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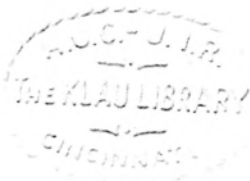
Text for Teenagers"

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Reform Judaism Viewed as a Polydoxy:  
Towards a Text for Teenagers

by

Paul J. Menitoff

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination.

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Referee, Dr. Alvin J. Reines

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## DIGEST

The purpose of this thesis is to provide high school students with an understanding of Reform Judaism viewed as a polydox movement. This thesis is based upon Dr. Alvin Reines' philosophy of Reform Judaism. It is written in textbook form, with four chapters.

The first chapter discusses the relationship between truth and religion. This relationship is defined by the proposition that a person must consider a religion to be true if the religion is to be meaningfully understood as that person's religion. In the course of this discussion, the various kinds of faith employed in determining religious truth are presented. Finally, the Pharisaic basis for belief is given as an example of how one Jewish system copes with this issue. At the conclusion of the chapter, questions are provided to aid the student in thinking through the contents of the chapter. Such questions appear at the conclusion of the other three chapters as well.

The second chapter discusses the role of religion in the individual's life. The basic difficulty which confronts all men is suggested as the problem of finitude. The role of religion is then defined in terms of man's

response to his finitude. The Pharisaic system is employed to illustrate the concept that religion is to be understood as man's response to finitude. At the end of this chapter the problem of finitude is discussed as it relates to Reform Judaism.

The third chapter presents the difficulties involved in finding an appropriate definition of a Reform Jew. The past, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Union Prayerbook are each considered as possible sources of such a definition. A definition of the term Reform Jew, based on the symbolism of affiliation, is offered.

In the final chapter, various aspects of the Reform Jewish Community are discussed, including Reform Jewish thought, appropriate Reform Jewish concerns, and general activities. This discussion is based upon the presentation appearing in the previous chapters on the relationship between religion and truth, the function of religion, and the definition of Reform Judaism. Also considered in this chapter are several major categories of beliefs and practices, which are considered vital for Reform Jews to explore. Given these categories, a suggestion is then offered regarding the functions of the Reform rabbi and congregation. At the end of the

work, a bibliography of background material for teachers and students is included.



## PREFACE

There are those of us who feel that some areas of Reform Judaism, as they are presented today, are open to criticism. The meaning of the terms Reform Jew and Reform Judaism are often misrepresented or misunderstood. Principles of Reform Judaism are often explained in terms which cannot be believed by a rational individual.<sup>1</sup> Frequently, current forms of Reform Judaism do not confront the central concerns and issues of Reform Jews. They find the rituals, customs and ceremonies of their local Reform Jewish congregation archaic and irrelevant.<sup>2</sup> Many Reform Jews find the religious school is teaching outdated, false and incredible beliefs. When large numbers of Reform Jewish children become teenagers, they discard totally the teachings expressed by the religious school.<sup>3</sup> A growing number of Reform Jews refuse to attend weekly services, and an increasing number refuse even to attend High Holy Day services.<sup>4</sup> Young people are leaving the Reform Jewish Community entirely and affiliating with others who have left traditional religious communities.<sup>5</sup> Given an accurate understanding of Reform Judaism, this need not be the case!

This text is intended to help students understand the vital role which religion can play in their lives.

It attempts to make them aware of the fact that not only can Reform Judaism be a religion which they can believe represents the truth, but it also stresses that it can only be their religion if they find that it represents the truth for them. This text discusses the problems which individuals are constantly confronted with and the way Reform Judaism allows and helps the individual to successfully respond to these problems. The nature of Reform Judaism is discussed and its direct relation to the individual is explored. Finally, based both upon the nature of the situation facing every individual and the nature of Reform Judaism, the Reform Jewish Community is considered.

This text does not use gimmicks. It presents, in a clear and concise form, topics which are essential for a Reform Jew to consider. At the end of each chapter, there are questions designed to help the teacher explore with the students the ideas presented in that section. The consideration given to these questions is thought to be as important as the actual reading of each section. This text presents the students with what will probably be for them novel concepts. Therefore, the concepts will have a more desirable effect on the students only if they are able to assimilate the ideas through debate

and discussion.

This text is now in an experimental form. It is hoped that the students and teachers who use this book will send the following information to the authors.

1. A critical evaluation of each chapter regarding its clarity, logic, and style.
2. A list of questions asked by the students regarding the content of each chapter.
3. The general reactions of those using the text.

Your reactions will be given much consideration and will be appreciated.

1.

I. WHAT DOES RELIGION HAVE TO DO WITH YOU?

A. WHY JOIN?

Dear Sir:

Congratulations. Upon the recommendation of your high school principal, you have been selected to be given membership in the Pelonies. If you accept, you will have the privilege of calling yourself a Pelony.

Sincerely,

President of the Pelonies

If you were to receive this letter, would you join the organization? Before deciding whether or not to join, you would probably want to know more about the group. Who are the Pelonies? What are the principles of the group? What do its members do?

After some investigation, you might find the following information about the Pelonies:

1. It is a science club.
2. Its members must believe that the earth is flat.
3. The club's major activities focus on convincing others that the earth is flat.

You would then have to decide whether or not these principles and activities were acceptable to you. Joining a

science club might seem like a good idea. The idea, however, of joining a club whose central principle is the belief in the flatness of the earth, and whose major activity is convincing others of its flatness would probably provide little motivation for most of us to join. Modern science simply will not allow us to believe that what this club represents is the truth. All of our reading on the subject has informed us of the spherical shape of the earth. If we accept the scientific fact that the earth is a sphere, then we cannot accept the Pelony's belief that the earth is flat. The scientists and the Pelonies cannot both be stating the truth at the same time. It cannot be true that the earth is both a sphere and flat. On the basis of this investigation into the club and its activities, most of us would probably not join.

Frankly, even if the science club's main principle was the belief that the earth is a sphere, and its major activity was publicizing that fact, few students would join. Who needs it? Sure, the earth is a sphere, but we could care less whether this well-known idea was given further attention. Before most of us join an organization, we must not only know what it is and believe in its principles and activities, but we must also find

that it meets our needs.

Our criteria for affiliating with an organization seem more than appropriate when applied to religion. When you say, "I am a Reform Jew and my religion is Reform Judaism", do you know what you mean by the terms Reform Jew and Reform Judaism? Although few individuals would be Pelonies knowing only that it is a science club, many are members of Reform Judaism knowing only that it is a religion. It is difficult to understand why many apply lower standards of affiliation to their religion than they use in selecting the club in which they want membership. When we found that the Pelonies believe that the earth is flat, we not only better understood the organization, but most of us found that we could not be a member because we did not consider its basic principle to be true. This should be no less true of our religion.

