

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM
(1922-1945)

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In Memory of My Father

Simon Pinsky

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May the Memory of the

Righteous Be a Blessing

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Preface

The preface to a Rabbinic Thesis must be, by its nature, quite different from other forewords. In it one feels compelled to thank many men and women who have helped to make one's rabbinic education worthwhile and exciting since this thesis is the culmination of that training. Yet one cannot help feeling inadequate to the task and fearful of leaving someone out of one's list.

Keeping this in mind, I must thank the faculty of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York for providing for me more than just a source of Jewish knowledge. It is easy to criticize one's teachers; it is difficult to find the words to praise them with. A more dedicated group of men would be hard to find. They have provided for their students models of rabbinic excellence all too rare in our own days.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Bertram W. Korn, rabbi and scholar. His work in the field of American Jewish history has become the hallmark of that field. His help and guidance to me during the preparation of this study has been an invaluable aid and a source of encouragement.

I also want to make mention of my gratitude to the Board of Trustees of the Society for the Advancement of

Judaism who opened their archives to me and allowed me to freely use whatever material I found therein. Special thanks are also due to Rabbi and Mrs. Ira Eisenstein for their reminiscences and suggestions as well as their friendly hospitality.

Most of all, I would like to thank Rabbi and Mrs. Mordecai M. Kaplan. Dr. Kaplan helped make this thesis not just another congregational history but what I believe to be a chapter in the spiritual odyssey of one of the great figures in American Jewish history. I particularly want to thank him for the use of his journals which, when published, will add immeasurably to our understanding of an important epoch in that history. In 1927, Rabbi Kaplan wrote in his journal:

If it be true, as Carlyle said, that happy is the people whose annals are tiresome, I ought to be adjudged, in the light of these annals, a happy man.

We are to be adjudged a happy people for having had this man among us for so many years and I am to be adjudged a fortunate person for having had the opportunity of meeting and speaking with him personally several times.

Finally, I would like to thank three important personalities in my life and dedicate this work to them. First, I would like to express my sincere and eternal gratitude to my parents who understood the importance of education for their children and gave me the physical and moral encouragement to reach this day. Although my father

died three months before my ordination, he was able to share the excitement as this important day drew nearer. The void in the lives of those who loved him created by his loss can never be filled. To my parents, therefore, this work is reverently dedicated. Secondly, I would like to thank my wife Lisa who has allowed me to see what was and is within myself that can be of lasting importance. Through our relationship I have learned why God upon seeing Adam alone in the world exclaimed, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." (Genesis 2:18) To my "fitting helper," I therefore dedicate this work.

Stephen Pinsky

Riverdale, New York
March, 1971

On Sabbath Eve, June 11, 1881, a son was born to a noted Talmud scholar and his wife in Swenziany, Lithuania. A colleague of the infant's father, also a Talmud scholar, upon seeing the child predicted that this boy would grow up to become the Chief Rabbi of England. Although the boy never fulfilled this prediction, many rabbis in this country would not hesitate to elect him today at the age of eighty-nine to the unofficial post of Chief Rabbi of the United States. In fairness to this unnamed prophet of ninety years passed, it should be noted that in 1915 when the post of Chief Rabbi of England was left vacant, Mordecai M. Kaplan was asked by the great scholar Solomon Schechter to become a candidate for the post. Kaplan, however, turned the offer down.

It seems strange to begin a study of an institution, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City, with a possibly apocryphal anecdote about a man, Mordecai Kaplan. Yet, on closer examination, this is indeed an appropriate place to begin. The history of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism and the life of Mordecai Kaplan are so completely intertwined that it would be difficult if not impossible to understand one without the other. The SAJ is the child of both the thought and life of Kaplan. We must, therefore, begin our study not in 1922 with the birth of the SAJ but in 1881 with the birth of its founder.

We must seek to understand Kaplan's philosophy of Judaism first, if we are to understand its concrete expression, the SAJ.

For the purposes of this study, we shall begin our study of Kaplan with a brief survey of his thought rather than with a biographical sketch of his early years. The reason for this inversion of logical procedure is to allow us to see how specific events in Kaplan's life led to the founding of the SAJ. We will also be able to view, thereby, these events in the light of Kaplan's thinking and be able to trace its development.

The Rabbis of old tell us that there is no former nor latter in the Torah. They meant by this that one should not be concerned with chronological time where the Torah is concerned. A similar statement can be made in regard to the writing of Mordecai Kaplan. His basic theses were, as we shall see later, fairly well developed at an early period in his career. His later books contain, in many instances, refinements of his philosophy rather than new insights. In reviewing his ideas, therefore, we shall not be concerned with whether a particular idea or quotation comes from an early or a late source.

Mordecai Kaplan's basic thesis is that the group rather than the individual or the idea is the all important unit in the history of mankind. Religion is in

essence the consciousness of group values. It must be emphasized immediately, however, that religion is simply one of the factors of civilization.¹

Kaplan no longer uses the term "Judaism" to mean simply the religion of the Jewish people. Judaism is more than the Jewish religion. It is the sum total of all of the activities in which the Jews partake. If, as Kaplan theorizes, God is not discoverable in a generally meaningful way by solitary man, but only by man as a participant in the life of a group, the God of the Jewish people must therefore be found in the life of the Jewish people. Men come to know God through the particular society of which they are members.² The social function of a religion is, therefore, its preservation of ideas and values considered vital to the continuity of a particular group.

The primary criteria for knowledge of God to Kaplan is that our conception of God must be self-consistent and, furthermore, be consistent with whatever else we hold to be true.³ Understanding this, Kaplan asserts that to modern man "religion can no longer be a matter of entering into relationship with the supernatural."⁴ What believing in God is, then, is "to reckon with life's creative forces, tendencies and potentialities as forming an organic unity, and as giving meaning to life by virtue of that unity."⁵

In Kaplan's view, belief in God is a necessity of

human nature.⁶ Since belief in God is necessary, you must give man a God which is believable to him in the present social and cultural milieu. In order for religion to function in a given time, it must accomodate itself to that time. For example, today we see that science needs order, so therefore religion likewise does.

Kaplan does not accept any view which holds God to be personal. Rather we should understand God as "the creative life of the universe."⁷ God is the power in the universe which makes for salvation.⁸ This means that the cosmos is so constituted as to enable man to fulfill the highest human needs of his nature. We see, therefore, that God must be thought of as a force or a power. This belief is necessary to Kaplan because this is how he believes that modern man thinks.

As we have seen, Kaplan views Judaism as a group "religion." The chief function of a group religion is to sanctify certain concrete elements of the particular civilization to which it belongs. "The task of the historical religion consists in rendering that milieu efficacious in eliciting from its adherents the best that is in them. It accomplishes that by attaching high worth and significance to certain concrete elements in the milieu."⁹ To be a religious Jew, then, is to do everything possible to bring out the best (i.e., to maximize the

potential) in the Jewish people. The goal is to allow the Jewish people to "attain its moral and spiritual maximum."¹⁰

Throughout its long history, Kaplan points out, the Jewish people has become conscious of certain values which have enabled it in the past to maximize its potential and to bring out the best in its people. These values, we are told, "are the product not of any single religious philosophy or ethical tendency, but of the various social and intellectual forces that have entered into the shaping of modern civilization."¹¹

What role then does the God-idea, as Kaplan understands that term, play in this scheme? It is clearly indicated in the following statement (which Kaplan himself places in *italics*): "The Jewish religion is an attempt to set forth the God idea by selecting the purposes and possibilities in the life of the Jewish people in which there is most promise of good, and making God, as it were, sponsor for them."¹² In Kaplan's view of God as a force or power in the universe, the whole problem of revelation becomes superfluous. There can be no question of revelation when we understand God is indifferent to man except for the fact that His fundamental operation has to do with men.

Arthur A. Cohen's observation concerning Kaplan is, I believe, quite relevant at this point in our discussion. Cohen writes: "The reconstruction of Judaism to which

Mordecai Kaplan has given his life is no reconstruction of Judaism (sic) but a reconstruction of the Jewish people. The people, not its faith, must live; for if the people live, some faith, any faith -- as long as it reflects the conscience and the history of the people -- will do. The people, not the faith, must be rendered eternal; for if the people shall not live, to what purpose shall have been the history of the Jews."¹³

Thus we see that Kaplan has basically reversed the direction or hierarchy theorized by other modern Jewish thinkers. For Leo Baeck, for example, the Jewish people exist for God's sake -- an instrumentality for bringing about a definite end. For Kaplan, on the other hand, the people become the center of the scheme. Just as every people will create its style and its religion, the idea of God in Judaism exists for the Jewish people. The Jewish people gave rise to a whole way of life. The idea of God was created along with religion by the people to give sanction to that life. To this extent, then, religion does not involve the acceptance of any belief in historical or metaphysical propositions. It is simply an affirmative attitude toward life in general. Thus religion is universal, while particular religions arise in particular cultures.

Kaplan theorizes, therefore, that "the task now before the Jew is to save the otherness of Jewish life...." He defines this otherness in the following fashion, "that nexus

of history, literature, language, social organization, folk sanctions, standards of conduct, social and spiritual ideals, esthetic values, which in their totality form a civilization."¹⁴

If Judaism is to survive, therefore, we see what is needed is the revitalization of the Jewish community. Just as we have seen above that God exists for the community, so too the covenant with that God would serve a similar function. It is merely one more method of assuring group survival. Kaplan uses the word "Torah" to indicate "a historically evolved civilization." He then goes on to write, "As a covenant, the Torah is a symbol, representing the truth that a nation becomes such not through the accident of common ancestry or physical propinquity, but through the consent of those who constitute it to live together and to make their common past the inspiration for a common future."¹⁵

With this understanding of Kaplan's thought in mind, we can better understand the man, his life and the institutions his personality and philosophy created. The centrality of the Jewish people to his scheme of thinking led Kaplan to become more and more concerned with Jewish survival. His concern with the survival of that group led directly to the founding of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism.

Chapter II

As I have already stated, the history of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism does not begin in 1922 with its founding but rather in 1881 with the birth of its founder. In order to understand the institution one must be familiar with the life of its leader as well as his thought. Much of the material for this chapter is based on several conversations I had with Rabbi Kaplan in December, 1970 and January, 1971.

Mordecai Kaplan was born in Sweziany, Lithuania on June 11, 1881. His father, Israel Kaplan, was a traditional Jew and a Talmud scholar of some note. In 1888, the elder Kaplan came to New York City at the invitation of Rabbi Jacob Joseph to become a member of the first Bet Din (Rabbinic Court) established in the United States. One year later, at the age of eight Kaplan joined his father in America.

For his first three years in New York, Israel Kaplan kept his son away from public schools. All of his studies were confined to Judaism. During this period, he attended the Yeshivah Aitz Hayim which later became Yeshivah University. Simultaneously, he would study Talmud with his father and Bible with private teachers who would come to his house five days a week between six and eight in the morning and eight and ten in the evening.

After three years of this regimen, Kaplan was enrolled in public grammar school which he attended until he was fourteen years old. While enrolled in public school, a classmate of Kaplan's, Charles Kauvar, absented himself from school to take an examination which would enable him to enter the Jewish Theological Seminary. Upon hearing Kauvar's story, Kaplan asked him to tell the story of the school to his parents whose life ambition was for him to become a rabbi.

At the age of twelve in November, 1893, while still attending public school, Kaplan applied for admission to the Seminary (i.e., JTS). His admission examination consisted of reading the Rashi Commentary on *parshat* (Genesis 33-40) and translating it into Yiddish. From the very beginning, however, he was critical of the Seminary and unhappy for the entire eight years with his course of study.

Some of Kaplan's disenchantment with the type of instruction offered him at the Seminary can be traced to his association through his father with Arnold B. Erlich. Erlich, a noted Bible critic who had studied under Friedrich Delitzsch in Europe, was a frequent visitor to Kaplan's home from 1894 to 1906. From Erlich, who was completely secularized and whose interest in the Bible was purely scholarly, Kaplan learned Biblical criticism. Erlich would bring his copybooks to Kaplan's father to have them

checked for the etymological meaning of certain Hebrew terms. One could imagine the effect of this knowledge upon Kaplan's studies at the Seminary. Kaplan reports that he was the only student who took exception to the traditional approach of teaching Bible at the Seminary. His advocacy of Biblical criticism almost brought him to the point of fist fights with fellow students on several occasions. His doubt of the Mosaic authorship of the Torah and the historicity of miracles were certainly not welcome views at the Seminary seventy years ago. Nevertheless, Kaplan received ordination from the Seminary in 1902 at the age of twenty-one.

While still attending the Seminary, Kaplan studied simultaneously at the City College of New York from which he graduated in 1900 and Columbia University from which he received his M.A. in 1902. At Columbia, he studied with Nicholas Murray Butler who introduced him to the world of sociology and anthropology.¹ Both of these disciplines were to have profound effects upon his theory of religion.

One other person, aside from Arnold Erlich, greatly influenced Kaplan during this period. He was Joseph Sossnitz, "a mathematician and physicist who was at the same time a Hasid in the fullest sense of the term, though he refused to wear Hasidic garb. From him I learned to synthesize the spirit of religion with that of science and to become aware of ethics as the indispensable prerequisite

to worship."²

Upon ordination, Kaplan accepted the pulpit of the most fashionable East European congregation of its day, Kehillat Jeshurun, the East 85th Street Congregation in New York City. This was the first time that a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary had been invited to occupy the pulpit of an Orthodox congregation in the New York area. Kaplan recalls that his chief function at the congregation was to have been the establishment of an afternoon Jewish religious school for the children of the congregation. A furor arose, however, over this appointment which was led by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. Since, at the time, Kaplan was unmarried and was not the recipient of semikha (Orthodox ordination), the fracas had its effect upon the congregation. Kaplan's title was changed from Rabbi to Minister and the congregation brought in Rabbi Moses Z. Margolis from Boston to fill the post of Rabbi of the Congregation. "Margolis....," Kaplan writes, "preached in Yiddish and only occasionally, but...gave the congregation the illusion that it was maintaining the East European type of rabbinate."³

In 1908, Kaplan travelled on his honeymoon to Heidelberg, Germany where he received semikha from Rabbi Yitzhak Reines, the founder of the Mizrachi movement, who had been a colleague of Kaplan's father in Eastern Europe. Even upon his return to New York as Rav, Kaplan became more and

more unhappy with his post at Kehillat Jeshurun and with the rabbinate in general.

I discovered how much, not only of the Jewish spirit, but of the very desire to live as Jews was lost in Judaism's transit from parents to children. I then traced the loss primarily to the fact that Jews had become completely disoriented in their religious outlook. They no longer believed wholeheartedly in the supernatural origin of the Torah; yet they were afraid to admit their doubts and would not even dream of trying to discover some genuinely convincing basis for Jewish loyalty. As for myself, the Zionist movement and particularly the Ahad Ha-Amist conception of the Jewish people as a living organism, animated by an irresistible will to live, enabled me to find spiritual anchorage. Moreover, I had by that time done considerable study and thinking in the field of anthropology and sociology.⁴

The ideas, however, could hardly be stated from an Orthodox pulpit and Kaplan found himself becoming increasingly frustrated. He even approached Cyrus Adler for a recommendation for a job as a life insurance agent. He was drawn to life insurance because he considered it a form of socialism in which people unite for the purpose of helping one another under stress. Adler, however, made light of his doubts.

It was during this time of personal crisis for Kaplan that Jacob Schiff established an endowment fund of \$50,000. for the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The main purpose of this fund was to defray the \$2500. a year salary of principal of the Institute. In the summer of 1909 Solomon Schechter, the President of the Seminary, asked Kaplan to fill this post. Schechter offered the position to

Kaplan despite the strong opposition of Cyrus Adler who, according to Kaplan, "saw me as a socialist radical." Kaplan viewed Adler as a intermediary for the Our Crowd group of American Jews for the purpose of Americanizing East European Jews. "All Adler's Jewish knowledge," Kaplan recalls, "came from attending (Sabato) Morais' classes in Philadelphia; otherwise he was an am ha'aretz (ignoramous)." Kaplan, of course, welcomed the opportunity to leave Kehillat Jeshurun and enthusiastically accepted the post.

Kaplan had to actually go looking for students for the new Teachers Institute. To fill the classes, he brought students who had been attending his adult study classes at Kehillat Jeshurun. Beginning in January, 1910, Kaplan also became professor of homiletics at the Seminary itself. Understanding homiletics to include what to preach as well as how to preach, Kaplan began a systematic reinterpretation of the Torah.

