to turn out in favor of Beth Adam.

Local and national newspapers such as the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Forward*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsday*, and *The New York Times* picked up the story for their newspapers. This author's favorite article title, "Baruch Ata Ado...Not!," was printed in *The Forward*. The article in *The New York Times*, titled "Temple with No Place for God Seeks a Place," had 1,306 words.[126]

The stage was set. Beth Adam was finally going to have its application heard by the Board of the UAHC. Leading up to the board meeting, the national board and New Congregations Committee received the CCAR Responsum, Mihaly's Responsum, and a "letter" framing the issue from Rabbi Schindler and Melvin Merians.[127] On Friday, June 10, 1994, Schindler gave a short sermon in which he gave a "subtle hint" on his stance vis-à-vis Beth Adam's application. That said, by the New Congregation's Committee meeting Schindler himself had not fully spoken on the issue. Rabbi Barr spoke first, arguing once again for an inclusive and pluralistic conception of Reform. After Barr spoke, Meyer presented once again on the history of the Reform Movement and the importance of God belief in the course of the Jewish experience:

> Our community has a sense of Jewish history. We consider ourselves part of a people that has lived and died for God. Our ancestors spoke the Shema when the Romans tortured them to death to keep them from teaching Torah, when the Crusaders gave them the choice of the cross or the sword. When they entered the gas chambers some of them still sang: Ani Ma-amin. How can we cut ourselves off from them by saying that in our

[125] UAHC news release, "Leaders of Reform Judaism to Vote on Admissions of Congregation that Omits Reference to God," May 20, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[126] David Gonzalez, "Temple with No God Seeks a Place," June 11, 1994. *The New York Times*, New York.
[127] Rabbi Schindler to Rabbi Syme and Melvin Merians, February 10, 1994, Manuscript Collection no. 630, SERIES A., box 5, folder 5, Rabbi Alexander Schindler Papers 1961-1996, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, 13.

> movement it doesn't matter whether or not a congregation ever utters the name of God in prayer.[128]

After Meyer spoke, Mr. Cummins explained why, from his personal perspective, Beth Adam's application should have been accepted. Finally, Dr. Hoffman concluded the debate by discussing the historical importance of God in Jewish liturgy and explaining that the essence of God is at the very core and foundation of Judaism.[129] Hoffman concluded that Beth Adam had "crossed the line not in its members' beliefs, but in its liturgy." Hoffman concluded that, "a congregation that makes Humanism its center has replaced the Jewish root (i.e., God) with another one, and we must say that it cannot be part of our congregational union."[130] Next, the New Congregations Committee had a short question and answer period, during which Barr and Cummins answered questions regarding whether Beth Adam denied a belief in God. According to Amy Applegate, Barr was again asked how Beth Adam's application was different from a Jews for Jesus application. It is important to note that these types of questions continually followed Beth Adam's application process, even though the CCAR Responsum had affirmed that Beth Adam was indeed a Jewish congregation. Ultimately, the New Congregations Committee voted 19-6 against admission.[131]

Next, the UAHC Board took up the debate. Only members of the board were allowed to discuss the issue; however, everyone was allowed to attend. Many board members spoke against the congregation, while only two spoke for the synagogue.

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[128] Michael Meyer, "Why Beth Adam Should Not Be Admitted to the UAHC: Presentation to the UAHC Board," Washington, D.C., June 11, 1994, Rabbi Kamrass Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[129] Rabbi Schindler, "Notes for Beth Adam Debate," June 12, 1994, Rabbi Kamrass Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[130] UAHC Press Release, "Humanism is not Judaism: UAHC Trustees Reject Bid for Membership by Congregation that Omits Reference to God in Its Prayers," June, 12, 1994, Washington, D.C.
[131] Michael Meyer to the author, July 24, 2006.

Interestingly, according to both Rabbi Barr and Amy Applegate, one of Beth Adam's proponents was a more traditionally oriented Reform Jew from Toronto, Canada. A lawyer, the man "objected to the entire process, and its lack of fairness, especially the fact that the UAHC had not invited any scholars to argue on our behalf."[132]

The vote of the UAHC Board was overwhelmingly against Beth Adam, with 115 votes against admission, 13 votes for admission, and 4 abstinences. According to Dr. Meyer, "All of the leadership of the UAHC, from Schindler on down, waved their voting cards in opposition." Dr. Fred Gottschalk, the president of HUC-JIR at the time, abstained from the vote.[133] The UAHC immediately sent out a press release that was unfortunately titled, "Humanism is not Judaism."[134] Again, news outlets from around the world covered the vote in their newspapers.[135]