#### B. MUST YOUR RELIGION BE TRUE?

Most people born into a religion are so familiar with its beliefs and practices that they participate in the activities of the religion automatically without considering either the truth which their religion claims to represent or the validity of the practices of their religion. These individuals perform their religious

actions by rote. Many do not realize that being born into a religion does not necessarily mean that it is truly their religion. For a religion to be your religion you must believe it to be true.<sup>6</sup> A simple verbal test may be employed to demonstrate this conclusion. Is it not nonsensical to make the statement, "Reform Judaism is my religion and I believe Reform Judaism to be false?" It is equally nonsensical to say, "I am a Reform Jew and do not know what Reform Judaism is."

If this is the case, then there are two necessary steps which must be taken by an individual before he can consider a religion to be his own religion.

1. He must learn the beliefs and principles of the religion.
2. The individual must then accept these beliefs and principles as true.

Only if these steps are taken can a person avoid the absurd situation of stating, "Reform Judaism is my religion and I neither know what it stands for nor do I believe it."

It is understandable that a person born into a religion might not be aware of the nature of his religion, because he is overly familiar with it. Being very familiar with something often prevents us from seeing what

that thing really is.

Imagine walking through a field of lush green grass. After crossing the field, you meet an artist who is painting a picture of the field. On his canvas, the dark green field appears to be a yellow-green pasture. For a moment you are surprised. You ask him why he is diluting the dark green color of the field with yellow in his painting. The artist responds by pointing out that from where he is sitting the sun causes the grass to have a yellow cast. He continues by suggesting to you that from different positions in the field the green grass will appear to be not only different shades of green but even different colors. Thinking about what the artist said, you again walk through the field. This time you too notice that under trees the grass appears to be almost black. In some places the sun causes the grass to appear yellow and in other places the grass seems to be almost a mint color. When you first walked across the field you saw a dark green field. After talking to the artist, and thinking through what he had said, you saw a field filled with multi-colored grass.

In this illustration, you thought you were performing one action, but actually you were performing another. You thought that you were seeing a green field, because



you had been taught that fields are green. Even though you were seeing yellow and many shades of green, you still persisted in the notion that you were seeing a green field. The artist then caused you to be critical of your actions and to examine them more carefully. Being born into a religion may cause you to find yourselves in a situation similar to the first walk through the field. You may perform certain religious actions without having previously thought them through. The artist caused you to think through the validity of the way you viewed the field. This caused you to view the field more accurately the second time. Perhaps such a re-examination of the religion of your birth would help you to more accurately view the nature of Reform Judaism.

In the situation described above, an action was first taken without having been previously thought through. Afterwards, the validity of the action was thought through. Thinking through the action affected the way the act was later performed. When we think through our actions, we decide whether what we did without thinking was valid or not valid. We decided, without thinking, that the field was homogeneously green and later we were shown that it was, in fact, multicolored. Concluding that the field was not merely green, caused

a change in behavior. After thinking about what was done, actions were changed to be consistent with what was thought to be true. Most would agree that it would have been absurd to act as if the grass were one shade of green when, after thinking about it, the opposite was thought to be true.

It may be assumed that there is a relationship between what most people think and what they do. In every phase of our lives the process of acting, then thinking through these actions, making a decision regarding their validity, and then either changing ones thought to be invalid or becoming more sure of actions thought to be valid, continually occurs. In this respect, there seems to be no reason for us to make a distinction between our general actions and our religious actions.

#### 1. Truth and Validity

It may be helpful before continuing to note the difference between the terms "truth" and "validity". Ideas and beliefs can be considered to be either true or false. Actions can be considered to be either valid or invalid. In other words, ideas and beliefs are never valid or invalid and actions are never true or false. The statement, "New York City is in New York State", represents a belief which is true. The statement, "New York City

is in Ohio", represents a false belief. If an individual were to travel to New York State to visit New York City, he would be acting in a valid way. If an individual were to travel to Ohio to visit New York City, he would be acting in an invalid way. In short, only ideas can be considered to be true or false while only actions can be considered to be valid or invalid.

## 2. Truth, Validity and Reform Judaism

It seems clear then, for your religion to be your religion you must believe that it represents the truth. All of your religious actions, if they are to be considered valid, must be consistent with that truth. Your religious actions, once thought through, cannot be the opposite of what you believe to be true. Your religion and your religious actions will be affected by what you consider to be true. A religion based on ideas which you cannot affirm as being true and on invalid actions causes you to have an unauthentic religion. A religion based on the idea that a marble statue controls you cannot be your religion unless you believe it. You do not believe in the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, so you are not a Roman Catholic. We would agree that for one to say that he is a Roman Catholic and doesn't believe the doctrines of Roman Catholicism to be true, would be

absurd. It seems clear that you must believe in the truth of your religion. It therefore follows that for Reform Judaism to be your religion, you must accept it as being true.

#### C. HOW DO I KNOW IF IT'S TRUE?

##### 1. Faith

Many people say that they believe in the truth of their religion on the basis of faith. When you accept your religion as representing the truth, you are, in fact, committing an act of faith. The term "faith" refers to the act that judges a belief or statement to be true. You may say, "God exists". Your act of faith is your judgment that this statement is true. How do people come to have faith in their religion? That is, on what basis do people decide to make the judgment that their religion is true? There are three kinds of faith:

- a) Faith without evidence
- b) Faith on the basis of objective evidence
- c) Faith on the basis of subjective evidence.

##### 2. Faith without Evidence

A person who says that he has faith in the statement, "tomorrow, apples will taste like oranges", uses a faith without evidence. He judges it to be true without any evidence. In some religions, the true and superior faith

is that which is given without evidence, in the fulfillment of the heart's needs, and with trust in the religious object.

### 3. Faith on the Basis of Evidence

In contrast, those individuals who use faith on the basis of evidence find support for their faith in either objective or subjective evidence. Objective evidence which is experienced by many observers and can be reproduced at will is the type of evidence which science accepts. There is, however, objective evidence which is experienced by many people, but cannot be repeated at will. The Red Sea parting to allow the Israelites to escape from Egypt was not reproducible for the many who experienced it or for anyone else. There was objective evidence in Biblical times that the Red Sea parted, because it was seen by many people.<sup>8</sup>

Subjective evidence is that which is apprehended externally through the senses or internally, as in a prophetic vision. In addition, it is apprehended privately, by one person alone. A common example of private, internal subjective evidence is the individual who feels that he is communicating with God through prayer. Subjective evidence is experienced by the individual without witnesses. If subjective evidence is accepted

by anyone other than by the person who experienced it, then it must be accepted on the basis of that person's say-so.<sup>9</sup>

Three types of faith have been discussed: faith without evidence, faith on the basis of objective evidence, and faith on the basis of subjective evidence. In attempting to decide what is true, individuals must decide to which kind of faith they will subscribe. Even though the types of faith which exist can be described and discussed, the ultimate decision remains with each individual. In order to make such a decision, each individual must ask himself whether he needs evidence in order to believe in the truth of something. If he decides that evidence is necessary in order for him to be convinced, then he is presented with the problem of deciding whether he needs objective or subjective evidence, in order to believe in the truth of something. Each individual must arrive at his own decision.