For days and weeks on end I brooded on each verse and chapter of the Pentateuch. The centrality of Israel in the divine epic as unfolded in the Pentateuch, and the relation of that epic to the precepts and the laws given to Israel, furnished me with the key to the permanent values which rendered the Pentateuch the token of the unique nationhood of the Jewish people and the guarantee of its destiny. I found myself evolving a new kind of Midrash...⁵

Kaplan worked out his lesson on Genesis for Schechter to approve. Upon reading these lectures, Schechter advised him that he was "walking on eggs" but, nevertheless, gave him a

carte-blanche to teach what he wanted. Although Kaplan had strong opposition at the Seminary (and throughout his long years of service there), Schechter refused to make a martyr of him.

At about the same time, Kaplan became associated with the Kehillah movement in New York City which arose in 1908. The Kehillah movement was an attempt by important members of New York Jewry to establish a comprehensive communal structure (a Kehillah) which would unite the city's Jewish population, ease the social and economic adjustment of the immigrants, and harness the group's intellectual and material resources to the task of creating a model community. The leader of the Kehillah movement was Rabbi Judah L. Magnes. Kaplan was appointed chairman of the Kehillah's Committee on Jewish Education.

In December, 1909, the Kehillah conducted a detailed survey of Jewish education under Kaplan's supervision. The investigation stirred tremendous interest because, "It was the first systematic study of its kind...;and second, it revealed a wasteland of apathy for religious training, and ineptitude where it was offered."

I discovered, through a house-to-house survey, the shocking fact that no more than about one-fifth of the Jewish child population were receiving any kind of Jewish education at any one time. To me, that fact was significant not only of a lack of proper facilities and of trained teachers but of a definite deterioration of the very will to live as Jews. Thus, through actual contact with the life of the masses of

our people did I become convinced that, unless we discovered some new motivation for Jewish living, we could not look hopefully to a future for our people in this country.⁷

Kaplan hoped that the Kehillah would encourage young people to conceive of Jewish education as a communal rather than a parental function. He tried to prove that Jewish education was just as dignified a profession for young Jews as a career in general education was considered to be. Kaplan was not satisfied with merely teaching at the Teachers Institute since, as he recalls, "I was by nature an activist." During this period, the Kehillah experiment fulfilled this need.

Aside from Magnes, the Kehillah movement brought Kaplan into direct contact with uptown Jews as Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, immigrant leaders as Joseph Barondess and Bernard Semel, young intellectuals as Israel Friedlander, and communal workers as Samson Benderly and Paul Abelson. Through the Kehillah, Kaplan also met Felix Warburg who was, at that time, serving as President of the local Young Men's Hebrew Association. Warburg asked Kaplan to serve on the Board of Directors of that institution. Through this association with the YMHA, Kaplan became aware of the potentialities and the limitations of Jewish centers as then constituted. This knowledge was to play an important role in Kaplan's life in the near future.

Kaplan blames the failure of the Kehillah to recognize

the need for developing the necessary ideology for the movement for its eventual liquidation in 1922. "It existed as long as it was led by a few outstanding personalities. When, for one reason or another, they left it, the movement petered out, because neither the laity nor the rabbinate had the least understanding of the absolute dependence of Judaism upon an adequate communal structure."⁸ Once the Kehillah failed, only a few leaders continued the attempt to build "an organic community." Kaplan, of course, saw this goal as increasingly central to his philosophy of Judaism.⁹

In 1915, another movement came into existence which was to play an important role in Kaplan's life and in which Kaplan played an important part. This new movement, called the Intercollegiate Menorah Association, was founded by Henry Hurwitz in order to reach the growing number of young Jewish intellectuals attending secular colleges and universities in the United States. Kaplan enthusiastically accepted the invitation to lecture on his philosophy of Judaism to the Society's chapters at City College and Harvard. In a series of articles for the Society's Journal, Kaplan advocated the need of a new understanding of the very nature of Judaism as a prerequisite to dealing with the difficulties in which it found itself.

Needless to say, I was thrilled at the prospect of

seeing the most intellectual among the Jewish youth turn their thoughts to matters of Jewish interest. I rejoiced that at last the crisis in Judaism seemed to have taken a favorable turn. I foresaw a new generation of thinkers and writers arising, who would create new Jewish content and Jewish values on which the Jewish spirit might thrive.¹⁰

Through his activities with the Menorah Association and his increasing contact with Americanized Jewish youth, Kaplan became more and more convinced that the American Jewish community was in grave and immediate danger of disappearing because of the threat of assimilation through intermarriage. One of the chief reasons for intermarriage was the fact that Jewish boys and girls had no place to meet one another socially once they left their homes for college. Therefore, he reasoned, an institution must be created in which Jews could meet each other socially. The Kehillah idea had failed and Kaplan began to see the need for a new kind of synagogue which would serve as a center for Jewish life. The question now before Kaplan was how to get this idea embodied in an institution.

Chapter III

Kaplan's opportunity to establish an institution of the type he envisaged came very quickly. This opportunity arose because of the movement of Jews from one section of the city to another. In the middle years of the second decade of this century, many wealthy Jews in New York were leaving their apartments on the East Side of Manhattan to take up residence in the newly fashionable streets of the West Side -- particularly Central Park West and West End Avenue. Among those who were moving were a group of members of Kaplan's first pulpit, Kehillat Jeshurun.

The most influential member of this group was Joseph H. Cohen who was at the time President of Beth Israel Hospital. Kaplan believed him to have a good mind and to be "intensely Jewish." He felt that Cohen would be the right person to interest the rest of the entourage in his project as they moved West. In April, 1915, Cohen gathered a group of people together to whom Kaplan placed the need for a synagogue-center which would act as a deterrent against intermarriage. Kaplan recalls that at that very first meeting he warned them that he was not Orthodox and that he was not so much interested in the congregation as he was in the idea behind the congregation.

Kaplan's idea was to have the synagogue function as the center for all Jewish life. The YMHA attempted to serve the

Jewish community in this manner but it, however, did not serve the Jew spiritually. The synagogue, on the other hand, did serve the Jew as a place of worship but, once again, this only served part of the total Jew's needs and, therefore, did not serve the true need of Judaism. Kaplan believed that the synagogue must act as the cultural, educational, recreational, and spiritual center of Judaism and reflect the totality of Jewish civilization.¹

The group began functioning as a planning committee for this new synagogue-center and set to work building the institution which was to be called the Jewish Center. Over one million dollars -- no mean sum in 1916 -- was allocated for the impressive building to be erected on West 86th Street in Manhattan. Kaplan was beginning to see his philosophy embodied in a concrete form.

I thought here was my opportunity to vitalize the one institution upon which the future of Judaism depends. Not a week passed without my visiting him (Cohen) and unfolding to him the importance of so planning their synagogue that it would become a center of all kinds of Jewish activities in which they themselves would participate. The Synagogue Center was to be the first of its kind in the country. It was not to be a philanthropic settlement-house intended for those who lacked leisure facilities. Neither was it to be a club where Jews cultivated the high art of gambling as a means of forgetting their troubles, chief of which they regarded their being Jews. It was to be a veritable sanctuary of the Jewish spirit, where everything of Jewish value would be represented.²

Only one problem remained to be solved. Kaplan had told the group in 1915, at the very first meeting, that he was not interested in serving as their rabbi. They did not

believe him then, however, and now the question arose once again.

By 1917, the first story of the building was ready for occupancy. Cohen came to Kaplan and advised him that they were ready to start functioning as a congregation. Kaplan reminded him that he had said from the outset of the project that he did not want to serve as the Center's rabbi. Furthermore, he reminded them that he was not Orthodox. Cohen, Kaplan recalls, replied that that could be settled later. It is quite likely that Cohen did not believe Kaplan on this point. Kaplan even went so far as telling Cohen that he could not use the Shulhan Arukh (authoritative sixteenth century code) as the authoritative guide in conducting the activities of the Center.

Finally, Kaplan recommended that the Center bring in from Denver his old friend and colleague Charles H. Kauvar for a trial sermon and interview. Kauvar was (and is) sincerely Orthodox. Kaplan recalls that Kauvar "spoke but did not conquer." After this experience, the Board of the Center became more definite in their desire to have Kaplan serve as their rabbi. Kaplan was finally persuaded and reluctantly assumed the pulpit of the Center in 1917, a post he was to fill for three and a half years.

Kaplan clearly outlined the intended program of the Jewish Center and the philosophy behind it in a booklet.

written during the Center's first year of operation. It is important for us because of the fact that the SAJ took over the ideas of the essay and quoted from the booklet quite widely in its earliest news releases and publications. It reads as follows:

Our Need	We are human. We need not only spiritual improvement, but also the joy of living. We need to serve ourselves before we can serve others.
Our Heritage	We are Jews. We have inherited a priceless treasure -- Jewish life and religion. We want to transmit our heritage not alone intact but augmented.
Our Opportunity	We are Americans. We enjoy the blessings of freedom and equality. We can best serve our country by remaining loyal to our heritage and utilizing it to enrich American life and ideals.
What a true Synagogue Should be	The true synagogue takes in the whole man. It fosters not only Jewish knowledge and Jewish practice, but also a Jewish Fellowship. It is a house of prayer -- a Beth Tefilah. It is a house of study -- a Beth Hamidrash. It is also a club and meeting house -- a Beth Haknesseth.
Jewish Fellowship	We share with the non-Jews the world's work, its business and its burdens. We feel the need, however, of developing at the same time our Jewish individuality. We want Jewish surroundings that shall recreate, redefine and spiritualize us for our work-a-day- existence.
Entertainment Hall	Amusement should not be a means of killing time, but of enlivening the soul. We all need the exhilarating laughter of comedy and the purifying pathos of tragedy. We need even the fantastic conjourings of the photoplay. But, what we need most as a means of recreation is self-expression through the social arts -- the drama, the song and the dance.
Gymnasium and Social Hall	Hillel urged that bodily care is adebt we owe to the divine in man. Taking this as a clue, we may idealize even basketball and calisthenics. Our racial vigor depends

- upon our having sound souls in sound bodies. Physical training can be made into a spiritual discipline -- a training in team work and fair play, in courage and will power. We need all these in our struggle for immortality.
- Jewish Knowledge The Sages call our children "the little messiahs." And rightly so! For they are the promise of a glorious future. But to create our future they must know our past. Acquiring that knowledge is a life-long process. The Jew is a student from infancy to old age.
- Jewish Home-Building We get our first and most lasting impressions of Jewish life from the home atmosphere. Hence the importance of making the home Jewish not only through ritual and observance, but also through ornament and music. Jewish home-building is an art that requires guidance and inspiration.
- The Kindergarten The little ones should gambol their way into Judaism. Their play should take on the character of the events and seasons of Jewish life. For each day a blessing, for each Sabbath a song, for each festival a game.
- The Jewish School This is where the experience of our people be woven into the very texture of our children's souls. This is where our children will learn to cherish Israel's hopes and ideals. This is where our characters will be molded in accord with the Jewish ideal of being 'in favor with God and men.'
- The Beth Hamidrash Jewish study should be not only the child's preparation, but also the man's avocation. Otherwise our religion would degenerate into dead formalism.
- The Forum The big problems that agitate mankind lay claim to our attention as Jews and Americans. We should ask the best informed men and women to define these problems for us. There are men and women who have a message for Jewry and are eager to impart it.
- Jewish Practice In Judaism deeds count more than creeds. The Jew had duties towards his fellow-man, his people, his God.
- Our Duty in Israel We are concerned in the material and spiritual well-being of Israel the world over. We shall partake in all public efforts to secure the relief for those who are in want

Worship

and redemption for those who are oppressed. We shall join forces with those who work for the upbuilding of Palestine as the spiritual center of the Jewish people. To worship in common we must have other interests in common besides worship. Otherwise religion becomes a weekend, a year-end or a life-end affair.³

Over half a century later, these principles hardly seem revolutionary. In fact, they appear quite common-place. Perhaps, this is a measure of how deeply Mordecai Kaplan's concept of the synagogue has become part of our own conception of that institution. The founders of the Jewish Center, however, never completely understood what Kaplan had in mind for their synagogue. Not surprisingly, friction began to surface almost immediately between Kaplan and the Board of Trustees.

By the middle of 1919, the situation became more and more intolerable for Kaplan. One of the best sources of information for this period is the journal kept by Kaplan since 1913. This as yet unpublished document is a fascinating chronicle of twentieth century American Jewish history. Kaplan was good enough to allow me free access to it and to discuss many entries in it with me.

Kaplan's disillusionment with the progress of the Center is clearly indicated in the following entry in the diary made on August 18, 1919:

I am really surprised at myself that I have held on to the Center so long. I suppose it is due to the fact that I am beginning to age and am commencing to realize that it is futile to measure one's strength

against the world, especially when one's strength does not amount to much.

The spiritual progress made by the families affiliated with the Center has been very slight. The few children -- there are about thirty of them -- that attend the religious school are probably the only ones that benefited from the existence of the Center. Whether that is worth the forty thousand dollars that it cost to maintain the Center during the last year is another question. It all depends from whose standpoint we are to consider the money spent. From the standpoint of the members, the least wealthy of whom spends ten thousand a year on his living expenses, and the one of average wealth twenty to thirty thousand, the sum of forty thousand dollars is by no means large. But from the standpoint of the general community which is so poverty stricken, the good that could have been done with such an amount is such that one is bound to consider the use, to which it was put an economic and spiritual waste.⁴

The only part of the money which Kaplan thought was well spent was a ten thousand dollar donation which the Center contributed in his name to the Teachers Institute.

Kaplan was able to reach only a very small percentage of the members of the Jewish Center with his message. Most were uninterested or hostile. A few members were interested in his teachings and Kaplan succeeded in organizing them into The Society for the Jewish Renaissance. Most of the members of this Society, however, were colleagues in the rabbinate or students from the Seminary. With this group, Kaplan attempted to disseminate his belief in the need for reconstructing the organization and ideology of Jewish life. As early as 1918, Kaplan preached a sermon at the Jewish Center entitled, "Reconstructionism." The Society for the Jewish Renaissance, however, merely exacerbated

relations between Kaplan and the Board.

Several other factors, however, led to making the situation increasingly difficult. In 1919, Kaplan began using the pulpit of the Center to back the demands of workers in the garment industry for a five day work week. Many of the influential members of the Board were "coat and suit" people who were locked in a bitter fight against unionization of their industry. Kaplan's journal entries clearly describe the difficulties which ensued from this situation. It also points out an interesting American phenomenon in which Jewish entrepreneurs were pitted against Jewish labor in a life-and-death struggle.

At the beginning of this year some of the industries in which the people are interested were compelled as a result of strikes to shorten the number of laboring hours per week to forty-four. The time seemed ripe for a general movement to promote Sabbath observance by dividing the forty-four hours among five days instead of having the men work as hitherto, a half day on Saturday. When the waist strike was on the point of being settled I made an attempt to introduce the five day week plan into the agreement that was about to be drawn up. I learned that a lawyer by the name of Gordon represented the interests of the manufacturers. I went to see him accompanied by J.H.Cohen. But no sooner did I see the man than I realized that my efforts with him would be in vain. He was far from reconciled to the idea of granting the worker the forty-four hour week, and was determined to fight them to the last ditch. With jaw firm and teeth set he hurled defiance at the workers with whom he said he was engaged in a bitter struggle. What care he for Sabbath observance? He had no use for religion, anyhow. His father who was a religious man gave him an opportunity to see all that there was to religion, but failed to convince him that there was anything to it. I learned later that his father was the notorious firebug on the East Side who was sentenced to a seven

years' prison term in Sing Sing. I went away from the interview disheartened.

I then made arrangements for an open meeting to be held at the Center for the purpose of making propaganda for the five day week idea. My purpose was to invite to the meeting as many of the leading manufacturers as possible, and to have Schiff, Magnes, Rosalsky and myself address them on the Sabbath question.⁵

The steering committee for the meeting, however, effectively sabotaged Kaplan's efforts. The committee, members of the Center Board and themselves Sabbath observers, agreed to back Kaplan on the Sabbath question only if Kaplan would use his influence to put an end to what they considered to be other unreasonable demands of the workers. In other words, the committee would trade the five-day week for forty-four hours of work. With this, Kaplan's efforts on behalf of the Sabbath came to a halt. The proposed meeting collapsed and Kaplan became more convinced than ever that his efforts at the Jewish Center were futile.

Several other factors, however, contributed to Kaplan's conclusion with regard to the Center. The lack of responsiveness by the membership to a Bible study course that Kaplan conducted every Wednesday evening was particularly upsetting. "I realized that I dealt not only with the T.B.M. (Tired Business Man) but with one who had not the remotest interest in any of the questions connected with the study of the Bible."⁶ Furthermore, the young people of the congregation seemed entirely unapproachable to Kaplan. This was extremely difficult to accept since

it was principally for this group that the Center was formed.