Aside from the short sermon on the Friday evening of the board meeting, Rabbi Schindler did not make a formal comment on Beth Adam's application until after the 1994 national board meeting. That said, UAHC leaders like Rabbis Syme and Pinsky expressed concerns about Beth Adam's application and ultimately adopted an anti-Beth Adam approach. Unfortunately, what was supposed to be a debate about the nature and limits of Reform Judaism turned into a "we (UAHC) vs. them (Beth Adam)" argument. The vote certainly excluded Beth Adam from membership to the Union. However, we are left asking whether the UAHC vote itself helped to define the nature and the boundaries of Reform Judaism. At the very least, the four-year process, beginning with the penning

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[132] Amy Applegate to Beth Adam Members, June 13, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio; and Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[133] Michael Meyer to the author, July 24, 2006.
[134] The release should have been titled "Humanism is not Reform Judaism."
[135] The Beth Adam Papers include hundreds of articles sent in by people from around the United States. Many of these articles were also placed into the Beth Adam collection at the American Jewish Archives.

of the Plaut and Mihaly Responsum and concluding with the UAHC vote, surely helped to define the boundaries of the Reform Movement.

The supporters of Beth Adam argued that the Reform Movement's doctrine of pluralism meant that the UAHC had to accept a congregation whose liturgy was, admittedly, Humanistic, but well within the religious spectrum of Reform Judaism. Thus, they argued that the pluralistic doctrine of the Reform Movement meant that as long as the congregation was Jewish and forwarded liberal Judaism, Beth Adam should have been accepted into the congregational body of Reform Judaism. Those who believed that Beth Adam could not be admitted into the Union argued that there was a limit to pluralism. They determined that Beth Adam did do not fit within the boundaries of Reform Judaism as defined by the liturgy and platforms of the Reform Movement.

## Chapter 5

## Drawing Boundaries and Limiting Elasticity: What Did the Reform Movement Learn From Beth Adam's Application?

### Beth Adam After the Application

The UAHC vote had an enormous impact upon Beth Adam and its members. Immediately after the vote, Barr, Beth Adam's leaders, and the congregation's members tried to comprehend what the vote meant for the congregation. For Barr and Beth Adam's leaders, the UAHC application process instilled within them a sense of pride. Beth Adam's members were proud of what their leaders had accomplished.[1] Beth Adam's members had worked together as a group during the entire application process. They had held countless meetings and had represented Beth Adam's theology and views to the UAHC Regional and National boards. They had held congregational votes and they compiled or created documents and statements about Beth Adam's religious practices, beliefs, and their educational philosophy. Beth Adam had received national attention in hundreds of synagogues and in countless media outlets. While Barr, Rosenberg, and Edwards all expressed a sense of disappointment and surprise by the overwhelming lopsidedness of the UAHC vote, they also explained that the congregation was made better because of the process surrounding the vote.[2] Still, after the vote, Beth Adam needed to tackle the organizational issues that had caused the congregation to apply for UAHC membership: they needed to develop a youth group and a youth program, cultivate a religious high school program, and consider how the congregation would

[1] Amy Gerowitz to Rabbi Barr, July 3, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[2] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.

retain a rabbi if Barr left.[3] Beth Adam's leadership also recognized that it could expand Beth Adam's message by selling its materials to a larger audience.[4]

Today, Beth Adam maintains its Humanistic tradition. It continues to teach a Humanistic Jewish philosophy that is similar to the Humanistic Judaism of Wine and the SHJ. Yet, Beth Adam's religious practice and unique liturgy is extraordinarily different from the few Humanistic congregations that this author has encountered. With regard to Beth Adam's members, it is not fair to argue that Beth Adam's members are merely secular non-believers. The congregation is accepting of an individual's right to theistic belief. Like Reform congregations, Beth Adam is composed of members who believe different things. Many of Beth Adam's members expressed a belief in a "higher power" or explained that they had a conception or a belief in God, particularly after life-altering events.[5] All the while, many of Beth Adam's members steadfastly hold onto a strict Humanistic philosophy. Beth Adam is a truly unique congregation. As with any congregation that is defined by its members, Beth Adam's liturgy is representative of the current liturgy committee. It would not surprise me to see Beth Adam incorporate elements of theistic language after Barr retires from the congregation.[6]