#### D. A DECISION FROM THE JEWISH PAST

##### 1. The Pharisees

In an attempt to decide whether evidence is necessary before you can believe in something, it may be helpful for you to understand the basis upon which the Pharisees, a major Jewish movement, has based its beliefs.

The Pharisees developed after the destruction of the Second Temple and greatly influenced the development of the synagogue. It is in this movement that Orthodox Judaism has its roots.

## 2. What did the Pharisees Believe?<sup>10</sup>

This movement believed that Moses received a revelation from God. It was believed that through revelation God told Moses how He wants man to live. It was believed that God's wishes are recorded in the Torah and the Talmud. God's wishes for man represent God's law.<sup>11</sup>

From these recorded revelatory experiences they derived the following beliefs:

- a) One God alone exists, who is all-powerful, eternal, all knowing, and all-good.
- b) God is the sole creator and conserver of the universe.
- c) God, being all knowing, is aware of man. In His goodness He exerts guidance over human affairs.
- d) The revelation of the Torah and Talmud to Moses is infallible. This revelation perfectly and forever expresses the will of God. No new revelation will occur or has occurred that alters this expression of God's will.
- e) Inasmuch as this infallible revelation is the primary constituent of Pharisaic Judaism, Pharisaism is the only true religion.
- f) The Creator (God) is alone worthy of worship; and man, as one who was created, must obey God's will.

- g) God rewards those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who do not.
- h) There is an ideal end to history, the Messianic era, which will be ushered in by a Messiah. At this time, men will be judged by God for their good deeds and their sins.
- i) There is an after-life, consisting in the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Primary Evidence as a Basis of Their Belief

First, there was evidence that the Pharisees took as establishing the truth of a revelation for those living in the time when the revelation occurred. This sort of evidence is used to varify the revelation for the person who receives it and for those around him. This evidence we will call primary evidence. The following types of evidence can be considered to be primary evidence.

Public (apprehended by more than one person), empirical (either seen, touched, heard, tasted, or smelled), and direct (when the belief it supports is implicit in the evidence itself and is fully confirmed) is a kind of primary evidence. An example of this sort of evidence is found in Exodus 19:9:

And the Lord said unto Moses: "Lo, I come unto you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak to you, and may believe you forever."<sup>13</sup>

In this passage, the people of that generation are being



asked to believe that God spoke to Moses on the basis of many people (public) hearing (empirical) the voice of God. This is the same variety of evidence that our courts accept today. If a number of witnesses hear or see something happen, it is considered significant evidence.

Exodus 24:9&10 provides us with another example of public, empirical and direct evidence which was accepted as convincing primary evidence for the Pharisaic belief.

Then Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended; and they saw the God of Israel (public, empirical, and direct evidence)....<sup>14</sup>

This sort of evidence is apprehended directly by many people.

A second type of primary evidence is public, empirical, and indirect (when it does not by itself confirm the belief it supports, but requires additional assumptions and inferences). Exodus, chapters three and four, provides us with an example of this type of evidence. God said, as it is related in Exodus 3:20, "...I will put forth My hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof...after that he will let you go." An account follows in which Moses asks for evidence to present to the people.

But Moses spoke up and said, "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?" The lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he replied, "A rod." He said, "Cast it on the ground." He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail"- he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand- "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you."

The Lord said to him further, "Put your hand into your bosom." He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales! And He said, "Put your hand back into your bosom."- He put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out of his bosom, there it was again like the rest of his body.- "And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the first sign, they will believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs and do not heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you have taken from the Nile will turn to blood on the dry ground." Exodus 4:1-9)15

In this passage, after God promises to help Moses, He gives Moses acts to perform in front of the people which could not be carried out by an ordinary individual. In order to prove that God did speak to Moses, he is given the power to turn a rod into a serpent, cause leprous

spots, and turn the waters of a river into blood. This evidence was public (seen by many people), empirical (seen), and indirect. It could be considered to be indirect, because the people did not directly witness God speaking to Moses. Instead, Moses gave them signs (the rod, the leprous spots, and the bloody river) which convinced them that God did, in fact, speak to Moses.

The Pharisees believed that God told Moses the way he wanted man to live

...because there were people to hear him when He spoke

...because Moses brought them signs from God

...because they saw God acting in history (eg. He split the Red Sea).

Their reason for believing in the truth of revelation and the truth of their religion was the sort of evidence which is summarized in Deuteronomy 4:32-36.

...since the day that God created man upon the earth...where has there been any thing as this great thing is, or has there been heard like it? Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking...or has God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders...according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto you it was shown, that you might know that the

Lord, He is God; there is none else  
 beside Him. Out of heaven He made  
you hear His voice, that He might  
instruct you...you heard His words....<sup>16</sup>

They believed, because men were there to witness God's  
 revelation to Moses.

#### 4. Secondary Evidence as a Basis for Belief

Since the Pharisees did not live during the time  
 that God spoke to Moses, they accepted what will be  
 called secondary evidence. This kind of evidence con-  
 sists of a reliable chain of transmission in which wit-  
 nesses, thought to be reliable by the Pharisees, testi-  
 fied to the reveled nature of the Torah to those in  
 succeeding generations not present when God gave the  
 Torah to Moses. All of us accept the fact that there  
 was a Civil War in the United States. None of us were  
 present to see it. We believe that it took place on the  
 basis of secondary evidence. The story has been passed  
 down to us from previous generations; in history books,  
 and by people we think are reliable who witnessed the  
 Civil War. The Pharisees believed in the idea that God  
 gave the law to Moses on the basis of the same type of  
 evidence as we believe that the Civil War occurred.  
 Pirke Avoth (1:1ff), a section of the Mishnah, describes  
 the chain of transmission from Sinai to Moses to Hillel.

Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue....<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that Pharisaic Judaism based its faith upon evidence. In fact, it is difficult to find a Jewish movement which has not demanded evidence as a requirement for religious belief. The Pharisees believed in the truth of their religion. It seems evident that we too must believe in the truth of our religion - Reform Judaism.

E. QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

1. Can you think of a statement which is both true and false at the same time?
2. What are the characteristics you look for in a club before agreeing to join?
3. Are your criteria for affiliating with an organization the same as your criteria for affiliating with a religious group? If not, how do they differ?
4. Do you think your criteria are adequate?
5. Must your religion be true?
  - a. How does being born into your religion affect the way you view it?
  - b. Is being born into a religion helpful?
6. What is the difference between truth and validity?
7. Is it really necessary to know the principles, beliefs, and practices of your religion?
  - a. Must you believe that your religion is representing the truth?
  - b. Must you view your religious actions as being valid?
8. What is the relationship between the actions in the field illustration and your religious actions?
9. How is the term faith defined?
10. What is the difference between:

- a. faith without evidence?
  - b. faith on the basis of objective evidence?
  - c. faith on the basis of subjective evidence?
11. How do you know if a belief is true?
12. How do you know if an action is valid?
13. What sort of evidence did the Pharisees use as a basis for belief?
14. Is the description of the Pharisaic approach helpful to you?
- a. If so, how is it helpful?
  - b. If not, why not?
15. What can Reform Jews learn from the Pharisaic approach to religion?
16. What does religion have to do with you?

## II. WHAT SHOULD YOUR RELIGION DO FOR YOU?

### A. MAN IS CONFRONTED BY THE PROBLEMS OF HIS WORLD

All of us find ourselves living in a world within which we must function. In order for us to function, it is necessary for us to relate to many different aspects of our world. We must relate to people: Parents, sisters and brothers, friends, teachers, employers, strangers, and of course ourselves. We must relate to institutions: family, educational, vocational, social, governmental, and other institutions. The relationships we form with others, be they individuals or institutions, and with ourselves frequently cause us to recognize our limitations. Our limitations are of a social, mental, and physical nature. Our limitations are on a variety of levels.

Our most basic limitations are physical. We are not all good ball players. Becoming ill or having friends suffering with the flu, tonsillitis, or cancer certainly causes us to readily recognize another physical limitation. The ultimate physical limitation is death. It is a limitation to which all of us know we are subject. We become more aware of this limitation when members of our family or friends die. Auto accidents and illness make young and old people alike very much aware



of the limitation which death presents.

Mentally we are also limited. We do not all become valedictorians. Not all of us can make the grades necessary to gain admission to the college of our choice. Few of us can understand all of the problems which confront us. Few of us find ourselves able to solve all of our problems.

Our relationships with others make us aware of our social limitations. How many of us are pleased with the relationships we have with our parents or brothers and sisters? How many of us have the friends we would like to develop? Are we always included in the social groups of our choice? Do we like the effect our personalities have on other people?

Each of us are subject to personal limitations. Are we happy with what we are? Do we like ourselves? How does competition, acceptance, rejection and other such limiting experiences make us feel? Do we understand why we are living? Are we what we would like to be?

It seems that our limitations are the real problem which confront us. These limitations cause us to worry. These limitations cause us to have anxieties. The anxieties produced by our limitations vary from individual to individual, but all of us experience anxieties.

If we so not successfully respond to these limitations, so that we can reduce our anxieties it is doubtful whether we can live a really satisfying life.

#### B. RELIGION'S RESPONSE

It has traditionally been the role of religion to help people successfully respond to their anxiety producing limitations of their lives in such a way as to reduce these anxieties. The name given to an individual's successful response to his limitations is salvation. Religion is defined as man's response to his finitude - his limitations.<sup>18</sup>

##### 1. An Example: Pharisaic Judaism

Another brief look at Pharisaic Judaism will help you to better understand what religion tries to do for men. As it was stated earlier, it is the basic belief of Pharisaic Judaism that the all-powerful and all knowing God of Israel revealed His will to Moses at Sinai. This revelation, the Torah, expresses God's will for man. The Torah represents a type of blueprint in which God described the way He wants man to cope with his life situation. God's laws were not merely broad abstract pronouncements, but rather dealt with the most practical aspects of daily existence. Consider the following passages from the Torah.

1. A law concerning usury (Deuteronomy 23:20):

You shall not deduct interest from loans to your countryman, whether in money or food or anything else that can be deducted as interest.<sup>19</sup>

2. A law concerning vows (Deuteronomy 23:22):

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not put off fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will require it of you, and you will have incurred guilt.<sup>20</sup>

3. A law concerning divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4):

A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; she leaves his household and becomes the wife of another man; then the second man rejects her, writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; or the man who married her last dies; then the husband who divorced her first shall not take her to wife again; since she has been defiled - for that would be abhorrent to the Lord. You must not bring sin upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage.<sup>21</sup>

4. A law concerning the payment of wages  
(Deuteronomy 24:14-15):

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a non-citizen in your communities. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Lord against

you and you will incur guilt  
(punishment).<sup>22</sup>

These passages illustrate how the Torah helped these people to cope with very real problems of life.

The Pharisaic Jews believed that if man follows God's will, His Torah, then man will not only be helped in his coping with the limitations of his life situation, but also would be helped to overcome the anxieties which develop out of facing sickness and death. In other words, the Pharisees believed that if man were to follow God's law, then he would gain salvation.

The Pharisees believed that the ultimate salvation would take the form of everlasting life in the World-to-Come. Man is not born possessing obstacles to salvation. They believed that man is born innocent, with freedom to choose between good and evil - to choose between following God's law or not following God's law. If man follows God's law he will gain salvation. If man rejects God's law he will not gain salvation. If a man at first rejects God's law; then afterwards accepts God's law, he may ask for His forgiveness and then obtain salvation. It was believed that the final salvation of mankind would be ushered in at the end of history by the Messiah. There would be a general resurrection of the dead. The

righteous (those who had followed the Law of God) would abide forever in the World-to-Come. The Messiah's coming was awaited.

In short, it was the Pharisaic Jewish belief that God had made His will known to Man through the Torah. If man were to follow God's will, then God would watch over man, helping him to cope with the anxieties of life and ultimately would help him even to overcome the anxiety of facing death. Those believing in the principles of Pharisaic Judaism were helped to cope directly with the limitations of life and death. Perhaps the belief that they were following God's law, psychologically helped them to confront the problems of daily living. Apparently the belief that God would reward those who followed His law in life, with eternal life in the World-to-Come, also helped these people in confronting death.

Pharisaic Judaism represents merely one approach to the goal which religions attempt to achieve. If you were to study a variety of religions, you would find that each religion, in its own way, is striving towards the same goal - helping its members achieve salvation.

#### C. REFORM JUDAISM AND YOU

If the goal of religion is to help its members

respond successfully to the limitations of their life situation and to death, then you should expect no less from your religion. Reform Judaism must provide you with a way of coping with your problems in facing life and death.<sup>23</sup> It can do this for you only if you know what Reform Judaism is and believe in what it represents. If the Pharisaic Jew did not really believe that the Torah represented God's blueprint for the way a man should live, then his religion would not have helped him to gain salvation. If you do not both know what Reform Judaism represents and believe what it represents, then Reform Judaism cannot help you.

D. QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

1. What are the basic problems which confront us?
2. Do we really have limitations?
  - a. If so, what are they?
  - b. Are they really serious?
  - c. Do you know of anyone with no limitations?
3. What has the role of religion been throughout history?
4. What is salvation?
5. Should religion be expected to help us? How?
6. Does religion in fact help us?
7. What should your religion do for you?

### III. REFORM JUDAISM: WHO IS A REFORM JEW?

#### A. WHAT'S REFORM - THE QUESTION

One of your non-Jewish friends has persuaded you to go with him to see a film about Israel. You just know that after the movie he is going to want to know all sorts of things about Judaism. It's a natural set up and you are feeling about to be set upon. Sure you went to religious school, but somehow clear answers to the questions most non-Jews ask did not seem to emerge. Your friend will probably start by saying something like, "Let's see, there are three kinds of Judaism, aren't there? Reform, Orthodox and what's the other one?" Confidently you will answer, "No, actually there are four kinds, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform. I'm a Reform Jew". Now, here it comes. You try, but you cannot avoid his next question. "What's Reform?" It is this frequently asked question, which few Reform Jews are able to answer adequately, that this chapter discusses.

##### 1. A Problem?

At this point, it should be noted that few Reform Jews are able to answer this question adequately, not only because it is a very difficult question, but because



it is also one which has been given comparatively little attention. Only recently have individuals clearly recognized that the question is the fundamental one as well as a difficult one to understand. If you would put this text aside for a while and think of some possible answers, perhaps it would help you to focus on the difficult nature of this question.

## 2. Where Shall We Look for Answers?

Hopefully, you have discovered for yourself some of the difficulties involved in answering this question. Now that these difficulties are clearer, it is appropriate to look for an answer. Where shall we look? Most Reform rabbis do appear to have sources of information. These sources reasonably enough seem to be either the Jewish past, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations or even the Union Prayerbook. Let us see if any or all four will be able to provide us with an accurate definition of Reform Judaism.

## 3. What Will be an Acceptable Definition of Reform Judaism?

At the outset, however, we must understand the general characteristics which any definition of Reform Judaism must have to be a viable one. First, it would

necessarily include the beliefs which are in fact considered to be true by people who call themselves Reform Jews. This is the case because, as was discussed in the preceding chapter, in order for a religion to be your religion, you must believe that it represents the truth. A religion based on the idea that rain falls upward cannot be your religion, if it runs counter to what you know to be true. How can that which you cannot believe be your religion? Consequently, the ideas found in any definition of Reform Judaism would have to be believed by Reform Jews as being true. The first chapter also illustrated that two mutually exclusive and contradictory things cannot be true. An individual could not be asked to believe in life after death and no life after death at the same time. Such a belief would be contradictory, nonsensical, and false. One human mind cannot meaningfully entertain this notion. We will consider a definition of Reform Judaism valid only if it is intelligible. This means it is able to be believed.

#### B. THE PAST

First we will direct our attention to the Jewish past for a definition. We will attempt to find standard beliefs which Jews have held throughout history. Such

a definition must yield a consistent set of religious beliefs to which each of the Judaisms of the past have subscribed. If we can discover beliefs which linked Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Maimonides, Kaufmann Kohler, Mordicai Kaplan, and so forth, then it should become clear to us where Reform Jews must stand in terms of these beliefs. We might call this a search for a sort of essence of Judaism in terms of which Reform Judaism can be defined. Let us see if we can find this essence.

The belief in God at first appears to form a most obvious essence. If, however, belief in God is used as the essence of Judaism; then we must consider Christianity and Islam to be Jewish, since these people also believe in God. Objecting, we could say that Jews have a different conception of God than these other religions. Therefore let us look to the past in an attempt to discover the Jewish conception of God.

The Bible is the most reasonable place to look first for the Jewish conception of God. You will be disappointed, however, if you expect to find that all of your Biblical ancestors viewed God the same way. It seems that at various times within the Biblical period of Jewish history different ideas of God existed.<sup>24</sup> At the

time of the Exodus, the deity was viewed as a national God. Each of the other nations had a god who watched over his people. The God of Israel guided the destiny of His people Israel. The people of Israel did not claim that their God reigned over any other people. He was the God of Israel alone. The God of Israel made Himself known to His people through such acts as bringing them out of Egypt and guiding them into Canaan.<sup>26</sup> Later, during the Prophetic period, the God of Israel came to be thought of as one who demanded righteousness from His people. Stress was placed on His ethical teachings. These teachings were to be the yardstick by which all nations were to be judged. Morality was viewed as having no boundries.<sup>27</sup> God was no longer viewed as the national God of Israel alone, but rather as the God of all nations - a universal God. Amos, Jeremiah, and other prophets, thought that God would destroy any nation, including Israel, who did not live up to His demands. It was believed that God's judgment was executed primarily in terms of nations rather than on the individual level.<sup>28</sup>

There is a significant difference between the way people viewed God at the time of the Exodus and the way they viewed God during the Prophetic period. That

difference was between the concept of a Hebrew God of the Hebrew nation and the concept of a universal God of all nations. These views really described two different kinds of gods. This is only one of the many differences found between the way the people of Israel viewed God during the Biblical period of Jewish history. This distinction, however, is enough to indicate that even within a single period of Jewish history, God was thought of in different way.

The Pharisees viewed God, not only as the God of all nations, but also as the God of individuals. He was thought of as being the creator and ruler of the universe.<sup>29</sup> He revealed His law to Moses. Every individual was expected to follow God's Torah. In contrast to the Biblical notion of God, He would judge individuals rather than nations. Individuals, not nations, had to atone for their sins. Contrary to the teachings of the prophets, the Pharisees believed that God would not destroy the nation for its collective sins. The God of the Biblical period was a God who focused His attention on national conduct, collective responsibility for sin, and national destiny. In contrast, the God of the Pharisaic period was thought of as focusing His attention on the individual's conduct and individual responsibility for

sin. He was viewed as being a personal God.<sup>30</sup>

Each of these ideas indicate ways Jews have thought about God. Each of these concepts differ very much from each other. In fact, those who held some of these beliefs would perhaps consider some of the other beliefs to be a misuse of the word God. It is common knowledge that Spinoza was excommunicated by his Jewish community, because of his view of God. Clearly, an investigation of the past does not allow us to use belief in God as the essence of Judaism.

The belief in a significant after life (life after death) is another principle which we might expect our history to reveal as basic to being Jewish. When we read Jewish history, however, we find that very different beliefs have existed regarding a significant after life. Consider these statements from the Rabbinic period of Jewish history.