The hardest blow of all, however, was the reaction of the members of the Center to Kaplan's sermons. Whenever he touched on a vital economic or political question, he could be sure of a hue and cry arising from the worshippers. Kaplan's mildly socialistic point of view could hardly have been expected to draw applause from the upper-middle class businessmen who supported the Jewish Center.

Whenever I spoke in that vein (i.e., on economic or political issues) I was accused of being a Bolshevik. Not that I am ashamed of being classed with the Bolsheviks. I would rather be classed with them than with the bourgeois profiteers. But what I object to in their charging me with Bolshevism is that such charge was to them a sufficient reason for not taking my views seriously or analyzing them to see whether there was any truth in them....?

Kaplan's despair was summarized in late 1919 as follows:

"With nothing left to preach or to teach and nothing that he can or dare change, what is there for the rabbi to do?"⁸

It seems clear that Kaplan would have left the Center at this point if he did not believe that the Center's donation to the Teachers Institute would have been stopped upon his resignation. This only added to his feeling of being a captive of the Center and its money.

At about this time, Kaplan began to believe that his former ally, Joseph Cohen, had turned against him and was the chief reason for his failure to gain favor with any group at the Center. He began to view Cohen as a fanatic

in the matter of Jewish belief and as a dangerous reactionary on social and economic issues. Since these were the two main chasms opening up between Kaplan and the congregation, Cohen's championing both causes against Kaplan was indeed an ominous sign.

Kaplan's temper, which always seethed behind his seemingly calm exterior, could have precipitated an open clash at the Dedication Dinner of the Jewish Center on April 18, 1920. This was avoided only because of the insensitivity of the members attending the dinner. It seems they were unaware of the intensity of Kaplan's anger.

April 18 the Center held a dinner to celebrate the finishing of the building. The annual meeting was held at the same time. The dinner was noisy and long drawn out. The dessert was hardly served when the young folks, they upon whom we stake all our hopes, rose as one man and walked downstairs to dance. This was too much for me. The lack of manners, the crassness that makes it possible for a banquet in the interest of a religious cause to be unattended by a word of prayer or blessing aroused my resentment to such a degree that I walked out too. No speeches were delivered that evening. Not that anyone took it to heart.⁹

The controversy, however, could not be repressed for long. The Board of the Center was willing to put up with Kaplan's views on religious, social and economic problems as long as they were confined to the four walls of the Center. They refused Kaplan's request to publish his sermons which he had delivered at the Center. They were saying to him: Say what you want, but publish nothing! We can understand, therefore, the furor which erupted when

Kaplan published an article in the Menorah Journal of August, 1920 entitled "A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism."

This article, hardly radical from our point of view, contained ideas which were to be repeated again and again by Kaplan and to reach their mature form in his magnum opus Judaism as a Civilization less than fifteen years later.

The Board members of the Center no doubt objected most heatedly to Kaplan's attack on Orthodoxy. The fact that he attacked Reform Judaism as well offered them no solace.

Kaplan charged Orthodoxy with no longer keeping pace with modern thought and therefore not being in the position to offer Judaism the help which it so needs.

Orthodoxy is altogether out of keeping with the march of human thought. It has no regard for the world view of the contemporary mind. Nothing can be more repugnant to the thinking man of today than the fundamental doctrine of Orthodoxy, which is that tradition is infallible. Such infallibility could be believed in as long as the human mind thought of God and Revelation in semi-mythological terms. Then it was conceivable that a quasi-human being could hand down laws and histories in articulate form. Being derived from a supramundane source, these laws and histories, together with the ideas based upon them, could not be regarded as free from all the errors and shortcomings of the human mind. Whenever a tradition contradicts some facts too patent to be denied, or falls below some accepted moral standard, resort is had to artificial interpretations that flout all canons of history and exegesis. The doctrine of infallibility rules out of court all research and criticism, and demands implicit faith in the truth of whatever has come down from the past. It precludes all conscious development in thought and practice, and deprives Judaism of the power to survive in an environment

that permits of free contact with non-Jewish civilizations.¹⁰

One could easily imagine the effect of these words upon the Board members of the Center who were already locked in battle with Kaplan on other issues. It is likely that these men completely ignored the positive aspects of the article which called for a reconstruction of Judaism. This, as we have seen, Kaplan had already been speaking about for several years at Sabbath services.

The Board members of the Jewish Center now, of course, could not so easily ignore the heterodoxy of their rabbi. The final break between the two factions did not occur immediately however. It is difficult to understand what exactly kept the pot from boiling over until the Spring and Summer of 1921 but certain factors can at least help to explain this period of armed truce.

The first factor was that although, as we have seen, Kaplan believed himself to be without a following at the Center, this was not entirely the case. This fact is adequately borne out by the events which were to follow. When the final break did occur, twenty families seceded from the Center along with Kaplan. Furthermore, Kaplan's allies included a very important group within the Center. Kaplan's first wife, Lena, was a member of the very large and wealthy Rubin family. The Rubins and those related to them by marriage composed an important segment of the

membership of the Center. This tie undoubtedly kept the eruption from taking place at a much earlier date.

Finally, it is probable that the members of the Jewish Center were very satisfied with Kaplan's style of rabbinate if not with his philosophy. At this time, aside from the Americanized Reform rabbi, it was very difficult to find an Orthodox rabbi who spoke English without an accent and could fulfill the needs of a group of Jews who saw themselves in the ascendancy in American economic and social life. Kaplan was clearly an asset to the Center socially.¹¹

The lid, however, could not be kept on the kettle indefinitely. There was just too much friction in the Center. The events which led to the final break began with a small meeting of some of the Board at Joseph Cohen's home in April of 1921.

He (Cohen) had been absenting himself from the services the last few months. While illness may have had something to do with his absence, I believe that he deliberately kept away from the Center, in order to make the other trustees miss him, so that if things went wrong financially they would naturally ascribe it all to his failure to take an active part in the running of the Center. But why shouldn't he take an active part as heretofore? Naturally, because Kaplan with his new fangled ideas about Judaism has made it impossible for Cohen to continue taking the same interest as of old. It was into this situation that he wanted to manoeuvre me, and he succeeded because I deliberately allowed myself so to be manoeuvred into it...¹²

Obviously, both Kaplan and Cohen were ready for a showdown.

At this meeting, Cohen tried hard to get Kaplan into a

theological discussion as to whether the Jews exist for the Torah or the Torah for the Jews. He claimed that only recently had he begun to realize what Kaplan meant by saying that his conception of Judaism involved shifting the center of gravity from the Torah to the people. Kaplan, however, did not allow himself to be drawn into the argument. He told Cohen that he frankly did not consider him qualified to participate in such a discussion.

'Why not have the matter referred to a committee of rabbis who are authorities on Jewish law?' he (Cohen) asked.

'There are very few rabbis to whom I would submit my case. They would have to possess a modern education, in addition to be authorities on Jewish law,' was my reply.¹³

Seeing that the argument was getting nowhere, Kaplan asked them to suggest a way out of the impasse. Thereupon one of the trustees made the suggestion that inasmuch as Kaplan had once before asked for a leave of absence, he might do so again, with the understanding that it was to be for one year, and that if by the end of that time either Cohen or Kaplan changed their attitude, Kaplan should resume the rabbinate.

I was surprised to see Cohen accept the suggestion heartily. I certainly was not averse to it, because the truth was that I had been seriously contemplating some kind of change in my relation to the Center. Just what I was to do was not clear to me, until the conference yesterday (above). Everybody went away happy.¹⁴

This meeting, however, far from resolved the controversy.

On May 21st, the matter was finally brought before an

official meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Center. Cohen immediately took the offensive with the following opening remark:

Let us not beat around the bush. Why veil the issues? Let us discuss this matter in our shirtsleeves. Dr. Kaplan stated clearly some time ago that for three years he tried our way in his work with the Center. Realizing that he did not succeed in accomplishing his purposes, he said he must try a new method. He wants to give us a new Judaism. We, however, cannot permit ourselves to be experimented with. We are bound by the constitution to be Orthodox.¹⁵

He then went on to relate how Kaplan at one time said to him that he was not Orthodox and that when he heard that from him he said, "You cannot be our rabbi." This led to the negotiations with Charles Kauvar. He could not remember exactly what happened to bring them together again since he kept no memoranda and made no written contract with Kaplan. But, Cohen emphasized, he was under the impression that in accepting the rabbinate of the Center Kaplan was pledged to make it one hundred per cent Jewish according to the "Din Shulhan Arukh (i.e., according to strict Orthodox practice)." The previous summer, however, Kaplan had published an article, Cohen charged, in which he broke completely with Orthodox Judaism and in addition had organized a society (i.e., the Society for Jewish Renaissance) whose platform distinctly violated the principles of Orthodox Judaism. With this attack, Cohen rested his case against the rabbi.

It was now Kaplan's turn to reply to the charges made

against him. This he did with the following short statement:

It was not a new Judaism that I was trying to formulate but on the contrary, I was doing all in my power to enable Judaism to live. As far as my relations to the Center are concerned I am prepared to uphold the Shulhan Arukh as the code to be followed in our practice in as much as we have no other authoritative code to go by. But on the question of Orthodoxy, I want to make it understood that my views are not Orthodox, nor do I consider myself bound to uphold Orthodoxy in the Center, since there is nothing in the constitution which says the Center must be Orthodox. This, however, does not mean that I intend to do anything prejudicial to the Orthodoxy of anyone in the Center. Nothing is further from my thought than to ram my belief down anybody's throat.¹⁶

With this statement, Cohen renewed his attack and attempted to turn the directors against Kaplan. The meeting continued for over two hours, becoming more bitter as the minutes flew by. By midnight, however, cooler heads prevailed. Kaplan agreed to the appointment of a committee which would guard the Orthodoxy of the teaching in the Center. He would cooperate with this committee in formulating the course of instruction in the religious school. Cohen was now on the defensive and a member of the Board made a motion that Kaplan be re-elected as rabbi. Cohen and his allies attempted to block the motion on the technical grounds that the meeting was not called for this purpose. Kaplan insisted that they either re-elect him right then and there or he would put the case before the annual meeting which would take place the following evening (or rather, considering the lateness of the hour, that evening). A

vote was taken on the motion and only Cohen was left voting against Kaplan. Then all present bent their efforts to get him to withdraw his vote so that the re-election be made unanimous. After a half-hour's pleading with him, Cohen yielded. This vote, however, did not end the controversy and the interpretation of what transpired at this meeting was to lead to the final break.

Kaplan, however, saw quite clearly that the overall picture at the Jewish Center was an unhealthy one for all concerned. It was only a matter of time before he and the Center would have to part company.

I am beginning to realize already what an anomalous position I am occupying in the group of people with whom I have been attempting to work the last ten years. Until recently when my views were unknown to them, I was an asset to them, but a hypocrite in my own eyes. Now that I am known as holding views that are absolutely nonorthodox, I can be of no service to them. I make no attempt whatever to sail under false colors. The arrangement at the Center was suggested by me not because I actually believe it is workable. I am human and have sufficient pride not to allow Cohen and Fischman to compel me to resign. I want to resign from the Center but I don't want anybody to make me do it. It looks as though I can no longer find my spiritual haven with the class of our people I have been associated with ever since I have been in the ministry. I shall have to break with them sooner or later. I am therefore laying my plans to do so with as little a jolt or shock as possible to all concerned.¹⁷

It is interesting to note that although Kaplan complained of working with the "class of people I have been associated with," when he finally left the Jewish Center, he set to

work with precisely the same class of people and continued to complain about precisely their same shortcomings.

During the same month (May, 1921), still another meeting was called. On the agenda of this meeting was the following resolution:

Whereas it is of vital importance to place a record in written form the religious principles which underly all activities of our institution and whereas recent events have shown how easily misunderstandings arise when such clear expression of principles is lacking, be it resolved that it is the sense of the Board that it go on record as reaffirming that the underlying religious principles of the Jewish Center were conceived in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism, and be it further resolved that in letter as well as spirit, every activity of the Jewish Center shall be carried on in accordance with the principles of Orthodox Judaism.¹⁸

This resolution reopened the wounds which had hardly had sufficient time to heal in a week. Kaplan attended this second meeting and expressed his surprise at their having offered this resolution after having elected him as rabbi the week before knowing full well that he was not Orthodox. Furthermore, he stated that whether the resolution was passed or not, he would continue preaching as he had hitherto done. After considerable "sparring," Kaplan offered the following amendment to the resolution being considered:

The Rabbi shall have the right to teach and preach in accordance with the dictates of his conscience.¹⁹

Cohen immediately objected that a rabbi could not be simply guided by his conscience since he is bound by Jewish law.

Kaplan accepted Cohen's point and incorporated the words, "shall have the right within Jewish law" into his amendment. Once again, however, the meeting deteriorated into name calling. Kaplan informed the meeting that if his amendment were not accepted, they automatically voted to accept his resignation. The meeting became deadlocked and was adjourned on the condition that the vote be taken the following Tuesday night without further discussion.

Kaplan was asked not to attend this meeting but he later learned that both the resolution and his amendment were passed. After considerable discussion, they decided to vote Kaplan an annual salary of twelve thousand dollars a year, a considerable sum for a rabbi to earn in 1921. A committee was appointed to see Kaplan and to talk over the terms of tenure.

Should I consent to remain in the Center it will probably be the attractive salary that will justifiably appear to have been the main deciding factor. Yet there is another factor that will also play something of a part, and that is the desire to work with this group which despite its limited Jewish vitality holds out so far as I know, more promise of enabling Judaism to strike root in this country than any other.²⁰

Whatever his motivation actually was, Kaplan decided to stay with the Jewish Center and try once again to make of it a force for the survival of Judaism. Believing that all was under control, Kaplan and his wife Lena left New York for the summer for a rest from the "wars" on West

Eighty-Sixth Street.

Upon his return to New York in September, 1921, Kaplan found that a new development had already taken place. What he saw, made Kaplan doubt Joseph Cohen's honesty and led directly to his resignation from the Center. "I discovered," Kaplan wrote in his journal, "that he (Cohen) carried out a piece of trickery which is gradually opening my eyes to the fact that I am dealing with a self-deluded hypocrite and not with an honest fanatic."²¹ While looking over the minutes of the first May meeting (May 20, 1921) described above which had been typed over the summer, Kaplan came across a reference to a resolution which was described as having been presented, discussed and unanimously carried. The resolution read as follows:

Resolved that the educational system of the Jewish Center be placed under the direction and control of a committee to be known as the School Board to be appointed and to be responsible to the Board of Trustees. At regular intervals, reports of the work in the educational system of the Center are to be submitted to the membership body.²²

Kaplan could not believe his eyes. Try as he could he was unable to recall such a resolution having been submitted or voted upon. The fact was, of course, that none had been. Immediately Kaplan called the Board together and presented his case. After heated discussion, the Board contended that the resolution represented the sense of the meeting and, that while Kaplan was technically right, he was

actually wrong in maintaining that the committee with which he agreed to cooperate was merely to look after the Orthodoxy of instruction. They insisted that Kaplan had completely abdicated all control of the education work. Kaplan recalls that "Cohen mumbled to himself while I was presenting my case last Monday, 'The cancer must be cut out,' alluding to me as the cancer of the Center."²³

With the situation having reached such an impasse, Kaplan wrote to the Board on September 20, 1921 asking for a leave of absence to go into effect immediately after the High Holidays. On January 16, 1922, Kaplan offered his resignation to the Center which was accepted two days later. Thus ended the bitter feud between Kaplan and the Board of the Jewish Center.

The feud itself was over but the bitterness lasted for many years. To this day, the Jewish Center does not allow its records to be investigated. Twenty years after its founding in 1937, the Center did publish its version of these stormy years in an article entitled "The Jewish Center and American Israel" which appeared in a souvenir journal distributed to its members to mark this anniversary. It almost succeeded in reopening the scars between families and friends which were practically healed and almost forgotten. The Jewish Center's version of these years is as follows:

Hardly had the Center been launched on its work when some of its leaders revealed a change of heart and first by indirection, then openly, planned to use the Jewish Center for a new kind of Judaism that denied the foundations of our faith, ignored Jewish tradition, invaded the sanctity of Jewish law and arrogated to itself the privilege of a re-interpretation based on sources hostile and foreign to Judaism. At that moment the crisis had arrived for Orthodox Judaism in the country. With the Orthodox rabbinate in general inarticulate toward its youth and with little influence in the affairs of the nation; the overwhelming majority of Orthodox synagogues unprepared, unorganized, unalert; the youth not yet conscious of its responsibilities; the Yeshivah in the Lower East Side battling against overwhelming odds for sheer survival -- it was then that the Jewish Center faced a supreme challenge -- its institution had been raised with all to generous disregard of expense, the maintenance cost went beyond the original plan, and when half of the membership threatened to leave unless their demands were met, those who remained true to the Torah had to face financial disintegration, social and personal disapproval and the heart-rending effort to keep up and to develop an extraordinarily difficult undertaking with their fighting forces diminished by half. It was due to the intrepidity and flaming inspiration...of Joseph C. Cohen, William Fischman, A.E. Rothstein and their friends that they accepted the challenge of the almost overwhelming problems generated by the schism. The day which the Jewish Center said 'No' to the betrayers of the faith of Israel will be inscribed in golden letters in the history of American Israel. It lifted Orthodoxy out of its despondency. It brought cheer and joy to our people throughout the country. It showed that the true leaders of our people are those that recognize that the law of Israel is our Rock of Ages and His Torah the only survival value for Israel.