Beth Adam is no longer located in a small office building.[7] The congregation purchased 3.3 acres of land in Loveland, Ohio and built a remarkable 12,000 square-foot facility. The facility includes a sanctuary with a 400-person seating capacity, educational classrooms for the religious school, a huge library and social hall, an administrative and

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[3] Rabbi Barr, "Beth Adam and the UAHC: A Look At the June 11 Vote," July 8, 1994, Beth Adam Papers, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[4] Ibid.
[5] This author does not wish to identify the individual members who explained their theological beliefs.
[6] Barr has been a rabbi for 25 years. He could potentially remain at Beth Adam for another 15 to 20 years before retirement.
[7] See Chapter 2.

office wing, and a boardroom. Beth Adam's membership has also increased to around 350 members. As the congregation has grown, Beth Adam's educational programming and religious school have ballooned. Beth Adam currently has the second-largest religious school in Cincinnati. Unlike the Reform synagogues in Cincinnati and in keeping with its original mission, all of Beth Adam's teachers and administrators are volunteers. Between 60 and 90 adults regularly attend the congregation's Sunday morning adult education programs.[8] While the congregation has had difficulty building a strong high school program and youth group, it has recently increased its efforts to do so.[9]

The congregation still has concerns about where it will find its next rabbi. Beth Adam has continued to maintain a strong rabbinical intern program with HUC-JIR students who have completed the student-pulpit requirements at HUC. It is highly likely that one of the former rabbinical interns would, in fact, return to the congregation if Beth Adam needed to hire a new rabbi. Thus, by having rabbinical interns, the congregation can continue to influence a few like-minded HUC-JIR ordained rabbis. Finally, the congregation has continued to produce liturgy for congregational and private use that is distributed widely through its website.[10]

Beth Adam is in a strong place today. As in the past, it has committed leaders and members. The UAHC application process did not rip the congregation apart. Instead, it served as unifying experience that, like other unifying experiences in the congregation's past, helped the congregation to define its mission, describe what it stood for, and determine a direction for the congregation's future. The congregation's growth and

[8] Rabbi Barr, interview with the author, May 26, 2006.
[9] Ibid.
[10] http://www.bethadam.org

building are examples of the positive outcome that the unifying experience of the UAHC application brought to Beth Adam.

**A Critique of the UAHC**

One must wonder if the location in Cincinnati played a larger role in Beth Adam's rejection from the Union. For example, two of the Cincinnati Reform synagogues were founding members of the UAHC. During the application, the Cincinnati Reform congregations banded together, largely under the leadership of Rabbi Kamrass, to coordinate their efforts and to express their unified opposition of Beth Adam's application.[11] On one level, the Reform synagogues played an important role in the story. The regional and national boards certainly heard the Cincinnati Reform congregations' complaints. Yet, on another level, the documents also show that the issue of Beth Adam's application was much larger than the local Cincinnati congregations. Thus, I do not believe that the opposition of local congregations was *the* determining factor against Beth Adam. No matter where Beth Adam had been located, the question of a Humanistic synagogue joining the Union would have elicited the same concerns by the UAHC leaders.

At some point between the UAHC Midwest Council board meeting in November 1992 and the national board meeting in June 1994, it became imperative for the UAHC and its leaders to deny Beth Adam's membership application. During this time, Beth Adam spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours trying to gain membership to the UAHC. Certainly, the choice to do so was Beth Adam's alone. The leaders of Beth Adam could have easily chosen to refrain from appealing the decision of the regional UAHC board to reject admission, thereby ending their application process. At the same time,

[11] See Chapter 4

however, Schindler correctly understood the potential for the application to engender a debate about the boundaries of pluralism within the Reform Movement. Schindler and leaders of the UAHC encouraged Beth Adam to continue its application, even while its Regional Boards had rejected it.

According to Barr's handwritten notes and written communication sent between Barr, Cummins, Schindler, and Syme, Rabbi Schindler also told both Barr and Cummins that the UAHC National Board meeting would include a debate between HUC scholars about the limits of pluralism. The debate was supposed to be similar to what had occurred on the regional level between Rabbi Gary Zola and Dr. Michael Meyer.