It was a favored saying of Rab: 'Not like this world is the world to come.' In the world to come there is neither eating nor drinking; no procreation of children or business transactions; no envy or hatred or rivalry; but the righteous sit enthroned, their crowns on their heads, and enjoy the lustre of the Divine Presence. (Berakot 17a.)

R. Johanan said: The Jerusalem of the world to come is unlike the Jerusalem of this world. The Jerusalem of this

world all can enter who wish to  
 enter; the Jerusalem of the world  
 to come they only can enter who are  
 appointed to it. (Baba Batra 75b)

These statements are typical of the Rabbinic period. They reflect a well developed concept of a world which they believed man would experience after death. The world to come was thought of as a place which could be described in concrete terms.

We discover, however, that the concept is absent from other periods. We find that the Biblical Jew believed in a state of nothingness called "shaol". There is an obvious conflict between these positions. This being the case, we wonder which is the correct opinion...which is the Jewish position? Is it possible that either position is less Jewish? Is it possible that Amos was less Jewish than Rashi or Maimonides? In the past, Jews have held very different views about most areas of religious concern. Jeremiah and Job accept nothing of the Pharisaic belief in a meaningful resurrection and after-life; Amos' God, to whom all peoples were equal, would entirely destroy Israel for its sins, whereas the God of the Pharisees loved Israel specially, and regardless of sin, would perpetuate His people forever, into the Messianic era. If we cannot find a Jewish essence in the past concerning such principles

as God and an after life, then it is doubtful whether we will be able to find an essence in any of the other areas. It seems therefore that we must conclude Jewish history has given rise to many systems, each calling themselves Jewish, but which hold views that often are in direct opposition.<sup>31</sup>

#### C. THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

We must therefore change the focus of our investigation from the past to the present. Perhaps we can be guided to a definition of Reform Judaism by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the C.C.A.R.), an association whose membership includes the vast majority of American Reform Rabbis. After a reading of the C.C.A.R.'s minutes we would be probably somewhat surprised that this group has not developed a definition of Reform Judaism. Considering, however, that the standard definition of a religion represents the dogmas of that religion; that is, those things which must be believed in order to be a member of that religion, we begin to understand our rabbis inability to define Reform Judaism.

First, there is a wide range of views found among the membership of the C.C.A.R. The following opinions regarding the State of Israel exemplify the diversity of positions adhered to by Reform rabbis.



1. Max Lilienthal (1815-1882) viewed America as his Palestine, Zion and his Jerusalem. He did not regard the establishing of the State of Israel as a positive action. He considered the signers of the Declaration of Independence his deliverers.<sup>32</sup>
2. Kaufmann Kohler (1869-1926) stated that "the hope voiced in the synagogue liturgy for a return to Palestine, the formation of a Jewish State under a king of the house of David, and restoration of the sacrificial cult, no longer expressed the views of the Jew in Western Civilization."<sup>33</sup>
3. Bernhard Felsenthal (1822-1908) felt that those Jews who were against the idea of establishing the State of Israel were in fact in favor of the Jews becoming assimilated into the majority culture. He believed that if Zionism failed, the Jews would disappear.<sup>34</sup>
4. Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949) stated, "I conceive of a Jewish Mission to create a centre of Jewish life, in which the loftiest spiritual and ethical ideals of the Jewish

religion shall be lifted up and magnified  
in the sight of the Jew and of the world."35

If the C.C.A.R. were to define Reform Judaism (set down a list of beliefs which one must believe in order to be a Reform Jew) it would necessarily be forced to select the views of some rabbis as being correct and others as being wrong. In doing this it would exclude some rabbis from its membership, because their views were not Reform Jewish ones. The C.C.A.R. is not "copping out" of its responsibility to make such decisions, but rather is being sensitive to the limits of its authority and to the right of each Reform Jew. In order for the C.C.A.R. to set down a definition, thereby excluding some people from membership, it would have to have the authority to decide whether or not an individual is a member of Reform Judaism. The C.C.A.R. does not have this authority.

We know that other religious bodies have had authority in such matters and continue to main it. How can they claim to have authority over others, and have their authority accepted by others, while the C.C.A.R. cannot do this? These religious groups which invest their clergymen with this religious authority reason in the following way:

1. There is a God who created the universe.
2. He has authority over all He created.
3. God, therefore, has authority over mankind.
4. God can exercise His authority and make demands on man.
5. God has made His laws known via revelation to a certain religious body.
6. God has also, through revelation, delegated elements of His authority over mankind to a certain person (eg. the Pope) or religious body (eg. the College of Cardinals).
7. Since this person acts in the name of God, mankind must recognize the authority of this person or body, and obey the laws issued from it.<sup>36</sup>

Two beliefs necessary to uphold this system are a belief in God and in revelation. As the following passage indicates, Reform Judaism does not subscribe to a single concept of revelation.

God reveals Himself not only in the majesty, beauty and orderliness of nature, but also in the vision and moral striving of the human spirit. Revelation is a continuous process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the people of Israel, through its prophets and sages, achieved unique insight in the realm

of religious truth. The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and of the moral law. It preserves the historical precedents, sanctions and norms of Jewish life, and seeks to mold it in the patterns of goodness and of holiness. Being products of historical processes, certain of its laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth. But as a depository of permanent spiritual ideals, the Torah remains the dynamic source of the life of Israel. Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism. (From the Columbus Platform)<sup>37</sup>

Therefore it seems clear that a single group of individual cannot claim authority in religious matters over other Reform Jews. It becomes obvious to us that the C.C.A.R. does not have the authority to say one man's view is incorrect, so he must not be considered to be within the bounds of Reform Judaism. The C.C.A.R. itself took away its only possible source of authority in religious matters when it stated that it did not feel bound by revelation.

#### D. THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the U.A.H.C.) is the only Reform Jewish organization which remains for us as a possible source from which we might

expect a definition of Reform Judaism to come. The U.A.H.C., as the following passage from its 1946 constitution clearly indicates, is the service arm of the Reform movement.

#### Objects

- a) To encourage and aid the organization development of Jewish congregations.
- b) To promote Jewish education and to enrich and intensify Jewish life.
- c) To maintain the Hebrew Union College.
- d) To foster other activities for the perpetuation and advancement of Judaism.

#### Congregational Autonomy

Nothing contained in this Constitution or the By-laws shall be construed so as to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities of the constituent congregations or the Union.<sup>38</sup>

Defining is clearly not a function of a service organization.

#### E. THE UNION PRAYERBOOK

The Union Prayerbook remains for us as the one source from which a definition of Reform Judaism might be expected. The Union Prayerbook however, is published by the C.C.A.R. It was stated earlier that when the C.C.A.R., as an institution, denied the revelation at Sinai it

eliminated its basis of authority for establishing the correct definition of Reform Judaism. The prayers found in the Union Prayerbook, therefore, can only be considered to represent the beliefs held by some of its members. It cannot be used as a basis for establishing the definition of Reform Judaism.