...They would build up out of the ruins of their own making a new kind of Judaism composed of fragments arbitrarily picked from the debris of their iconoclastic fury, sunk in contemporary 'isms' and blindly following the latest sociological or psychological fad.²⁴

When the Board of the SAJ was shown this journal, they decided to ignore it in order not to reopen the feud. Kaplan, now freed from his obligations to the Jewish Center, had

to choose the next step in his career. He had to weigh the obligations he had to several groups and ideas in his life. He knew that the next few years would be crucial ones for himself and his philosophy of Judaism. Yet he was unsure which road would benefit both.

Chapter IV

In his 1920 article written for the Menorah Journal which played such a crucial part in his relations with the Jewish Center, Kaplan outlined a program for the reconstruction of Judaism which he believed would ensure the continued survival of the Jewish people in the United States. First, he held that Judaism and Jewish tradition must be interpreted in terms of modern thought. Secondly, the social solidarity of the Jewish people must be fostered through the upbuilding of Palestine and the establishment of viable communities (Kehillahs) and communal centers in the Diaspora. Finally, a code of Jewish practice must be formulated so that every Jew may definitely know what constitutes loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people.¹ The predicament faced by Kaplan was, of course, what should be his next step to further these aims which he began to see as more and more crucial for American Israel.

One opportunity offered to Kaplan precisely at this time seemed most difficult to turn down. For a number of years, Kaplan had been unhappy at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He believed the atmosphere to be one in which modern ideas were stifled. When Kaplan resigned from the Jewish Center, he was also contemplating leaving the Seminary. Just at this time, Kaplan received an invitation

to join Stephen S. Wise who was attempting to organize a new seminary, the Jewish Institute of Religion. Wise was determined that his new seminary would be more open and less sectarian than either the Jewish Theological Seminary or the older Reform seminary, the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Wise promised Kaplan that he would be given freedom to teach whatever he wished at the new Jewish Institute of Religion and that, thereby, his philosophy of Judaism would become widely known. Although, Kaplan eventually decided to stay at the Seminary, it took him several years before he could bring himself to be able to give Wise a final unequivocal negative answer.

There was one particularly important reason which made it difficult for Kaplan to answer Wise's request. When he resigned from the Jewish Center in January, 1922, he did not leave that institution alone. Although, as we have seen, Kaplan felt isolated at the Center, he had managed to attract a devoted following there. In the fall of 1921 the membership of the Center was split into three fairly equal groups. The first faction consisted of members who joined with the Board of Trustees and who stood with them whatever their actions might be. The second group was composed of the members who had joined the Center because of Kaplan's educational and religious leadership of that institution. This faction felt that without him the Center could have no further interest for them whatsoever. Finally, there

were the members who joined the Center neither directly because of the Board of Trustees nor because of Kaplan personally, but because of the institution itself. They found Kaplan's functioning generally to their satisfaction. During the period of greatest discontent between Kaplan and the Board, this third group held the balance of power at the Center and probably was an important factor in Kaplan's staying as long as he did in his position. When the final break occurred, however, this swing group split between the two other factions.

When Kaplan was granted a leave of absence after the High Holidays of 1921, the second faction (those most loyal to their rabbi) organized themselves into a committee of fifteen families. Their object was to decide what their next step should be and to take it as a group. They elected H.L. Simmons as chairman to represent their point of view and to guard their interests at the Center. His report to the committee offers us still another first-hand glimpse of those bitter days of 1921-22.

I have from time to time kept you informed of our actions. I took up the chairmanship with a very clear and distinct object in view...peace at any price but one -- Dr. Kaplan and what Dr. Kaplan stood for was not to be the price. That, I gathered was your unanimous decision. Whatever efforts we have made towards peace was with that object clearly defined in our minds. Throughout our conferences and negotiations a few members of the Board of Trustees had made up their minds that they would only consider peace at the sacrifice of Dr. Kaplan. They wanted to do everything for us, they would say

'Gut Shabes' to us, they would pinch our children's cheeks and tell us what wonderful children they were. They would sing znios (Sabbath songs) right with us on the Sabbath Sudohs (meals) and give us more Sudohs. They would even call meetings once in awhile and let us take part in the discussions. They went so far as to hold out a vision to us that 'You never can tell, some day, if it please God, you (meaning us) may become Trustees, and who knows, maybe vice-president or even president, but as far as Dr. Kaplan is concerned ...'he is a wonderful man and we love him,' they said, 'but he is too big a man for the Center and we don't want him.'

That is the strain to me, throughout our negotiations with them as your Chairman. All that sort of stuff was pure bunk. The Center without the Ideals that Dr. Kaplan tried to infuse into it was a big building, with expensive furniture inside, but empty as a drum -- a body without a soul.

They in time came to know that we would not be tempted to make peace at the sacrifice of Dr. Kaplan and his principles which we have learned to love and desire above everything else.²

The negotiations mentioned by Simmons in his report were those set up between his faction and the Board of Trustees of the Center. The members of the Center had made a tremendous investment in the building which, as we have seen, cost over one million dollars. Once this dissident group came to realize that they could not compromise with the Board and decided upon the course of secession, they hoped that they would be able to work out some sort of financial settlement with the Board.

Because of the bitterness of the split, however, the Board of the Center was in no mood to return any money at all to those who were leaving their congregation. The committee decided, nevertheless, that they wanted to part

in peace and they, therefore, called in Judah Magnes to act as mediator in the dispute.

Magnes, however, was unable to bring the two parties to an amicable parting. Simmons, acting on behalf of his committee, therefore, sent the following letter dated January 8, 1922 to William Fischman, the President of the Jewish Center:

As our negotiations through Dr. Magnes, who has been kind enough to act heretofore for both sides, has not brought us any nearer to a peaceable settlement or adjustment of our differences, we now ask that the matter of settlement be arbitrated by Dr. Magnes and Mr. Louis Marshall.

As we propose to hold a meeting on Monday evening, I would ask you to be kind enough to let me have your decision in this matter before our meeting. Should we not hear from you on Monday prior to our meeting, we will be compelled to assume that your decision is a refusal to grant our request for arbitration.³

Simmons, however, in his haste to have this letter reach Fischman in time for him to contact his Board and draw up a reply, forgot to sign the letter by hand. Instead, Fischman received the letter with Simmon's typewritten signature. This breach of etiquette elicited the following reply from Fischman:

A messenger has delivered a letter to me signed with your name typewritten above the word 'Chairman,' which was tantamount to a one day's ultimatum. I will thank you very much to formally sign any communication that you desire to have me lay before the Board and if you are authorized to represent others beside yourself, please specifically state who they are.⁴

Fischman's reply led Simmons to the belief that further efforts to either work out an agreement with the Center to

remain there with Kaplan or to work out an amicable parting between the two groups was doomed to failure.

Simmons, therefore, decided that no further time should be wasted in these quixotic endeavors. The next step for his group would be, he decided, for them to devote their time and effort to building some sort of institution in line with the ideals and purposes for which the Center had originally been conceived and planned. In Simmon's report he expressed his own expectations for the future, amply demonstrating that Kaplan's theories and ideas were reaching some of the laymen of the Center.

We often say we are proud of being Jewish, and when somebody suddenly confronts us to ask why we are so proud of being Jewish we hesitate and then dig deep into the past and bring forth the wonderful history that we have had. We never give the reason that we stand today for ideals and put into active practice such ideals as to distinguish us from any other people. In other words, we are traveling on our reputation. There is no business, there is no nation, and there is no people that can travel long on reputation only. A reputation in business is a wonderful asset providing it is linked with virile, live, present-day activities. Otherwise it soon fades out of existence and that is true of nations, if you know history, and must be true of a people.

What chance then will our Jewish individuality have to survive with our children or their children, unless we instil in their hearts and minds a love, not alone for their past history, but bring our beautiful ideals to them in a practical way that will be acceptable to their every day life, and that will fit in with American ideals and surroundings. It is the only possible chance that we have in this country of ours for our children's children to remain proud of being Jews without being mocked at for their pride.

A modern Jewish boy or girl of fourteen or sixteen who has access to all modern literature, history, the

sciences, astronomy, economics, chemistry and one hundred odd subjects of which a man of forty is ignorant of, will not accept everything in religion on blind faith. They have keen inquisitive and developed minds. It must appeal to their heart and their reason, for them to develop a love for religion and a desire to retain it.

They must be both Jewish by inheritance up to a certain age, and then Jews by choice...on the merits of Judaism itself, and the merits of Judaism must be interpreted to them so that it is not beyond the reason and understanding of an intelligent mind; and if he is to be a good Jew by choice, his Judaism must be a livable commonsense one, under conditions that prevail in this country of ours.⁵

Upon the conclusion of the reading of this statement at the January 17, 1922 meeting of the dissident faction of the Center, the group was galvanized into action. Abraham Liebovitz called the Center a bad investment with a bad partner. "Shall we waste our life arguing with this bad partner?" he asked. "Let us lose the few dollars and begin anew. We are here tonight to organize a new institution. We want to know which of you men will join it, because this new institution will be started whether you are with us or not."⁶ Liebovitz was followed by Isadore Rubin who asked, "What shall our attitude be? Shall we wait until they throw us out as they threaten or shall we go out, following our leader, the ablest man in the rabbinate, the man who caused a member of the Board of Trustees to say, 'Not over my dead body will you win.' There will never be a chance for reconciliation. Their mummified Judaism cannot permit it."⁷

With these words still hanging in the air, a call from

the floor was made for the mass resignation of the group from the Center. At this point, Kaplan felt constrained to speak for the first time.

I want to speak as an onlooker not as a participant, because I promised myself that if there were a difference of opinion I would take the part of an onlooker. I want to warn the people who are ready to take the next step towards establishing an institution founded on the ideals I laid down years ago, that this is not an easy task. To me it has been heart-rending. To see one's ideals shattered by idle worshippers because one cannot stand for deception, is indeed heartrending. They have made my life hell because I came out with the ideals which they knew I stood for, but did not want me to express. I put up with all this because you, my friends, did not authorize me to get out. My patience is now exhausted and I cannot stand their mudslinging. I want your permission to resign. There are other groups who want me to carry out my work and ideals. I cannot continue at the Center.⁸

Kaplan's speech served to continued the momentum already present at the meeting and Simmons offered a plan for re-organization. The first step would be for the group to rent a building. This would serve as both sanctuary and school. The dues would be much lower than at the Center because there would be no need to support a great building with a tremendous overhead. Secondly, a membership committee would be formed which would have the goal of recruiting one hundred members in the first three months and five hundred by the end of two years. A larger hall would be rented for the High Holidays which could seat up to seven hundred. Finally, there would be no president or vice-president of this new institution whose policy would be set

and work carried out by an Executive Council. The reason for this innovation was the hope that they could avoid the petty politics which they saw as the ruin of the Center.

At this point, Kaplan once again rose to speak. He wanted it understood that this new institution would not duplicate in method or point of view any other existing synagogue, including the Jewish Center.

Let us remind you again that this organization will be different from any other congregations. You are therefore going to be open to much criticism. In the first place, it has been suggested that the organization be called The American Synagogue. We want to start an American synagogue, a synagogue which shall strike its roots in American life; which shall show to this country that there is a future, not only a past.

1. The Platform will be that this American Synagogue is dedicated to the interpretation and advancement of Israel's Torah. The explanation of the Torah shall be in the light of reason and commonsense. This interpretation shall not be Orthodox because it interprets its beauties and glories. It will not be Reformed because it does not deny the Torah.

2. The restoration of Israel's ancient land shall be the ideal for which this synagogue will work, because this synagogue cannot stand for empty lip prayer, but uplifting work. We stand for the idea of Palestine as a spiritual center.

3. This will be done as the means of the establishment of universal freedom, justice and peace.

With a name of this kind and a platform of this kind you must belong body and soul. You must make it your business to go out of your way to come every Saturday or at least every other Saturday. Later we can decide on the ritual and the mode of carrying on the services, which may be a departure from Orthodoxy. I do not say here that I shall live up to the Shulhan Arukh but I will go by that code because it is the only code to go by, but I cannot follow it to every letter. I must use my commonsense.⁸

Obviously, Kaplan was not prepared to repeat the same mistakes that he had made at the Center in this new American Synagogue.

He was determined that all who joined with him in this endeavor would know where he stood and for what he stood.

Upon the conclusion of Kaplan's statement, Louis Lubetkin arose from his seat and moved that all those who were in favor of the organization of the American Synagogue sign their name to a sheet of paper indicating their position. In addition to Kaplan's signature, twenty names were affixed to the document. Three other men in attendance indicated their interest but decided to wait to commit themselves formally. The last step taken by this founding meeting was the nomination and unanimous election of Simmons as Temporary Chairman of the Executive Council.

At the first Members' Meeting of the new organization, the name of the institution was changed upon Kaplan's suggestion. The words he addressed to his followers were never fully comprehended by most of them. He stated:

The great need of our institution is to fill is not that of a local institution, such as a schule or synagogue. This organization has a message and a problem as its motive for organizing. That problem is the adjustment of Judaism to meet the needs of present day life, without bringing about a disintegration of Jewish life. Although the American Synagogue was the name hitherto suggested and accepted, it seemed that the name is open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of its real significance. The word synagogue, in its larger sense, really implies not a small institution but a large community, or even groups of communities, and may also designate a movement embracing large numbers. For this reason, the name American Synagogue had been chosen. However, now it seems more

advisable to rename the organization so that it may express more concretely the purposes for which it stands. The Society for the Advancement of Judaism seems to express the true purpose of the organization. Together with the name of the organization should also appear the platform,

Dedicated to the interpretation and advancement of Israel's Torah, to the restoration of Israel's ancient land, and to the establishment of universal freedom, justice and peace.⁹

With this statement, Kaplan was trying to indicate that what he was attempting to establish was not a synagogue but rather an institution which would serve to disseminate his philosophy of Judaism. Since the members, having resigned from the Jewish Center, were in need of the services of a synagogue, the SAJ would fill that need. Its synagogue-function, however, was clearly intended by Kaplan to be secondary to its propoganda-function. This concept his followers never really understood although they paid lip-service to the idea throughout the twenties. They were clearly interested in forming a new synagogue.

The name of the new institution was not original with Kaplan. A Society for the Advancement of Judaism was formed to guarantee Judah Magnes' salary while serving as leader of the Kehillah movement (see above). This organization, supported principally by Jacob Schiff, Felix Warburg and Israel Unterberg, ceased to exist when the Kehillah experiment failed.¹⁰ Unterberg was a founding member of this new group and his wife suggested the name to Kaplan.

Kaplan saw the SAJ as a counter-movement to the Ethical Culture Society whose attraction was so great to assimilated Jews of fifty years ago. In many respects, Kaplan desired to outdo Felix Adler who had formed that Society in 1876. Kaplan even called himself "Leader" and not rabbi. Adler was also called "Leader." (This, of course, was in pre-Hitler America when the term "Leader" could still be used in good faith.) Kaplan believed that through the Society for the Advancement of Judaism he would be able to prevent more Jews from leaving Judaism for Ethical Culture by developing "an all-around organic, rational, ethical and spiritual type of American Jewish life."¹¹

Thus, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism was founded in 1922 with both hopeful signs and possible omens for failure. If even the founding members of the organization did not understand its purpose, what would the future bring? Furthermore, the fact that Kaplan had already demonstrated that he had trouble getting along with precisely the upper middle class group he was again called upon to lead was not a good sign. The group's almost fanatical devotion to their leader, however, acted to counterbalance their lack of understanding of the philosophy he expounded. Finally, the general cohesion of the group through trying periods would serve them well in the future.

Chapter V

Although, as we have seen, Kaplan was determined that the new institution would be more than a synagogue, the first order of business for the organization was to begin functioning as a synagogue. The Society for the Advancement of Judaism was designed, however, to represent a way of life in which the influence of Jewish religion, peoplehood and culture would blend into a harmonious whole with the American pattern of life. The actions taken by the Society in its first years were, therefore, a strange mix of synagogue, center and school. This mix was to become, in many respects, the model for synagogue activity in the United States for decades to follow.