No longer interested in the academic debate, the UAHC's leaders took a decidedly anti-Beth Adam stance after the regional vote. Mr. Chaiken (the president of the UAHC Midwest Council during the 1992 regional board meeting) argued that by the time the issue got to the national level, two of the UAHC's branches had already rejected the congregation.[12] Thus, from Chaiken's point of view, it would have been inappropriate to reargue the case from scratch. The decision on the regional level had already established an exclusionary policy: Beth Adam was appealing this official UAHC position. While Chaiken is certainly correct in his understanding of the events, the process deviated from that which Schindler had originally promised to Beth Adam's leaders. Nonetheless, Beth Adam's inflexibility concerning this process was also naïve; choosing an academic to represent them might have changed the tenor of the debate. It is also possible that the scholars were wary of speaking on behalf of Beth Adam. For example, Zola explained that he would have been pleased to present his own academic arguments concerning the nature of Reform Judaism to the UAHC board. However, he

[12] See Chapter 4.

expressed a hesitation toward the idea of being asked to speak on behalf of a congregation whose theological beliefs he did not share.[13]

After the Beth Adam vote, the UAHC (now the URJ) amended its mission statement to say "The mission of the Union is to . . . foster the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through . . . *avodah* (worship of God through prayer and observance).[14] Interestingly, the mention of God in the URJ mission statement was entirely absent in the Union's Constitution prior to and during Beth Adam's application. Yet, the change in the mission statement is proof that the URJ has taken some steps to create more theological boundaries by which all member congregations must abide. By making membership conditional on subscribing to URJ's Constitution and by-laws, member congregations must affirm the new URJ mission, which clearly references God. Of course, by leaving vague what it means by God in the mission statement, the Reform Movement also allows for a wide spectrum of belief, ranging from a personal immanent God to a transcendent God; from a Diest-like "watchmaker" God to an almost pantheist God concept.

Besides the change of the URJ mission statement, the Reform leadership still did not completely tie up all of its loose ends. Indeed, Article VI (6) of the URJ Constitution still clearly states that the URJ cannot "interfere in any manner whatsoever with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the congregational activities of the constituent congregations."[15] Because the URJ cannot interfere in the activities of constituent congregations, the movement is forbidden, by its by-laws, to oust a member congregation that chooses to transform its liturgical practice

[13] Rabbi Zola, interview with the author, June 26, 2006.
[14] Constitution and By-Laws of the Union for Reform Judaism, http://urj.org/docs/bylaws/
[15] Ibid.

from the normative Reform liturgy (Gates of Prayer or the forthcoming *Mishkan T'fillah*) to a Humanistic liturgy. The borders and boundaries of Reform Judaism are defined only in reference to congregations seeking admission to the URJ. The URJ has never demanded that member congregations utilize certain prayers or liturgy—a move that would surely cause consternation and rebuttal by the rabbis and lay-leaders of the URJ member congregations.

One wonders, with a 115 to 13 vote to reject Beth Adam, why the URJ did not follow up and change the by-laws. After the vote, the Union's leadership must have felt that the issue was moot. There was not an epidemic of Humanistic congregations applying for membership or a significant number of Reform synagogues agitating towards the Humanistic Movement. Clearly, it was not worth the bureaucratic and political haggle of actually modifying the URJ's Constitution. Furthermore, many Reform Jews would have rejected the idea that the Union could tell a synagogue how to operate or choose its own liturgy. In political terms, the URJ leaders had no reason to start a Civil War at a time when their backs were not up against the wall. There is no split in the Reform Movement over the issue of having God in its Reform liturgy.

**The Limits of Pluralism**

There are many elements of Beth Adam's application to the UAHC and Barr's own understanding of Reform Judaism that appear to have been naïve. Beth Adam knew that many Reform Jews did not agree either with Beth Adam's liturgy or with its application to the UAHC.[16] Yet, even after rejections from the CCAR and the UAHC Midwest Council, Barr and the leaders of Beth Adam pushed forward and continued to

[16] Please refer to Chapter 4. Beth Adam's potential application to the UAHC was refuted by the CCAR Responsum Committee. In 1992, Beth Adam's application was rejected by both the New Congregations Committee and the Board of the UAHC Midwest Council.

believe that the Reform Movement might accept a congregation that did not pray to God. Some members of the Reform Movement suggested to Beth Adam that it could be accepted in the Reform Movement if it added the *Shema* to its liturgy. True to their beliefs and steadfastly consistent, Beth Adam's members never chose to sway from their strict Humanistic liturgy and reconstructed rituals. Barr and Beth Adam's leadership should be commended for their unwavering consistency to Humanistic practice and the principle of religious integrity. Yet, there is a difference between Humanistic Jewish practice and Reform Jewish practice. The rejection of Beth Adam was a drawing of boundaries and a repudiation of the small Humanistic stream that was quietly embedded within Reform Judaism at the time.