#### F. CONCLUSION: A DEFINITION

On the basis of this review, it becomes understandable why neither the past, the C.C.A.R., the U.A.H.C., nor the U.P.B. can provide us with a definition of Reform Judaism or a basis for one. It seems that standards for membership, a definition, can only be found by observing the actions of the members of the Reform Jewish movement. The definition comes via observation rather than via theory or dogmas. The working definition which must be arrived at, after observing the Reform Jewish group is evident.

The most general mode of defining Reform Judaism is to utilize the standard of membership in Reform Jewish institutions. Thus, any person is to be considered a Reform Jew who is affiliated with one of Reform Judaism's formal institutions: the C.C.A.R., the U.A.H.C., rabbinic students at the Hebrew Union College, and the 18th century Reformers who lived before the establishment of the three institutions. This body of person is

referred to as the Reform Jewish  
community.<sup>39</sup>

Since affiliation, not doctrine, is the basic factor in the definition, religious thought and belief will be Reform Jewish so long as the one holding those beliefs is a Reform Jew. Consequently, Reform Judaism is composed of many Reform Jewish systems, since each person can have his own system.

G. QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

1. What are the characteristics which any definition of Reform Judaism must have to be a viable one?
2. Can the Jewish past, the C.C.A.R., the U.A.H.C., or the Union Prayerbook provide us with a definition of Reform Judaism?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, why not?
3. Do you agree with the definition of a Reform Jew offered in this chapter?
4. According to this definition, what can be considered to be Reform Jewish thought, belief, and practice?
5. Who is a Reform Jew?
6. What is Reform Judaism?



#### IV. NOW, WHAT ABOUT THE REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY?

The previous sections stressed the necessity of each individual knowing what his religion is and then deciding whether he can accept it as being true. Afterwards, consideration was given to the question of what Reform Judaism, your religion, should be doing for you. Finally, a working definition of a Reform Jew and his Judaism was offered. It now seems reasonable to consider the function of the Reform Jew, rabbi, and congregation.

##### A. THE REFORM JEW

###### 1. The Reform Jew and Reform Jewish Thought

The definition of a Reform Jew arrived at in the last chapter was one based on membership. Any person who is affiliated with one of Reform Judaism's institutions: the C.C.A.R., the U.A.H.C., the student body of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and the 19th century Reformers who lived before the founding of these institutions is to be considered a Reform Jew. The members of these institutions combined form the Reform Jewish community. Since membership, not specific beliefs, determine who is to be considered a Reform Jew, religious thought and belief is Reform Jewish so long as the individual holding those beliefs is a

Reform Jew. If you are a member of one of these Reform institutions, then you are a Reform Jew. Consequently, your thought and beliefs regarding religion are Reform Jewish. As is demonstrated by your classroom discussions regarding almost every issue, there are many different points of view. Each of these differing views are Reform Jewish, since you and your classmates are Reform Jews. This diversity of opinion justifiably exists not only in your classroom, but also throughout the Reform Jewish community. Each of the varied opinions held by such Jews not only represents valid Reform Jewish thought, but also a valid Reform Jewish approach.

Even though it is true that you have the freedom to believe and say anything without losing your status as a Reform Jew, it must be pointed out that there is a difference in the quality of beliefs which can be held. Your classroom discussions illustrate that some beliefs are based on a studied, well thought out and logical foundation, while others are not. It seems evident that the beliefs resulting from much consideration are the ones which are to be valued.

## 2. The Reform Jew and His Concerns

Your most basic concerns as a Reform Jew do not really differ from the concerns of members of other

religious groups. As was discussed earlier, men find themselves in a world which confronts them with many limitations: physical, mental and social. These limitations are problems which cause men to be anxious. Religion has historically attempted to help men successfully respond to the anxiety producing limitations of life. The goal of religion has been to help man gain salvation.

The Reform Jew, too, is concerned with successfully responding to his limitations. It is reasonable for you to expect from the Reform Jewish community at least that which others expect from their religions.

### 3. The Reform Jew and His Activities

It has been suggested that ...

...each of the varied opinions of Reform Jews not only represent valid Reform Jewish thought; but also valid Reform Jewish approaches to their concerns.

...the goal of Reform Judaism is to help man successfully respond to the anxiety producing limitations of life.

Activities, therefore, which help you to successfully respond to your limitations seem to be appropriate activities for you as a Reform Jew. It seems productive for

the Reform Jew to engage in three major areas of activity: beliefs, ethics, and symbolism (rituals, customs, and ceremonies).

In order for you to gain from Reform Judaism you must become aware of and understand the relevant beliefs which exist in the Reform Jewish community. After you have gained an understanding of the variety of existing views and practices, you will then be in a position to accept those beliefs which you think are true and those practices which you think are valid. This will enable you to achieve an authentic religious identity. The following are several major categories of beliefs and practices are helpful for Reform Jews to seriously explore.

a. The philosophy of Reform Judaism.<sup>40</sup>

There are a variety of ways in which Reform Judaism has been viewed. There are a variety of answers which have been given to the question, "What is Reform Judaism?" Each of you has a way of answering this question. The various ways of viewing Reform Judaism each represent a philosophy of Reform Judaism. It seems that it would be a productive activity for each individual first to study the ways Reform Judaism

has been thought of by Jewish thinkers. Afterwards, on the basis of this study, each of you would be able to formulate a well thought out view of Reform Judaism - a philosophy of Reform Judaism. This would provide you with a basis upon which you would be able to build your Reform Jewish beliefs and practices.

b. The meanings and uses of the term God.<sup>41</sup>

If you were to ask each member of your class to explain what he thinks God is, many different explanations would undoubtedly be given. If you were to read what various famous Jews had to say about God, you would find a great diversity of beliefs. Amos, for example, thought of a God who judged all nations equally. Amos' God was willing, therefore, to destroy Israel entirely for its sins. God, as thought of by the Pharisees, had a special love for Israel, and regardless of sin, would perpetuate His people forever, into the Messianic era.

It is evident that there are different

meanings and uses of the term God. It, therefore, would seem appropriate for you, as a Reform Jew, to study the various meanings and uses of the term God. After doing this, you would be in a better position to arrive at a meaningful and useful concept of God.

- c. The standard concepts and themes of religion; such as, prophecy, after-life, miracles, and so forth.<sup>42</sup>

Prophecy, after-life, and miracles are some of the major themes and concepts which are found in most religions. Reform Judaism is not an exception. Your understanding of these areas is sure to help you gain insights into the development of your religion.