Aside from changing the name of the institution from the American Synagogue to the SAJ, the first Membership Meeting took care of certain procedural problems. The membership dues for the Society were set at \$150 per couple. Although Kaplan would have liked the Society to serve all elements of the Jewish community, the high price of dues for the organization immediately excluded all but the middle-class Jews he had been serving previously. Secondly, the membership decided that, for the time being at least, there would be no daily minyan (daily service). Finally, a Board of Trustees consisting of nine members plus a secretary was elected by the membership.

As we have seen, the SAJ was organized on Tuesday, January 17th. The first Sabbath services were held on Friday evening, January 27, 1922. The Society had rented a building at 41 West 86th Street, just a block from the Jewish Center. The building was the former home of George M. Cohan and services were conducted in what had been his living room which was decorated in the popular Chinese style of the day. Men and women were seated separately with the women placed in the back of this long room. The services were essentially Orthodox and any changes in them had to be made slowly in order not to split the Society.

The ability of the Society to attract important personalities in the Jewish community was true even in its earliest years. The first cantor of the Society was the famed liturgist Abraham Zevi Idelsohn. He served for one year until he was called to Cincinnati to be Professor of Jewish Music and Liturgy at the Hebrew Union College. His leadership and knowledge set the tone and level of services at the SAJ for years to come.

Kaplan was elected Leader of the Society on February 12th. He told the Board that it was his desire to contribute his share to the Society for the first year in the form of his services. This would be his contribution toward the efforts of the Society in spreading his ideas on Jewish life. Throughout Kaplan's long relationship with the SAJ,

he never received a salary. Several years later, the Board did purchase a life insurance policy in his name but they never paid him directly. It was Kaplan's hope that in this way he would never become dependent upon the Board or the Society and could maintain his independence of both. Once again, he was determined not to allow himself to sink into the same morass he had been in at the Center.

Kaplan believed that the Society should play an important role in the complete lives of its members. He, therefore, was particularly interested in making sure that the members of the SAJ were of the highest moral quality. He even had the following resolution written into the constitution of the SAJ:

In case any member is alleged to have conducted himself in his private life or in his business relations in a manner that is likely to discredit the good name of the Society, or in case he interferes with the harmonious working out of the purposes of the Society, the Board of Trustees shall appoint from the rest of the membership a special committee of three to investigate the charges against said member. If the special committee will unanimously sustain such charges, the Board of Trustees shall have the right to ask said member to resign, provided at least seven members of the Board of Trustees shall vote against the retention of said member. If he refuses to send in his resignation within two months, his name shall automatically be dropped from the membership roll.¹

This resolution, although never used by the Society, clearly indicated the desire upon the part of the founders of the group that the SAJ should exert an influence for good upon the lives of those affiliated with it.

The earliest and perhaps most imitated liturgical innovation claimed by the SAJ was the introduction of the Bas Mitzvah ceremony. Kaplan hoped that this parallel ritual to the Bar Mitzvah would serve as the first step toward according Jewish women equal status in religious life. Kaplan had been toying with the idea of Bas Mitzvah for many years. Kaplan's sister had received a thorough Hebrew education from their father and was placed in the main cheder (afternoon Hebrew school) until Yitzhak Reines, the founder of the Mizrachi movement, objected to her attending classes with boys. Later Reines established the first yeshivah where secular subjects were studied along with Jewish studies. The yeshivah met for several years in the parlor of Israel Kaplan's home and his daughter would listen to the class discussions from the doorway.

Kaplan was given the honor of allowing his eldest daughter, Judith, to inaugurate this custom in September of 1922. Although the calling of women to the pulpit was a big step for the congregation, the Bas Mitzvah was not for many years an exact counterpart of its male equal. Unlike the boys, Judith was called to the pulpit only after the sacred Torah scrolls were returned to the Ark. She, therefore, read the portion of the week from a book rather than from the scrolls themselves. Furthermore,

she recited the Torah blessings rather than chanting them. It was many years before the SAJ accorded women actual equal status in their services. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein recalls that even her own grandmothers were opposed to this innovation.

The Hebrew School of the SAJ began operation in February, 1922. It was immediately faced with the difficulty of finding teachers in the middle of the year but the SAJ was determined to get its school functioning as quickly as possible because of the fact that many of their members' children had been without Hebrew studies for eight months because of the break with the Center. By March, however, the school could boast an enrollment of thirty-one students divided into six groups taught by four teachers.

Kaplan, however, was still troubled by the steep price of membership in the Society. He suggested that the Society seek to obtain subscribers to the movement at a fee of ten dollars a year. This would give the subscriber the privileges of attending lectures, study hours and similar educational functions in addition to receiving literature to be published by the Society. They, however, would not be entitled to seats for the High Holy Days or the privilege of voting. Kaplan again pointed out that the main purpose of the organization was in the field of educational work for all Jews, "and only inci-

dentally and in addition to this work will the organization conduct other activities -- such as Hebrew School, synagogue and other activities -- for its sustaining membership."² The Board, however, felt that the time was not yet ripe for Kaplan's suggestion since it might serve to discourage prospective members from taking upon themselves the full responsibility of sustaining the organization. Kaplan's plan had to wait several years.

Since one of the functions of the SAJ was to be the dissemination of Kaplan's philosophy, the Board in April asked Kaplan to write out one sermon a month which they would have published in the form of a little twelve or sixteen page leaflet. The members of the Board felt that for the first year of the Society such a publication would be received with great interest by the Jewish community in New York. It would eventually become a direct instrument for the expression of Kaplan's ideas on Judaism.

Yet Kaplan was disappointed at the slow progress that the new institution was making. Even from the point of liturgical changes, the group was of an extremely cautious nature. After four months at the SAJ, Kaplan wrote the following in his journal:

I have in fact been feeling very uncomfortable at the slowness with which the Society has been progressing toward the goal that I have in mind, the goal of a dynamic socialized Judaism. The only thing I have succeeded in so far has been to change the phrasing in that part of the ritual where the return of the sacrificial service is

petitioned for. Instead of praying for the restoration of animal sacrifices, the version, as I have altered it, simply recites the fact that in the past these sacrifices constituted a means of communion with God. The reason for retaining such historic allusion to a mode of service that is obsolete is that the historical continuity of Israel is thus emphasized.

But even this slight change I have introduced in a manner that might be characterized as surreptitious. I have not announced it or explained it to the congregation. I have only asked the Cantor to read the service with these changes. Most of the people have their minds on other things while the Cantor recites the Amidah, and therefore are really unaware of what I have done with the text.

When it came, however, to a more visible change there was protest and the protesters have had their way. I wanted that men and women should not be divided off as is done in the Orthodox synagogues. I believe that there is no reasonable excuse for continuing the custom of separating the sexes during prayer nor that men and women sit promiscuously at all other functions social and educational. But the organizers, men like Joseph Levy, Abe Liebovitz, were afraid that seating men and women together might identify us as Reformed Jews and so we have men and women sitting separately.³

Nevertheless, Kaplan did feel a great sense of responsibility toward these people. He, therefore, finally rejected Stephen Wise's offer of a position at the Jewish Institute of Religion. This he did with an extremely heavy heart.

It does not look as though I am going to take the step that might emancipate me for the larger life and the greater contribution that I might make to the cause of Judaism. The main consideration that prevents me from accepting Wise's offer is that the Society for the Advancement of Judaism which I brought into existence three months ago would be wrecked.⁴

When the membership met, however, for their first Annual Meeting in May, they pointed with pride to their program of adult activities which were functioning well

after only five months of operation. In addition to the Sabbath Morning Services, the SAJ had introduced a Sabbath Afternoon History Hour which was to expand and take several different forms in the years to come. A Wednesday Evening Forum was begun which first took the form of a discussion of the Rabbi's sermon of the previous Sabbath and to which later recognized leaders in Jewish life were invited. Both Judah Magnes and Kaplan's old colleague at the Kehillah Samson Benderly were early speakers in this series. Finally, a Young People's Group had been formed at met with the Rabbi on alternate Wednesday¹ evenings for study and discussion. Yet the same week in which the members glowed over their initial success, Kaplan remained depressed.

Last night the SAJ gave a dinner-dance. Before the affair began I was in grand spirits. When I thought of the fact that at least I have succeeded in actually building up an organization that came as near to being my own creation as I could ever expect, I believed for the moment that my effectiveness was demonstrated. But my ardor cooled off when I came to the Meeting House. I was disappointed in the small attendance. The people with whom I sat at the table never mentioned a word about the organization, as though it had never existed. The main topic of conversation was golf. I was bored to death.⁵

That very next week, Kaplan did see some movement on liturgical reform which he recognized as very promising indeed. For many years, Kaplan had been troubled by the text of the Kol Nidre prayer chanted on the eve of the Day of Atonement. He, therefore, offered the following

resolution to the Board of the Society:

WHEREAS on Yom Kippur eve, the beginning of the most solemn day in the yearly life of the Jew, the services are started with the chanting of Kol Nidre,
 WHEREAS we, as Jews, who take our religion seriously, cannot permit ourselves to enter upon this solemn day with an avowal that is not compatible with present day life, and is likely to be misinterpreted and misunderstood, therefore be it

RESOLVED that Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, our spiritual leader, be asked to formulate a prayer compatible with our conscience as Jews, in place of Kol Nidre, and further

RESOLVED that we retain the present melody of Kol Nidre.⁶

The resolution was passed by the Board after considerable discussion. It did not, however, resolve the issue of Kol Nidre. This resolution was reconsidered and withdrawn by Kaplan the following September before Yom Kippur and the issue continued to be, as we shall see, a major one at the Society for many years. Nevertheless, it is important because it made Kaplan believe that there could be some movement on liturgical matters among the membership.

Last Tuesday a few of the Trustees of the Society met to discuss plans for the High Holiday services which are to take place at the (Hotel) Leslie rooms. I was pleasantly surprised to hear them suggest that men and women be seated together instead of separately during the services at the Leslie....
 I do not know what to attribute the ease with which the suggestion to have mixed seating was adopted, whether to their own realization that it is absurd to maintain a custom that is so out of keeping with the attitude assumed toward worship today, or that recently Dr. E.L. Solomon, a colleague of mine in the ministry, who had always been regarded as Orthodox, accepted a call to a congregation in the neighborhood which has abolished the separate seating of the men and women....
 Seeing that the members of the Board are beginning to act upon their convictions, I proposed another change, to substitute for the Kol Nidre a prayer that is really in keeping with the spiritual level of the Day of Atonement. I considered the Kol Nidre paragraph as entirely out of place and beneath the level of truly spiritual religion. The contents, if understood, are amenable to misconstruction, and in no way conducive

to the elevation of the soul. I would preserve the melody, but not the words of the Kol Nidre.⁷

Kaplan's attitude toward Kol Nidre was an example of the views held by most liberal elements at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he continued teaching. The more conservative leader at the Seminary, Louis Finkelstein who was later to become president of that institution, was among this group.

Last night Dr. Louis Finkelstein and his wife paid us a visit. He and I got into a hot discussion as to the wisdom of my replacing Kol Nidre with a selection from a poem by Luzzatto and retaining only the melody. He considered such an action on my part as destructive of Judaism, for if I were to carry out the motive that led me to take this step to its logical conclusion, I would abrogate such laws as Halizah. I contended that I regarded sincerity in prayer as superior to all other considerations. The substance of Kol Nidre expressing disavowal of all promises and oaths was entirely unspiritual and unworthy of a place in the service on the most solemn day of the year. The reason it is permitted to occupy so important a place is that it evokes, if it does that at all, an atmosphere which has nothing to do with its contents. Such a state of affairs is deplorable in any religion since it makes for mummary and hypocrisy. Finkelstein, of course, remained obdurate, but his wife seemed inclined to agree with me.⁸

It would seem that Finkelstein's more conservative point of view was also held by a substantial portion of the Society's membership and, therefore, Kaplan felt it would be wise to withdraw the suggestion for the time being.

The first High Holiday services were marked by the SAJ in the fall of 1922. They were conducted in the large banquet hall of the Hotel Leslie because of lack of space in the cramped Meeting House of the SAJ. The holidays

offered Kaplan an opportunity to look back upon the past year and to assess the progress he and the SAJ had made.

The High Holidays are over. They were a source of anxiety to me in view of the fact that the SAJ was to hold services for the first time in a hall where the atmosphere is not calculated to inspire any sense of reverence or worship. Personally there was much of a comedown from the magnificent though small synagogue at the Center to the entertainment and wedding hall with the improvised ark on the stage and camp chairs on the floor. Yet when I recalled how narrowly I escaped the clutches of an ingrowing bourgeois hypocritical religiosity that is devoid of the least idealistic aspiration I thanked God that He delivered me from the Center....

The rejoicing I experience whenever I think of my emancipation from the Center is, I hope, not of the Pharisaic kind that finds expression in such benedictions as those over the facts that God 'did not make me a Goy (non-Jew),' or a woman or a slave. I realize that in having failed to alter their world outlook, I admit defeat. My only consolation is that if J.H.Cohen had not been in the way, I probably would have been able to do something with them. When I took charge of the Center, Cohen had too strong a hold on them for anyone to loosen that hold. He cultivated them and exploited them for Beth Israel Hospital. He never lost an opportunity to flatter them into believing themselves high minded and generous, whereas from me they heard statements made repeatedly from the pulpit of a kind that tended to destroy the illusion about themselves that Cohen so cleverly fostered in them.⁹

The holidays, however, gave Kaplan second thoughts about those with whom he was working in this new endeavor.

I have been disillusioned today about the success of the Yom Kippur services. My loss of temper on Kol Nidre night when I scolded the congregation for the cold and lackadaisical spirit in which the Maariv (evening) service was proceeding -- the people even forgetting to answer Amen at the end of the benedictions -- and for the leisureliness with which the congregation was collecting -- seems to have displeased a good many...¹⁰

An opportunity to discuss the aims and operation of the new Society arose due to the inadequacy of the rented quarters which the SAJ had been using. Some of the members of the Board were urging the purchase of land on the West Side and the building of permanent quarters for the Society. Simmons, the Chairman of the Board, opposed this move because he believed that with the purchase of land the Society would become a localized congregation like every other instead of representing the genesis of a national movement. Kaplan agreed with Simmons and felt that the Board was losing sight of the main purpose of the organization.

...I have never really made a serious effort to have them (the Board) grasp that purpose in all its implications. Most of them fail to see the difference between my conception of Judaism and the Orthodox point of view. Somehow they miss the significance of my belief that Judaism should be regarded as having arrived at its present form as a result of natural development, and is not a system of beliefs and practices based on a supermundane Torah. I urged, therefore, that I meet with the Board once a week for the next few weeks for the purpose of explaining to them how the SAJ should be represented to those whom they wish to win as adherents.¹¹

These meetings took place in October, 1922 and served to give the Board a broader understanding of their own organization. It was always Kaplan's hope that the SAJ's membership should be a cohesive group with a firm concept of what their institution stood for. These meetings, he felt would allow the Board members to explain the purposes

and the philosophy to perspective members before they signed any application forms.

At the first meeting, Kaplan attempted to explain why a Society such as the SAJ was necessary to preserve Judaism in the United States.

I began by explaining that there were three types of influences that were disintegrating Judaism: Materialism, Christianity, Ethical Culture. There is no specific way in which we can counteract materialism. In Christianity, Christian Science is taking many from our ranks. Hence a movement that could effectively counteract Christian Science by providing within Judaism the means to health could be very much worthwhile. Yet far more important is to ethicise Jewish life to shift the center of gravity within Judaism itself from ceremonials to ethics. This would hold within the ranks of Judaism many who are idealistically inclined, and who are at present turning to Ethical Culture where they can find better opportunity for selfexpression than in Judaism. I would therefore propose that our Society should be a Jewish Ethical Culture movement. Our general aim should be to promulgate the truth that the foremost religious duty of a human being is to engage in life-long moral self education. Such an aim is, in reality, a modernization of the Jewish ideal of Torah. Simmons wanted me to state more specifically wherein our Society would differ in its aims from the Ethical Culture Society. This necessitated my mentioning at once that in addition to being committed to the general aim mentioned, our Society would stand for certain specific duties, among which was that of developing the spiritual potencies of the Jewish people especially through the upbuilding of Palestine as a Jewish homeland.¹²

The second meeting took a more theological turn than the first.

I recast the formulation of the purpose to read thus: The purpose of the SAJ is to love and spread the Jewish idea that the best way to serve God is to engage in a life-long study of moral duty.