Beth Adam's leadership argued that the congregation's liturgy was well within the religious spectrum of the Reform Movement. For the proponents of Beth Adam, the pluralistic doctrine of the Reform Movement meant that as long as the congregation was Jewish and forwarded liberal Judaism, Beth Adam should have been accepted into the congregational body of Reform Judaism. To bolster their argument, the leaders of Beth Adam also asserted that the sixth *Shabbat* evening service of the Gates of Prayer (GOP) included Humanistic elements that were consistent to the liturgical expressions found in Beth Adam's liturgy. Yet, Barr and Beth Adam's leaders consistently failed to recognize that the GOP's sixth service, which was developed as a pseudo-expression of Polydoxy, never truly eliminated God from the liturgy. Throughout the sixth service the Hebrew uses the traditional *Shabbat* liturgy with traditional Hebrew words for God. Taken as an entire document, it is clear that the Reform Movement's prayer book emphasized the centrality of God within Reform Judaism. The same is true for all of the Reform

Movement's Platforms, which also emphasize belief in God as a defining aspect of Reform Judaism.[17]

In reviewing Beth Adam's application, the UAHC leadership was particularly concerned about the removal of the *Shema* and the Mourners *Kaddish* from Beth Adam's liturgy. For the Reform leaders, these prayers were essential to Reform Judaism. Reciting the *Shema*, for example, emphasizes both the centrality of God and serves as a unifying liturgical rubric for all Reform synagogues. It is important not to underestimate the value that Reform leaders placed on having consistent prayer rubrics as a unifying element within Reform synagogues. Beth Adam's creative liturgy broke away from the central liturgical elements that tie Reform Jews together. Beth Adam's liturgy also rejected the very God-idea that is central to Reform Judaism.

By rejecting Beth Adam, our leaders have determined that there is a significant difference between individuals who do not believe in God in our congregations and an entire synagogue that does not specifically espouse belief in God in its worship services. While Beth Adam maintained that it allowed for individual choice, by removing God completely from its liturgy it made a decision for its members vis-à-vis the public worship of God. The removal of God language means that God can only be worshiped in private or discussed philosophically within a classroom at Beth Adam. If the God-idea is central to an individual's belief system, individual members must be able to express that belief in public worship from the *bimah*. Thus, I fully agree with the argument of Dr. Meyer: Beth Adam's liturgy, which does not permit the recitation of the "*Shema*" or the "*Kaddish Yatom*," smacks of an orthodoxy which is contrary to the spirit of pluralism.

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[17] The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the 1935 Columbus Platform, and the 1976 Centenary Perspective all affirm God and the belief in God as an essential component of Reform Judaism.

The UAHC's leadership was correct: Beth Adam's liturgy precludes it from membership into the UAHC.

Even with the rejection of Beth Adam's application, Reform Jews are left with questions concerning the limits of pluralism in the Reform Movement. Arguably, all religious groups need boundaries for purposes of self-definition. Like other religious groups, the Reform Movement has repeatedly created boundaries for itself vis-à-vis traditional Judaism on the right and secularists or Felix Adler's Ethical Culture on the left. The rejection of Beth Adam by the UAHC is another example of such a boundary. In the future, Reform Jews will need to grapple with the boundaries that we construct while defining our congregations and our Movement. For example, what are the boundaries that we as Reform Jews draw? Which boundaries limit the elasticity of pluralism?

The divide in Reform Judaism today is not along the lines of God belief but rather *halakhah* (Jewish law). There is an unwritten understanding within the Reform Movement that individual conceptions of God are all over the map. Indeed, there should never be a litmus test of belief in order to belong to a Reform synagogue. Doing so would surely alienate large numbers of Jews for which Judaism is an important part of their lives, even as they question their belief in God. Yet, the divide over *halakhah* is much more significant to modern Reform Judaism because it represents the divide between the radical Reform (now understood as classical Reform) and modern Reform (now understood as mainstream Reform).