- d. Varieties of past and present Jewish religious systems of thought.<sup>43</sup>

The Pharisaic system of thought has been discussed in an earlier chapter. There are, and have been, many such systems which are called Jewish. An examination of each of these systems will either help each

Reform Jew to find one which can be adopted or will provide the individual with guidance to develop a personal religious system of thought.

e. All relevant ethical theories.<sup>44</sup>

Everyone is confronted with ethical decisions. Many ethical theories have arisen because individuals have always been called upon to decide what is good. Each theory suggests what should be considered to be the ultimate good. One theory suggests that "might makes right." Another states that good is that which leads to the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers. After considering the existing ethical theories, a Reform Jew would be familiar with the many ways of defining that which is good. A broader base would be created upon which decisions could be made regarding what is to be called good. It is clear that this would help the individual in deciding how to act in a given situation.

f. The nature and meaning of Reform Jewish

ritual, customs and ceremonies.

A serious look at what is trying to be achieved via the worship services, the holidays and the ways of celebrating them, and the life cycle ceremonies (eg. Bris, Bar Mitzvah, Confirmation, the Marriage ceremony and others), would provide the Reform Jew with a standard for judging the value of these practices. This sort of investigation would help Reform Jews to determine which are useful in their present form, which need to be updated, and which need to be discarded. Refraining from this sort of activity is almost certain to lead either to meaningless repetition or to complete indifference regarding rituals, customs and ceremonies.

An exploration of these areas will better enable you to find effective ways to respond to the limitations of your life situation.

B. THE REFORM JEWISH RABBI

The Reform rabbi is confronted with the same task as is every Reform Jew. He must gain an understanding of such areas as the philosophy of Reform Judaism, the



meanings and uses of the term God, the nature and meaning of Reform Jewish practices, and other areas previously mentioned. On the basis of this understanding, he accepts views which are believable and helpful to him in his responding to the limitations of his life. His thoughts, as do the thoughts of every Reform Jew represents Reform Jewish thoughts. His actions, based on his thoughts, as do the actions of every Reform Jew, represent Reform Jewish actions.

There is a difference, however, between the Reform Jewish rabbi and the Reform Jew. Once the Reform Jewish rabbi reaches views which help him to respond successfully to the limitations of his life, his position then causes him to function in a unique way within the Reform Jewish community.

The Reform Jewish rabbi is a person whose essential function is to develop, in terms of each individual and the total Reform Jewish community he is serving, the potential for successfully responding to their problem. The specific focus of the Reform Jewish rabbi's attention is on the Reform Jewish community; the general object of his attention is the Jewish community at large; and his broadest area of concern is the community of mankind.

The Reform rabbi's essential function differs from that of the Orthodox rabbi's, not in its goal of helping his congregants gain salvation, but in the way in which the goal is reached. For the Orthodox rabbi and his followers, salvation comes only by following the Law given by God. This sort of law does not exist for the Reform rabbi and his congregants. As discussed earlier, in the Reform Jewish situation, each individual is free to respond in his own way, since Reform Jews are not bound by the authority of a God given law.

On the basis of our previous considerations, the essential activities of the Reform rabbi seem clear.

1. The Reform rabbi teaches all the relevant beliefs that relate to religion and salvation so that the members of the Reform community will become aware of and understand them.
2. Afterwards, the Reform rabbi presents his own views as true in his opinion, and exhorts his congregants to accept his beliefs.<sup>46</sup>
3. The Reform rabbi urges that the congregants accept some belief as necessary for religious identity, even though the belief may vary from the rabbi's own view.<sup>47</sup>

4. The Reform rabbi teaches the nature and meaning of Reform Jewish practices, customs and ceremonies, so that they become potent vehicles of moods, and feelings for the community.<sup>48</sup>

In short, the prime purpose of the Reform rabbi is to acquaint the Reform Jewish community with all relevant beliefs that exist, and to urge that they internalize the beliefs they think are true so they may achieve authentic religious identity. It is not of prime importance that the members of the community adopt the rabbi's particular point of view, but rather that they adopt views helpful to them in their search for salvation.

#### C. THE REFORM JEWISH CONGREGATION

It seems to follow that the Reform Jewish congregation should be one which recognizes the previously discussed goal of religion and one which directs its efforts towards meeting that goal. An atmosphere is desired which is a natural outgrowth of the nature of Reform Judaism. An atmosphere should exist in which the right of religious freedom is offered to every member of the Reform Jewish congregation. The many options, in terms of beliefs, ethics, and ritual matters, should be made available to the congregants. In addition,

they should be encouraged to select those which are not only believable, but also helpful to them in responding to their limitations. In short, the Reform Jewish congregation should provide each member with a community having a common goal of gaining salvation.

D. QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

1. What are our individual concerns as Reform Jews?
2. Do members of other religious groups share these concerns?
3. What are appropriate activities for us as Reform Jews?
4. How do the activities of Reform Jewish rabbis differ from those of his congregants?
5. What is the task of the Reform Jewish rabbi?
6. What should be the nature of a Reform Jewish congregation?

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alvin J. Reines, "The Function of the Reform Rabbi," Elements in A Philosophy of Reform Judaism, Third Mimeographed edition, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1969-70, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Alvin J. Reines, "Reform Judaism", Meet The American Jew, ed. Beldon Menkus, Nashville, 1963, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>Alvin J. Reines, "Polydoxy and Modern Judaism" Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal, ed. Daniel

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. pp. 25-26.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. pp. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>13</sup>The Holy Scriptures, Philadelphia, 1916, p. 88.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>15</sup>The Torah, Philadelphia, 1962, pp. 103-104.

<sup>16</sup>The Holy Scriptures, p. 218.

<sup>17</sup>Savings of the Fathers, trans. Joseph Hertz, New York, 1945, pp. 13-15.

<sup>18</sup>Reines, "The Function of the Reform Rabbi," p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>The Torah, p. 367.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. pp. 367-368.
- 22 Ibid. p. 368.
- 23 Reines, "The Function of the Reform Rabbi," p. 3.
- 24 William Sunday, "God," A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings, II, Edinburgh, 1906, 200.
- 25 Ibid. p. 201.
- 26 Ibid. p. 203.
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- 32 W. Gunther Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism, New York, 1965, p. 145.
- 33 Ibid. p. 146.
- 34 Ibid. p. 150.
- 35 Ibid. p. 151.
- 36 Alvin J. Reines, "Authority in Reform Judaism," Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal, ed. Abraham J. Klausner, New York, April, 1960, p. 18.
- 37 Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism, adopted by the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis at Columbus, Ohio, May 27, 1937, p. 1.
- 38 Plaut, pp. 110-111.
- 39 Reines, "Reform Judaism," p. 30.
- 40 Reines, "The Function of the Reform Rabbi," pp. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid. p. 5.



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