Simmons said that it was necessary for us to state what our conception of God was. I replied that one could easily gather from the statement of the purpose the concept of God that was the basis of our plan of action. When you are told of a certain person that you could please him no better than by giving him a book as a gift you imply that he has literary tastes; pictures, that he is artistically inclined; a stradivarius, that he is a virtuoso. Thus by stating that the best way of serving God is to engage in moral study, the inference is that you assume His nature is in some way kindred with the application of the mind to the problems of right and wrong. That is the most that Judaism wants us to posit about God. Further than that is left to each individual to think out for himself.¹³

With this new understanding of the purposes of the Society, the Board seemed better equipped to plan the SAJ's program. In the twenties, the most popular form of programming at the SAJ, as at other institutions, was the lecture. The Society launched its first lecture series with two weekly courses. The first, taught by Leo Honor of the Teachers Institute, was entitled "Modern Jewish History during the Last Two Centuries," and the second, taught by a professor from the City College, was called "Jewish Life in Contemporary America." Another lecture series was later added on Jewish Current Events. In line with their Leader's concept of Judaism as a complete civilization, the SAJ sponsored an exhibition of Palestinean paintings by Jewish artists and hired a dramatics and music teacher for adult and children's groups. All of these activities are important to our study because they clearly reflect Kaplan's philosophy of Judaism.

The heavy dependence upon lecture series, however, was too great for the Society as it stood during its first year. They were generally poorly attended and, therefore, were drastically curtailed in number. Kaplan suggested to the Board that they divert the money and energy spent on lectures to the field of publication. Through the printed word, Kaplan felt, the Society would be better able to bring its ideas to the attention of the public, and to really further the advancement of Judaism. He suggested that the publication of some kind of magazine would give an opportunity for the expression of his ideas. Further, it would also offer an opportunity for developing a group of students of modern Jewish life and thought who could use the magazine for the expression of their ideas.

In May of 1923, the Editorial Committee of the SAJ decided to expand the SAJ Bulletin, which was essentially a house organ, into a magazine which would contain book reviews, reviews of articles and general articles on subjects of interest to the Society and its members. The magazine, to be called the SAJ Review, published its first issue on the first of June. It continued to appear throughout the twenties every week except during the summer. Until 1928 (February 18th), the Review was mimeographed. At that time, it was expanded in scope and was printed professionally.

The SAJ Review is extremely important to the story of

the Society because it represented the group's attempt to fulfill the broader program envisaged for the SAJ. It was edited by Kaplan who also wrote the editorials and provided much of the copy, particularly in the earlier volumes. Many of these articles served as the basis for Kaplan's books in the 1930's. The magazine, however, also contained many essays on Jewish education and its deficiencies. Most of the contributors were identified with Conservative Judaism and much of their writing was critical of that movement because of its ideological weakness.¹⁴ The Review played an important part in spreading Kaplan's ideas to a wider and more heterogeneous public than the members of the SAJ. It was, therefore, a severe blow to Kaplan when the SAJ Review ceased publication in 1929 due to the onset of the Great Depression.

Nevertheless, the Society's first year of growth was discouraging and the SAJ began its second year with almost a ten thousand dollar budget deficit. The Board, however, felt constrained to offer Kaplan a salary of five thousand dollars per year. Kaplan, holding to the decision he had made at the time of the founding of the Society, once again turned down any offer of remuneration.

As we have seen, the SAJ was from its inception dedicated to the rebuilding of Palestine as the Jewish homeland. When Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader,

visited America in 1923, the SAJ took the lead in raising one hundred thousand dollars on the West Side of Manhattan. By Shavuot of 1923, when Kaplan handed the money over to Weizmann, Kaplan was able to see movement toward his goals at the SAJ. Weizmann, himself, attended services at the SAJ on that festival.

Last Shavuot night we had a very successful program meeting. After the services we had the conventional Shavuot cheese pancakes. With the collation over the meeting began at 9:30. Six of the members delivered short talks on different phases of the SAJ Platform set forth in the Blue Booklet which had been given out as a souvenir at the annual gathering on March 11.... The interest of that meeting was enhanced through the presence of Dr. Weizmann, whom I had invited to come.... At the meeting Weizmann was called upon to speak. He expressed keen satisfaction at the attempt that we are making to adjust Judaism to modern life. He called us a society of seekers. Taking up the point that Judaism is a civilization and not merely a religion, he developed Renan's conception of the reason for the unique character of the Jewish civilization. At the end of the meeting he was elected an honorary member of the organization.¹⁵

The Blue Book mentioned by Kaplan in his journal was still another attempt made by the Society to educate its members and prospective members as to the purpose of the Society. It was a twenty-five page booklet written by Kaplan in the form of answers to questions about the movement and its philosophy. The first question asked: What is the SAJ?

The SAJ is a religious fellowship of Jewish men and women who want Judaism to act as an ethical influence in their everyday life. Most people associate Judaism with dogmas which are either self-evident or unacceptable, and with ceremonies which are more honored in the breach

than in the observance. They ought to know better. They ought to know that Judaism once embraced the whole of life; that it consisted of a language, a literature, a code of laws, an ethical system, a community life, a public opinion -- that it was, in fact, a whole civilization. Conditions have changed. We no longer live in ghettos segregated from the rest of the world. We are Americans, and as Americans we had to give up a part of that Jewish civilization: We have surrendered the civil code; We have little time for the Hebrew language and literature; We have no Jewish communal life. But we are Jews, nonetheless. As such, we want enough of Jewish civilization to survive to make a difference in our mode of living and not only in our mode of praying, in the way we spend the six days of the week and not only in the way we keep the seventh day.¹⁶

Next, the question was asked as to how the Society would attain its aims.

We propose to attain our aims in a number of ways: In the first place, by attempting to reread the past of the Jewish people, its political career as well as its spiritual struggles, in the light of truth as the modern man understands it; Secondly, by taking part in the restoration of Palestine, where the whole of the original Jewish civilization shall again come into play; Thirdly, by making it a religious duty to engage in group deliberation upon all problems affecting our social relationships in the home, the shop, the market place, and the state -- upon all problems of work and leisure, of peace and war, of property rights and human rights.¹⁷

Kaplan then went on to explain how rereading the Jewish past will further the Society's purpose, why Palestine is so important and why group deliberation is so vital that it is designated a "religious" duty.

Next the anonymous questioner asks whether the SAJ of Orthodox or Reform. The answerer replies:

Such a question implies a complete misunderstanding

of our purposes. The question as to Orthodox or Reform would be relevant, if we were to make ritual and observance our chief concern. We are, by our very purpose, committed to retain those elements in our ritual and observance which identify us with Israel of old, and which will make us one in spirit with the Jewish commonwealth of the future. Beyond that, we are not committed to any set form of ritual or mode of observance. Our program differs from Reform Judaism in upholding the original character of Judaism as a civilization, instead of a denominational creed. So long as we believe that Judaism must function as a civilization in order to achieve its destiny in the world, we cannot think it apart from Palestine, which is the only place where it can thrive as a full-fledged civilization. We believe that Judaism should maintain its Hebraic character even in the Diaspora. The Hebrew language should be retained in the synagogue, should be taught as a living language in the religious school, and should be made to serve as a living bond of universal Israel. Judaism as a civilization calls for a comprehensive plan of education which makes far greater demands upon the time of the child and of the youth than does the Sunday School training which is required by Judaism conceived as a creed. Judaism as a civilization calls for the reinstatement of the synagogue as the center of social, philanthropic and cultural activities. Judaism as a civilization calls for the stimulation and fostering of every form of Jewish art and culture.¹⁸

Finally, the inquirer asks: Why do you call yourselves a "Society" and not a congregation?

We are not a congregation, because we are not organized primarily for the purpose of worship. We are a Society, insofar as the task to which we are dedicated is more comprehensive than can be undertaken by any local congregation. We are a Society, insofar as we hope to win to our program all who are interested in having Judaism function ethically, regardless of their congregational affiliation. We are a Society, because we expect that, throughout the country, Jewish men and women, who are in accord with our aims, will band together into religious fellowships similar to our own. Thus will the SAJ become a potent factor in the rejuvenation of Israel and in the unification of mankind.¹⁹

In this booklet, we see a development in Kaplan's thinking

from its earliest stage which he enunciated in his booklet on the Jewish Center in 1916. These ideas, in a more developed form, took their final shape in Judaism as a Civilization.

By the summer of 1923, the membership was already approaching the one hundred mark and the spirit of the Society was beginning to pick up. This, of course, raised Kaplan's spirits somewhat and he was able to describe the SAJ in his journal "as the only Jewish organization of a religious character that has a college spirit."²⁰ Upon his return from Europe where he had spent the summer, Kaplan was greeted at the pier by a large delegation of SAJ members. It gave him pause to reflect upon his role at the Society.

In all sincerity I feel that I do not deserve all that friendship which these people are manifesting toward me. I ask myself 'Why are they so good to me?' Is it because they feel that I might emancipate them into a larger life of the spirit, into the life where they would be free from their petty cares and from the useless burdens that the past has imposed on them? But God knows, I myself need the strength and the courage which it should be my business to inspire others with.²¹

Friendship, however, was never enough for Kaplan in his association with the Society. His greatest desire for the membership of the SAJ was for them to understand his work and their role in bringing a new Judaism into existence. Once again, Kaplan was forced to warn the Board against putting up a permanent building and, thereby, losing sight

of their precious goal.

At a Board meeting of the SAJ last night I urged upon those present that we must be careful not to lose sight of the main aim of our organization which is that of evolving the type of Judaism in this country that is likely to live, a Judaism that is both ethical and Hebraic in character. I warned against the danger of being diverted from the aim by taking up the problem of a building for the Society. Once we do that we are bound to shrink into a congregation interested in its own upkeep. I advocated organizing groups similar to our own in different parts of the city and the country, and then having those groups form a party in Judaism which will embrace the vast mass of our people who want to remain Jews but cannot affiliate with Orthodoxy, because of its medievalism and with Reform, because of its unJewishness. Those present were convinced by my arguments in favor of the SAJ engaging in propaganda work and voted to establish a propaganda fund of \$10,000. for the first year. I pray to God that I be able to carry out at least some of the plans that I suggest and for which the SAJ is so ready with its support.²²

In addition to this propaganda program, the SAJ began several projects in its 1923-24 season which reflected both its broader and synagogue platform. For example, the Society raised over \$11,000. for the Jewish Theological Seminary and affiliated for the first time with the United Synagogue (the congregational body of Conservative Judaism). Moreover, the Society took it upon itself to be partly responsible for the publication of the Hashiloah, a Hebrew monthly magazine which was then published in Jerusalem. The SAJ became its sole agent in the United States.

As far as its synagogue program was concerned, the SAJ introduced late Friday services in order to reach a larger number of members with Kaplan's sermons. A Women's Division

was formed with Mrs. Samuel Lamport as its first president. Finally, in December, 1923 Moshe Nathanson joined the SAJ as cantor. Nathanson remained with the Society throughout its years of growth and is today, nearly fifty years later, serving as Cantor Emeritus. Once again, however, the year was ended with a deficit of over \$9000.

At the Annual Meeting Kaplan was able to point with pride to the progress toward advancing Judaism in its religious, cultural and ethical aspects which the Society was making.

A Jewish ritual, which conforms with the spirit of the times and our spiritual needs, is gradually being developed by the SAJ, through the introduction of an intense Hebrew spirit in the services, the elimination of unnecessary repetition, and the addition of new poetic selections from modern Hebrew and passages from the Bible arranged in a logical form about definite themes.

Culturally, the Society has made considerable progress through its program meetings, which provided an opportunity for self-expression and identification with the main stream of contemporary thought; through the Friday evening lectures which provided a theoretic interpretation of our point of view of Judaism; through courses of study; through the institution of Jewish soiree or cultural evenings at the homes of our members; and finally, through our intense interest in the propagation of Hebrew culture in America, evidenced by our financing, in part, the publication of the Hashiloah. The plans of the Women's Committee to arrange for an SAJ day once a week, during which members will spend the day in attending courses of study at the SAJ, is another stride toward this cultural development.

Ethically, the Society has also made notable steps in advance. By taking the initiative in organizing the West Side for Palestine activity, we have aroused Jews to their sense of duty and responsibility, thus emphasizing the moral duty of building up Palestine. Our appreciable contributions to charity and Jewish

education are further evidence of the sense of responsibility. A number of our members have, as a result of the program of the Society, improved their ethical standards toward fellow businessmen and fellow workers, thus showing the influence of our ethical teachings.²³

Moreover, the Chairman was able to report that the Hebrew School now had eighty-five students most of whom met three or four days a week. For college students, the SAJ had established groups under its auspices at Hunter College, Columbia's Teachers College and Barnard. Finally, the SAJ had this year raised over \$35,000. from its membership for Palestine.

No matter how glowing Kaplan's report to the Annual Meeting was, however, he still harbored serious reservations in his own mind as to the real progress of the Society. These doubts he confided only to his journal.

In my game against the destructive influences that are undermining the Judaism and Jewishness of the lay group I am working with, I feel once again at a stalemate. I have never had the sensation that one associates with an aggressive game. It is always a case of being on the defensive and at the last point of defense, where one is actually cornered. All I have to do is to restrain myself by sheer force of will from admitting defeat. What I cannot decide in my own mind is whether the situation is really hopeless or I am too weak to deal with it. The moment the holidays were over 70% of the SAJ became invisible to me. The enthusiasm of the other 30% has to be kept up by all sorts of artificial stimulants. As soon as I would let go for a few days, I imagine, the organization would disintegrate.²⁴

This doubt about the Society continued throughout the twenties. Once again, Kaplan was asking himself whether he should continue with a congregation or devote himself

full time to his writing and teaching. And once again, he used the pages of his journal to pour out his heart and to weigh the pros and cons of the situation.

My mind has been awlirl again as to whether I should proceed with my work at the SAJ. The Board meeting which took place Monday night was so poorly attended and was carried on in such a lackadaisical spirit that I began to doubt whether I should permit them to think of purchasing ground for a building....They are not ready to make any sacrifice in time or money. Outside of two or three upon whom I might count for work, there is no one that can contribute anything toward the purpose for which the SAJ was formed, and these two or three are too preoccupied with their own business cares to have any energy for this work.... The services are poorly attended...The program meetings upon which I counted so much are not entertaining enough for them. They have so many distractions, so many sources of diversion that they are blase. In this respect their children down to the youngest are even worse than they are. The few young people cannot be made to take an interest in anything intellectual or spiritual. They cannot even be induced to undertake anything of a social nature, so tired are they of one another. They are just worm-eaten with boredom. Lately I have offered to conduct a group of men in the study of ethics and religion, provided I got at least twenty-five to come regularly. So far no one but the one who got me to make the effort -- Dr. Brand, a dentist who is as ignorant of Judaism as he is of Chinese -- is the only candidate for the group. With such deadheads I have been working for the last three years.²⁵

But worst of all, Kaplan felt his futile work with this "group of deadheads" was taking him from work that could be creative and important to his real goal.

On the other hand, whenever I get a chance to concentrate on the problem of Judaism as a civilization, I see more and more light. I am beginning to find a workable formula for Judaism in the Diaspora....I am quite certain that if I could go on work uninterruptedly I might at least realize the dream of my life: to work out a clear formula for Judaism as a civilization both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, before

my mental powers will begin to wane, which I understand is normally the case at fifty-five.²⁶

Yet Kaplan concluded that if he was ever to realize his goal of a Judaism which could survive in the Diaspora, he would have to work with laymen and this group certainly was as good as any to experiment with. It is interesting to note that although Kaplan was afraid that his mental powers would begin to wane at the age of fifty-five, his latest book has just been published at the age of eighty-nine!

The decision made, Kaplan rededicated himself to the work of the SAJ. In December, 1924, the Society began publishing the SAJ Diary which contained a calendar of Jewish and English dates, special notes describing the Jewish holidays, a statement of the Society's aims and a brief section on Jewish statistics and current events. The SAJ Diary served (and continues to serve) as both a handbook for members and a useful guide to perspective members.

In January of 1925, Kaplan was invited to travel to Scranton, Pennsylvania by two former Seminary pupils, Rabbis Max Arzt and Bernard Heller, to help in the organization of a new unit of the SAJ. Kaplan felt this to be the beginning of the expansion of the SAJ beyond the confines of the West Side. These developments are, of course, beyond the scope of this study yet are important to our understanding

of Kaplan's relationship to the SAJ.