Mark Washofsky notes in his book *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Jewish Practice* that even at the height of radical Reform, the Reform Movement never

truly rid itself of *halakhic* discussion.[18] Today, as in 1885 when the Pittsburgh Platform was written, the divide in Reform still centers on the role of *mitzvot* (commandments) in our modern lives. For most mainstream Reform Jews, the Reform ideology of informed choice posits that Reform Jews have an obligation to make meaning out of the world through our biblical and rabbinic tradition and not through a radical departure from tradition. Although Reform Jews are not bound to *halakhah,* we are, at the very least, responsible for appreciating it and engaging it to understand how we, as modern Jews, make Jewish decisions. As Washofsky explains further, the turn away from radical Reform towards Reform Jewish engagement with *halakhah* is evident through the appearance of Reform guides to ritual practice, of which his book is but one of many produced in the past 50 years.[19] Washofsky argues that *halakhah's* role in Reform Judaism "links us to the religious expression of other Jews, uniting us with them as part of a community whose history spans many countries and many generations."[20]

Herein lies an important, although rarely discussed, dividing issue between Beth Adam and the Reform Movement. While Beth Adam's members and most Reform Jews understand *mitzvot* to be a creation of mankind, Beth Adam largely ignores *mitzvot* and the importance of *mitzvot* to daily Jewish practice. For Beth Adam's members, *halakhah* is an imposed legal system that prevents them from exercising their free will. Beth Adam's members understand Judaism more as a religion of ethics rather than a religion of laws. In contrast, the Reform Movement, which also largely understand *halakhah* to be

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[18] Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York, NY: UAHC Press, 2001), xix
[19] Ibid. xx.
[20] Ibid. ssii.

created by man rather than God-given, still acknowledges *mitzvot* to be "God's indirect inspiration in what is essentially a process of human spiritual expression."[21]

Washofsky correctly explains in *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, that Reform religious life is in a sense *halakhic* – or at least inspired by *halakhah*. Washofsky notes: "The way we pray, celebrate, commemorate, and mourn, even in our liberal and modern style, are modes of sacred action that we have inherited from the rabbinic legal tradition."[22] Thus, we as Reform Jews turn to our Jewish legal tradition for guidance in our process of understanding our modern Jewish practices. The rejection of Beth Adam was also a statement about the nature and the boundaries of Reform Judaism vis-à-vis *mitzvot*.

Beth Adam's radical rejection of *mitzvot* and its departure from the liturgy and Jewish traditions that emphasize God, even while it maintains some semblance of ritual, is beyond the pale of Reform. It is important to note, however, that there are also limits of Reform pluralism on the right. A congregation that tried to reinstate the *mechitza* (the separation between men and women) would not be acceptable within the Reform Movement. We are also distinguished from Movements on our right because we are not bound by *halakhah* in its traditional meaning. Reform Judaism is distinguished from Humanism on its left, as is evident through the rejection of Beth Adam, on the basis of its non-theistic liturgy.

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[21] Dana Evan Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 43

[22] Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York, NY: UAHC Press, 2001), xxi.

**The Questions Still Left Unanswered**

For thousands of years Jews have grappled and struggled with the concept of the Divine. As Jews, we have consistently searched for meaning and understanding of our place within the natural world. Our Jewish civilization has constantly tried to comprehend and show appreciation for the unexplainable. The rabbinical commentaries, the Talmud, Jewish codes (law), and even Jewish humor are the products of the Jewish struggle with the God-idea and living our lives as we believe God commanded. It is this struggle with the God-idea that that makes Jews the true bearers of the biblical name, *Yisrael*, one who struggles with God.

Throughout the application process, Barr and Beth Adam's leaders often talked and debated with the Reform Movement's leaders on two entirely different levels. The Reform leaders were often concerned with "what" Beth Adam's members were saying, i.e., whether Beth Adam's members said the *shema*. Beth Adam's members were more concerned with the *meaning* of the liturgy and whether or not they could publicly recite prayers that they did not agree with.

We in the Reform Movement must ask ourselves some tough questions about the relationship between our theology and our liturgy. As the Reform Movement continues to accept more traditional liturgy, we must ask ourselves whether our liturgy is consistent with our theology. For example, do we as Reform Jews believe in a God that responds to the personal pleas of humans? If not, why are our prayer books filled with liturgy that conceives of God in this manner? Does what we say matter? What, for example, are the limits of metaphor? At what point do we as Reformers say to ourselves that

understanding prayer as a metaphor cannot truly cover up the theologically difficult aspects of our prayers?

These are questions that cannot be answered in the confines of this thesis. However, they are questions that deserve immediate attention because the nature of the Reform Movement, the extent to which we accept pluralism within our synagogues, and the ways in which we teach the God-idea to children and adults are held within these questions. Demanding that member congregations utilize a theistic liturgy, as Beth Adam's rejection from the UAHC did, says nothing about how Reform Jews understand the nature of God.

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