With this exciting news, Kaplan felt that his opposition to the acquisition of land for a new building was no longer founded. The original quarters of the Society would certainly not be large enough to house the offices of a national movement. Accordingly, in January, 1925, through the efforts of a Building Committee headed by Joseph Levy, the SAJ acquired the property at 11½ to 15 West 86th Street. The renovation of the buildings on the site took the whole year. The next month H.L. Simmons, the first Chairman of the SAJ, resigned and was succeeded to that position by Harry H. Liebovitz.

Kaplan, once again, attempted to raise the moral level of his followers during this period. He had the Board establish an Arbitration Board which the members of the Society were expected to use.

All claims, demands, disputes, controversies and misunderstandings or differences that may arise between any of its members, that may arise under, out of, or in connection with, or in relation to any contract, existing between them, or arising under or out of any arrangement or dispute shall be settled by the Arbitration Board herein created, pursuant to the Arbitration Laws of the State of New York, in the tribunal of justice, to be known as the Arbitration Court of the SAJ, established and conducted by the SAJ in accordance with its Rules.²⁷

This Court, which never really functioned at the SAJ, is important because once again it points to the fact that Kaplan was trying to influence the whole life of each

congregant. This is also demonstrated in an editorial which appeared at about the same time in the SAJ Review.

The news item tells us that creditors filed claims for more than \$500,000. against the Gladstone Hotel which had declared itself bankrupt. One of our members, Mr. Bennett Siegelstein, attorney for the hotel, impressed the U.S. District Court Judge with the sincerity of the intentions of the corporation operating the hotel to organize its finances so that it would pay back in full all of its obligations, giving every creditor one hundred cents on the dollar. The Judge consented to delaying the appointment of a receiver and, through the efforts of Mr. Siegelstein, the new corporation was quickly reorganized and met all creditors' claims by full payment of all obligations. We are sometimes under the impression that the influence of the Society can only be exerted at our Discussion Meetings, where we deliberate and talk considerably about various ethical and social problems. However, the most important results of the activity of the Society are seen when our members in the daily conduct of their business affairs give evidence of translating their ideas about ethics into actual ethical action. That is what we mean by making Judaism function.²⁸

Further growth of the Society as a national movement was reported during this year. Another student of Kaplan's from the Seminary formed a chapter of the SAJ in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Other chapters were in the planning stages in Woonsocket, Rhode Island and Cleveland, Ohio.

In the spring of 1925, the SAJ celebrated the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Special services were held at the Society to mark the occasion. Kaplan journeyed to Palestine to represent the Zionist Organization of America at the official opening exercises. The following letter was sent by the Board of Trustees to

Kaplan during his stay in Jerusalem:

We are happy that Mr. Levy's visit to Palestine gives us the opportunity to extend to you, our Leader, our sincere good wishes for your health and happiness during your stay in Palestine. We have felt great pride in your representation of American Jewry at the dedication of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. We hope and pray to God that you return to us in good health and renewed vigor, and when we are again privileged, upon your return, to have your guidance, we can each individually truly say, 'Now my joy is complete.'²⁹

The new building of the SAJ was dedicated with a Hanukkah Dinner in December, 1925. The occasion afforded Kaplan another opportunity to formally outline the aims of the Society.

On the occasion of the dedication of the new quarters of the SAJ at 13-15 West 86th Street I formulated the principles of the SAJ in terms of thirteen 'wants.' My purpose in those principles is to convey that at the present time it is impossible to agree upon abstract principles, but it is possible to agree as to what differences in our lives the fact of being Jews should make. I believe that stating the principles of Judaism in that way should prove an excellent means of transferring the interest from something that can no longer function to something that can. Beliefs cannot function as a means of Jewish unity. Let us, however, learn to make demands upon Jewish unity and Jewish unity will be strengthened through the effort to have it meet these demands.³⁰

These thirteen "wants" were published immediately in the SAJ Review and appeared in every issue of that publication thereafter. They were originally called "The SAJ Creed" but Kaplan changed their name to the "Thirteen Principles of the SAJ" because he felt that Judaism could no longer be expressed in terms of beliefs. These principles later became the basis for the Reconstructionist Platform of the

1930's. They are:

1. We want Judaism to help us overcome temptation, doubt and discouragement.
2. We want Judaism to imbue us with a sense of responsibility for the righteous use of the blessings wherewith God endows us.
3. We want the Jew so to be trusted that his yea will be taken as yea and his nay as nay.
4. We want to learn how to utilize our leisure to best advantage physically, intellectually and spiritually.
5. We want the Jewish home to live up to its traditional standards of virtue and piety.
6. We want the Jewish upbringing of our children to further their moral and spiritual growth and to enable them to accept with joy their heritage as Jews.
7. We want the synagogue to enable us to worship God in sincerity and in truth.
8. We want our religious tradition to be interpreted in terms of understandable experience and to be made relevant to our present day needs.
9. We want to participate in the upbuilding of Erez Yisrael as a means of the renaissance of the Jewish spirit.
10. We want Judaism to find rich, manifold and ever new expression in philosophy, in letters and in arts.
11. We want all forms of Jewish organization to make for spiritual purposes and ethical endeavor.
12. We want the unity of Israel throughout the world to be fostered through mutual help in time of need and through co-operation in the furtherance of Judaism at all times.
13. We want Judaism to function as a potent influence for justice, freedom and peace in the life of men and nations.³¹

With the opening of the new building, the Society was in a position to expand its programs in several areas. The synagogue, for example, began the practice of conducting daily morning services. Finding a minyan (ten men needed for public worship) for this service was always a problem for the Society and in later years they even resorted to paying men to attend services regularly. In addition to

this, a Junior Congregation was formed which conducted an abbreviated service each Saturday morning for the young people of the congregation. This practice was copied by many other congregations in the country.

Yet, once again, Kaplan felt that he wasn't positively affecting the lives of his congregants. He was torn between his desire to castigate them for their lack of interest and the knowledge that such a course might build up a wall between himself and the Society.

In my sermon last Sabbath, I voiced the inner conflict under which I am laboring. Very few in the auditorium, I suppose, suspected that fact. I contrasted the prophetic mood with the rabbinic mood as expressed in their respective attitudes toward Israel on the part of the prophets and of the rabbis. Moses, Elijah, Isaiah were ever ready with their resignations. They despaired of Israel. The rabbis glorified Israel and condemned the prophets for their lack of faith in Israel. When Elijah came to Horeb he handed in his resignation to God. The rabbis characterized him as an informer for telling God that Israel destroyed his altars and killed his priests. Which is the more ethical and spiritual course to follow? That is the problem with which I am forever wrestling.³²

Kaplan often viewed himself in his journal as a prophet in the midst of a recalcitrant Israel.

This feeling of malaise was compounded by a period of sagging morale and diminished Sabbath attendance at the Society. Kaplan felt that the growing indifference which he saw on Sabbath mornings was symptomatic of the deterioration in the general morale of the SAJ. The Board and their Rabbi began to seriously discuss what should be done to hold the membership's interest.

In the informal conversation that I had with three or four of the members of the Board after the meeting, they suggested to me that I would get a better attendance if I were to speak on current plays and books, instead of on the portion of the week or on the aims of the Society. These last remarks opened up my wounds afresh. I cannot help realizing that such a request sounds the death knell of Judaism in this country. For to me the difference between Judaism and any other civilization is not a difference in abstract principles, but primarily a difference in the sources whence such principles are to be derived. If the history and experience of the Jewish people are to be supplanted by non-Jewish books and plays as the source or principle of living there is an end to Judaism. Probably the fact is that living in America we must draw upon the materials of American life at least as much as upon those of Jewish life for the inspiration to live ethically and spiritually. But the danger is that the materials of American life by the very nature of their wealth and immediate interest are bound to crowd out the materials of Jewish experience altogether. With what will we then be left?³³

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Ethical Culture Society, the SAJ Review printed an editorial in which it sharply criticized that movement. In it, Kaplan wrote that effective groupings are either historical or purposive.

The Ethical Culture group is not purposive, nor does it ally itself with any historical group. It has served as an excellent debating society in quest of truth. What it has accomplished has been done not because of the movement, but because of the man at the head of it. When Dr. Elliott, in paying tribute to Dr. Adler's record of fifty years of uninterrupted service in the Ethical Culture pulpit, said, 'I know of no other instance in history where for fifty years a single platform has been maintained which rested practically on the efforts of one man and one group of people, where there was not the backing of a great historical and authoritative institution,' he pointed out very emphatically just wherein lie both the success and failure of the Ethical Culture Movement. When Mr. Henry Neumann recounts the concrete achievements of

the Ethical Culture Movement in his article in The Nation, he lists this or that reference in which Dr. Adler was participating actively.

The Society for the Advancement of Judaism faces the same danger of failure as the Society for Ethical Culture. The fact that the Leader of the SAJ does this or thinks that, and has won recognition for some piece of work or book, does not mean that the Society has been responsible for these achievements. The SAJ can be both purposive and historical. As soon as it ceases to be either the one or the other, it will soon become a debating society with a high-sounding name but without achievements to match.³⁴

Kaplan, however, despite this editorial, was still quite impressed with the Ethical Culture movement's achievements and in subsequent editorials called for the establishment of a day school at the SAJ which would follow the plan of the progressive Ethical Culture schools in New York.

In the spring of 1926, still another SAJ chapter was founded by another student of Kaplan. This one was organized by Rabbi Levitsky in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. That summer a Rabbinical Council of the SAJ was formed whose purpose it would be to establish new SAJ chapters and to help publish and edit an SAJ Quarterly.

Kaplan, of course, was fundamentally concerned with the fate of American Jewish youth. Something had to be done, he felt, to reawaken their interest in Judaism. He praised the Reform movement for the institution of the confirmation ceremony but chided it for copying such a Gentile model. The SAJ, incidentally, introduced this innovation into its program during the thirties. Kaplan was well ahead of his time, however, in calling for the

creation of a camp system which would provide Jewish children with positive Jewish experiences.

There is no doubt that Jewish camps are becoming generally more Jewish, but too often the Jewishness is confined to saying Grace and mumbling some prayer for a few minutes every Sabbath. The real spirit of Jewishness, however, is not conveyed. When we consider how remarkable is the opportunity offered to camps to inculcate the Jewish spirit in our boys and girls, it is all the more to be deplored that the only form of recreational and educational activity these camps offer is an entertainment around a campfire which aims to approach the Indian mode of living. Kashrut is important and should be taken care of, but educationally we must include activities that will afford the boys and girls opportunities for Jewish self-expression along lines that will interest them. For unless we utilize these opportunities at camp and everywhere else, we shall not make any headway with our Jewish civilization.³⁵

The question of Kol Nidre which had been raised but never acted upon, was brought up once again during the High Holidays of 1926. This time, Kaplan copied the practice of many Reform congregations by replacing the words of the Kol Nidre with the 130th Psalm, leaving the melody untouched. The subject was discussed in the SAJ Review in the following editorial:

Many times have we repeated the seventh 'want' of our Society, 'We want the synagogue to enable us to worship God in sincerity and in truth.' Little by little we are altering our liturgy and the conduct of our services so as to make our services traditional insofar as possible, but in accordance with the spirit and demands of modern life. In this wise are we attempting to live up to our declaration of 'Wants.'

The substitution of Psalm 130, 'Out of the depths have I called unto Thee,' for Kol Nidre in the Yom Kippur liturgy is an illustration of the manner and spirit in which we make these emanations and alterations in our mode of service. Here is a sad and beautiful melody, expressive of the sufferings and yearnings of the Jewish

people throughout the period of its exile, dear and holy to every Jew, yet sung to words which long ago have lost their significance and relevancy. In its stead we have taken a Psalm which is traditional and appropriate to the Day of Atonement, and have fitted the sacred melody of Kol Nidre to the words which will be far more expressive of the day we are observing.³⁶

The congregation of the SAJ accepted this innovation in a generally favorable manner. This, however, was not the end of the Kol Nidre controversy at the Society. Several years later, Judah David Eisenstein, a well-known Talmudist and grandfather of Ira Eisenstein, suggested that the Society restore the Kol Nidre text in a slightly amended form. Eisenstein pointed out that the real purpose of the prayer was to absolve man from vows which were intended to alienate him from his fellow men: if, for example, one man says to another, "I swear I'll never talk to you again," the Kol Nidre prayer is intended to free man from this type of vow. Kaplan accepted this explanation and restored the original text with an added line designed to make this purpose clearer to the worshippers.

During this year (1926-27), the SAJ experimented with a free Sunday School for the children on the neighborhood who were receiving no Jewish education. By using stereoptican slides and motion pictures, they hoped to be able to reach a large number of children. In addition to this, Kaplan issued a call for a unified Hebrew School for all the West Side congregations. This suggestion, however,

went unheeded.

The problem of large and ostentatious Bar Mitzvah celebrations was obviously a growing problem in the affluent days of the mid-1920's.

The Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a beautiful and important institution in Jewish life. All the more reason why we should take it seriously and guard it against abuse. The parents must realize that they are initiating their child into Jewish life. In committing the child to the life of the Jew, they are also committing themselves. Their child's Bar Mitzvah or Bas Mitzvah should mark for them an occasion when they should rededicate themselves to a more earnest effort to make their own lives more Jewish. If parents would celebrate in this spirit their child's initiation into Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah day would not be the child's farewell to the synagogue. The cultivation of this attitude is infinitely more important for Jewish life than the uncalled for and often extravagant banquets which are held in celebration of a boy becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Nothing could be more incongruous with the true purpose of the celebration than the elaborate vaudeville performance, and often even more inappropriate forms of entertainment, which have become the fashion in well-to-do Orthodox Jewish circles.³⁷

The SAJ was one of the earliest congregations to attempt to fight this trend by establishing high standards for the training of each Bar or Bas Mitzvah candidate. In addition, each youngster was required to sign a pledge promising to devote a few hours each week to Jewish study for seven years after the ceremony. Kaplan even went so far as to suggest a new ceremony of initiation for each Jewish young person to be conducted upon completion of this seven year program.

Throughout this period, the bitterness between the SAJ and the Jewish Center continued. Kaplan's daughter Judith recalls that she would have to look out the door of

the SAJ building to make sure that the coast was clear for some of her girlfriends to leave Sabbath services so as not to meet aunts or uncles coming from the Center's services. Many of the Center's members, she remembers, would cross the street in order not to pass in front of the SAJ on their way back to their homes. There was some contact, however, for we read in the SAJ Review of November 19, 1926 that the Center's basketball team defeated the SAJ's Junior League team by a score of 31 to 24.

That year also saw the establishment of a new SAJ Chapter in Hartford, Connecticut. Within the home congregation, a choral group was formed and the SAJ became one of the first Ashkenazic congregations to adopt the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew for its services and instruction in its religious school.

The spring of 1927, marked the fifth anniversary of the founding of the SAJ. A dinner was held at the Hotel Astor. Kaplan wrote the following message to his followers on that occasion:

Here is a movement that should be a challenge and an inspiration, a movement that should fire the imagination, stir the very depths of the Jewish soul and give men a vision and a dream. This attempt to develop a type of Judaism, rich in content, effective in our daily life and compatible with intellectual honesty, should be welcomed by all who are groping for a Judaism that will meet the demands of modern life, that will ennoble and enrich their experiences. But there is always the danger that the ardor of some of those who launched it will cool down by reason of the prevailing apathy to matters spiritual.

For time makes many of us weary and trying details and

periods of adversity dull the keenness of our interest. If so, we must always replenish our ranks, but carry on we must. The SAJ is not merely another congregational effort. It is a movement, an idea, an ideal. As such, its appeal cannot be sudden and swift. It must take the course of all conquering ideas -- the way of slow, evolving conquest. To conquer the imaginations and minds of men, an idea must be translated and present in terms appropriate to its dimensions and power. It demands on the part of its followers a fervor and a vision, a persistence and a tenacity without which no ideal can ever succeed....

If we determine to labor with untiring zeal for the reconstruction of Palestine as the Jewish homeland, and for the reinstatement of the study of Torah as the avocation of young and old, Judaism will again function in the life of the Jewish people. It will not merely guide them in discriminating the good from the evil in modern civilization, but will then radiate that light whereof the prophet spoke when he said, 'The nations will walk by thy light.'³⁸

Although the words "The nations will walk by the light" became the SAJ's motto, these words were empty of meaning for Kaplan for he saw the membership as basically disinterested in his goals. This truer feeling he confided once again in his journal.

How little the SAJ means to me in the way of spiritual encouragement can be seen from the fact that I almost forgot to mention that on March 13th we went through the motions of the fifth anniversary celebration. It was devoid of general spirit and enthusiasm. If it left so little an impression on me, one can gather how little an impression it left on the other participants. The only thing I recall was the fact that Harry Liebovitz, who on previous occasions evinced some real feeling for the SAJ, indulged this time in a series of colorless platitudes that had as much relevance to the purposes of the Society as to the Versaille Treaty.³⁹

Kaplan's despair over the SAJ was increased by an unfortunate incident which came to light shortly after this anniversary dinner. The Board, which had promised to keep

up an endowment policy for their Leader, never fulfilled their promise.

The SAJ is dull and stationary....The indifference of the Board of Trustees has showed itself in a most unforgivable act of negligence that I should never have imagined them capable of. In February, 1923 they voted me a fifteen year endowment policy for \$100,000. Not long after that resolution was passed Nat Turrel who was entrusted with the task of attending to the details informed me that the committee which had taken the matter under advisement on finding so large a policy too expensive decided to make it a \$50,000. life, plus an amount which in five years would total sufficiently to make the policy self-paying. After a while I received the policy. That was the last I heard of the matter, until recently when in view of the misfortune which befell Phineas I thought I might have to draw upon the money they had laid aside. When I asked A. Liebovitz to let me have \$2000. I woke up to the fact that nothing had been paid in by the SAJ toward the amount that was supposed after five years to yield enough income to cover the premiums of the policy. At the last meeting of the Board they realized that they had failed even to ask Turrel to report and that they have to pay in about \$14,000. to make up for the arrears. This oversight is typical of the general negligence that marks the work of the SAJ.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, after the first five years in operation, the SAJ was able to report a membership of one hundred and sixty. The Hebrew School had a registration of seventy students. By the end of the twenties, the membership of the Society was growing at an agonizingly slow pace although there was positive motion in the expansion of the SAJ movement to other cities.

Kaplan hoped as the SAJ movement spread beyond New York City that rather than being a new group within American Judaism, the Conservative movement would adopt its platform.

In later years, Reconstructionism became a separate group against the earlier policy of its founder. This attitude is reflected in an editorial which appeared in the SAJ Review.

Thanks to the aggressiveness of Jewish fundamentalists, those who belong to the large body of adjectiveless Jews are beginning to realize their mistake in permitting themselves to pass off as spiritual 'mugwumps.' They are being forced to make their position clear. They must take a definite stand with regard to the traditional attitude toward the Torah. They must formulate the principle or principles they intend to follow in the changes they want to introduce into their ceremonial practices as Jews. The bootlegging of innovations will have to be stopped. In other words, they will have to accept the logical and moral consequences that follow from being a distinct party in Judaism. Groups that are the product of insurgency against the status quo are, as a rule, too shame-faced at first to admit their identity. Whatever name they come to bear is usually the one forced on them by their opponents. This is happening at the present time with synagogue Jews of the non-conformist type, to which class we of the SAJ belong. Both the Orthodox and the Reformists are gradually forcing us to assume the name Conservative. If possible, we should like to forestall such an eventuality because we consider the epithet a rather unfortunate one. It is a characterization hardly calculated to inspire interest or enthusiasm.... Those of us who are the butt of the attack by the Orthodox at the present time are not Conservative but Reconstructionists. What we want is that Jewish life should become as many sided and as contentful as it is possible to make it in the Diaspora, with Palestine as our cultural and spiritual center. Our interest is centered in the reinterpretation and reconstruction of traditional ideas that are at the basis of our theology, nationalism and Jewish law. Hence we should be known as the Reconstructionist Party in Judaism.⁴¹

Whatever high-sounding language Kaplan used in his editorials for the SAJ Review, he could not hide from himself the fact that he believed himself to be failing with the group of laymen with whom he was working.

I myself am becoming so weak and flabby that I no longer wax indignant at the demoralized state of the SAJ. If I had any 'guts' in me I would have kicked the whole thing over. If I had any self-respect I would have said to those who were assembled last Sunday night to hear me debate on What is religion? with a group of three raw, crude and unmannerly youngsters, 'Ladies and gentlemen, if this is the product of six years of my toiling with you, if you can not only sit patiently listening to such blasphemy and trash, and applaud it to the echo, you better change the name of this Society to the Society for the Prevention of Judaism and choose as your Leader one of these young snotnoses.' But, of course, I must pretend that I am enjoying the privilege of being their spiritual leader and smile like any ordinary salesman about town, even if he is kicked downstairs by the party he is trying to sell his wares to.⁴²

Despite the fact that the Society claimed to be interested in events outside of the Jewish world, there is very little evidence for this. The SAJ was strangely silent and seemingly insulated from developments in the broader community. In 1928, however, the Board went on record as opposing a bill before Congress which would have appropriated two and a half billion dollars for naval armament. Kaplan pointed out to the Board members that "the naval program proposed can be understood only as an anticipation of imminent war with nations that are now on terms of peace and friendship with the United States. To anticipate war and to enter into competitive armament building on the basis of this anticipation is equivalent to serving notice on other nations that we are ready to make war on them."⁴³

The one international sphere in which the SAJ was very interested, of course, was the events occurring in Palestine.

Its importance to Kaplan's scheme of thought was demonstrated in an editorial which appeared in the SAJ Review early in 1928.

Palestine must not fail us. If it fails us, it is as though the land has rejected us and sent us into a third exile. For the Zionist movement to succumb to its present emergency would spell disaster to Judaism. Although we live in the Diaspora, we have never actually experienced an exile. But we shall understand what exile means vividly enough if a Jewish national homeland will definitely prove to be a mere will o'the wisp. Palestine is now too large a part of what Judaism we have. Our self-respect and our faith in the meaning of history have become bound up with Palestine's recovery as the center of Jewish civilization. Therefore we must not fail Palestine. We dare not confess the utter moral bankruptcy which such failure would mean. All our passionate avowals of devotion to Israel and Israel's God will become ashes in our teeth, if we prove now unable to withstand the inevitable trials of a rebuilding movement. We Jews dare not be fair-weather patriots, for in that event we shall not be patriots at all; we shall very rarely meet consistently fair weather.⁴⁴

In order to further the program of the SAJ, Kaplan felt that something had to be done to emphasize the SAJ as a movement over the SAJ as a synagogue. An early indication of this tendency was the fact that the SAJ Review ceased printing news of the SAJ congregation in March, 1928. That month it published an editorial entitled "The SAJ as a Movement."

One of the obstacles the SAJ movement should not have to reckon with is regusal, here and there, to understand that the SAJ represents not a closed group but an attitude toward Judaism. Yet there are many who, having every reason to participate in the movement, obstinately hold to the misconception that the SAJ is a congregation and nothing more. We should be grateful to these pilpulists if they could tell us how the

movement could have started, if there were not a group willing to start it? And as the movement to which this group has committed itself makes increasing progress it becomes, in fact, increasingly clear that the movement will not be limited to an organized congregation or to any group of them...⁴⁵

The following month, the Society took a step originally urged upon it by its Leader in 1925. It reorganized itself into an SAJ Synagogue and an SAJ Chapter. Although there was growth in the movement outside of New York City, the SAJ Chapter on 86th Street never really grew as an independent entity from its parent congregation. As we have seen, the majority of members of the Society were really only interested in a synagogue. They went along with Kaplan's reorganization plan principally out of respect for him. Although beyond the scope of this study, the movement was showing definite signs of growth by the end of the 1920's. A Mid-West Council of the SAJ was formed in the spring of 1928 and a highly successful conference for the discussion of the problem of Judaism was held in Chicago. Many prominent Conservative and Reform rabbis attended this two day conclave.

The SAJ Chapter took over the responsibility for the publication of the SAJ Review. Kaplan continued to attack the amorphous nature of the Conservative movement and call for the adoption of a definite ideology in its pages.

Every time a Conservative rabbi essays a public definition of the Conservative 'credo' he inevitably confirms the current understanding of Conservatism as something that is decidedly neither here nor there.

The matter is beautifully illustrated in the recent dedication service of a Conservative Temple, where the rabbi explained that the 'principles' of the Temple constituted a 'blending of tradition and piety with progress and modernity.' These are indeed fine principles; one need only to understand them, which is not easy.

One might object to the reference to blending, as if religion were a choice tobacco, aged in wood, and one might object to a conception of piety which took it as a kind of chemical element that does not readily enter into combination with the element of progress. One might, in short, pertinently object to the slipshod way of thinking about religion and think one has traced the confusion to its source. But the source of the error is deeper. It is in the very conception that a religion is possible which shall be boldly and self-consciously eclectic, borrowing furniture here, forms there and ideas nowhere -- as it always turns out. The Temple is described as 'Orthodox in all ways but three. These three are the use of the organ, a mixed choir, and mixed pews.' There is of course nothing wrong or exceptional in any one of these three properties of a service, but what is to be said of a religion which can be characterized in these terms! This state of affairs will probably prevail until Conservatism makes for itself a philosophy, and it is not likely to do so until it finds for itself a new and less paralyzing name.⁴⁶

To balance this critical picture of Conservative Judaism, the SAJ Review often published articles and editorials critical of Reform or Liberal Judaism. It was, of course, more interested in Conservatism because this was the movement from which the SAJ drew most of its strength.

The Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism held recently in Berlin, managed to show that Reform Judaism is pretty much at sea -- wherein, probably, it does not much differ from other groups in Judaism. Yet one is more inclined to be critical of the shortcomings of an international Reform conference than of any other because Reform Judaism originated the only consistently and deliberate effort to adjust Judaism to modern life, and one feels that now, a century after its inception, it should have forgotten something and have learned

something.

Reform Judaism should by now have forgotten the meaning it once attached to the word 'Liberal,' that is, hard and fast allegiance to a theology newer and vaguer than the old one. This new kind of Liberalism made of Reform the exactparallel of Orthodoxy -- it did not matter that the parallels were far apart. And Reform Judaism should by now have learned to make use of the real opportunity that the word 'Liberal' gave to it. Why should not this Conference have so formulated its aims as to make it clear that Liberal Judaism means the recognition of Judaism as a broad and inclusive civilization in which all honest and worthy expressions of the Jewish spirit are equally authoritative, equally Jewish?⁴⁷

The greatest success of this period for the SAJ movement came in October, 1928 when a Conservative congregation (Beth El) in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn adopted the SAJ Platform. Kaplan began to feel more and more assured that even though his own group was making scant progress, the overall momentum in American Judaism was in his direction.

However little progress I may be making with the SAJ group on 86th Street, there is promise of the SAJ program winning adherents in other quarters. About two weeks ago I received a letter from Dr. Winckler of Los Angeles that he was about to form an SAJ Chapter in his congregation. The other day I received an inquiry from a man in Detroit by the name of Ehrlich about our work. Tonight Rabbi Signer of Manhattan Beach, whom I have been helping with sermons for the last year or so, has interested some of his trustees in the plan of having his congregation accept the SAJ program and reorganize its services in accord with that spirit. He brought with him tonight to my house Messrs. Zola, L.Marder and Aronson. They were impressed when I pointed out to them that the SAJ was furnishing the Conservative movement in Judaism with a definite program. It looks as though the Manhattan Beach congregation will be the first congregation outside the original one that will have formally adopted the SAJ Platform. If that will prove to be the case then my efforts have surely not been in vain.⁴⁸

As the 1920's drew to a close the SAJ was able to report a membership of 296 individuals who belonged to the Congregation and the Chapter, seven members who belonged to the Congregation only and eighteen members who belonged to the SAJ Chapter only. Despite the fact that in an editorial in the Review Kaplan warned against "The Rabbi as Cult," he was increasingly functioning in this manner in relation to the members of the Society. There can be little doubt that had Kaplan left the SAJ on 86th Street during the twenties it would have ceased functioning almost immediately. It was his charisma which held it together through these years but which also kept its members from operating independently of him.

Even this charisma, however, could not attract the membership into taking a more active part in their Society. In February, 1929, Kaplan announced that he would discontinue preaching until such time as the members would indicate a positive interest in the religious services. Several steps were immediately taken to improve attendance at the services including letters to all members and an attempt to vary the prayers and a greater use of English prayers on the Sabbath.

At the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Society on May 26, 1929, Kaplan indicated that the SAJ must begin a new lease on life. He pointed out that the Society should not set itself up as a model congregation for others to emulate.

"Its aim should be to supply the platform and program of work for Conservative Judaism in America. The platform and program of work implies two essentials: (1) Judaism as a civilization; and (2) a maximum of Jewishness in all phases of Jewish life."⁴⁹

Yet no matter how difficult the 1920's were for the newborn SAJ, the 1930's were to offer far more difficult problems and greater challenges that the Society had ever anticipated. The new Chairman of the Society, Jacob Klein, would spend most of his term in office trying desperately to keep the SAJ from having to close its doors. Most of Kaplan's dreams for the Society, both as a local and a national movement, were shattered, temporarily at least, by the Great Depression which hit the United States in the fall of 1929.

Chapter VI

The effects of the depression on the Society for the Advancement of Judaism were immediate and staggering. Kaplan's hopes for the spread of the SAJ movement suffered a severe setback when the SAJ Review, its principal organ of propaganda, was forced to cease publication in the fall of 1929. Furthermore, the chief economic contributors to the movement were members of the SAJ congregation in New York. Many of them were wiped out by the Stock Market Crash and the business and bank failures which followed it. The Society had all it could handle in keeping the congregation running. All pretense of separation of congregation and chapter was dropped and all efforts were spent on surviving the period.

The thirties began with a Dinner-Dance tendered by the SAJ on the occasion of Kaplan's silver jubilee in the rabbinate. The Society, at that time, reported three hundred forty-two members. Yet by the spring of that year (1930) Kaplan was ready to liquidate the organization. Its members' failure to grasp his philosophy of Judaism and its inability to function as more than a congregation made Kaplan believe that his work in keeping it going was quite futile.

Before he would do this, however, he decided that he would try to find someone who would take over his respon-

sibilities at the Society. He first asked Milton Steinberg and then Max Kadushin to serve as his assistant but they both refused.¹ Next he approached Ira Eisenstein, a senior at the Jewish Theological Seminary, to fill the position of Executive Director of the SAJ. Eisenstein, who later married Kaplan's eldest daughter Judith, had been working for the Society as youth director since 1928. He had also written several book review for the SAJ Review during its last year of publication. Eisenstein accepted the post of Executive Director for a one year trial period.

During that year, Kaplan once again approached Eisenstein with a proposition. Kaplan offered him the position of Assistant Leader for a two year period. After that he would be elected Associate Leader and would eventually become the Leader of the SAJ. Kaplan told his younger colleague that if he turned down the position he would liquidate the Society. Eisenstein recalls that this was a particularly difficult choice to make since he had just been offered the pulpit of the prestigious Congregation Mishkan Israel in Roxbury, Massachusetts. As a disciple of Kaplan, Eisenstein felt that he had no choice but to accept the position of Assistant Leader which he assumed in the fall of 1931.

Although, as we have seen, Kaplan had vehemently attacked the Reform practice of Confirmation, the SAJ introduced a Confirmation program in 1930. He pointed

out that he was reluctant to introduce this ceremony because it was not originally in accord with Jewish tradition. Due to the necessity, however, of having a hold on the young people so that they continue their Jewish education, a Confirmation group would be organized.

The economic effects of the depression were evident throughout the thirties. For example, in the spring of 1930 Cantor Nathanson was denied an increase in salary and the Board voted not to increase its contribution to the United Synagogue. For a period of several years, it dropped these contributions altogether. Furthermore, the Board voted not to issue seats for the High Holidays for members in arrears and to sell no seats to non-members unless paid for in advance. As the depression wore on, conditions as the Society grew worse and worse. At one time, the Society itself was six months behind in paying its own employees. They eventually had to accept three months payment since the Society couldn't come up with enough cash to pay the full amounts.

At the Annual Meeting of May, 1930, Kaplan was still attempting to explain to the members of the Society its twofold purpose.

The Society represents a larger vision which aims to inculcate a new viewpoint in Jewish life. The congregation can be viewed as the first organization which embodies the SAJ Program. I am convinced that the Society's program would be the type of Judaism which will flourish in America fifty years hence. The SAJ aims that all its activities -- be they pulpit,

school or adult education -- shall be guided by an educational philosophy. The services of the congregation are to be viewed as a means of spiritual and mental growth. The pulpit, in contradistinction to a free pulpit, endeavors to approach all problems arising at present from the point of view of the Jew.²

In order to carry out this program, Kaplan stressed that two definite and immediate steps be taken. The first would be the resumption of the SAJ's periodical in order to disseminate its philosophy. Secondly, a field worker should be engaged in order to enlist the cooperation of other congregations who are ready to accept the SAJ Program. "Funds must be provided for Judaizing Jews if we are to count as a factor in the upbuilding of American Israel."³ Funds, however, were in too short supply to be used for what many members considered to be frills.

The Board reacted swiftly to the news that the British government was about to enact restrictions against Jewish immigration into Palestine. A resolution against this act was passed and sent to Washington and London. In addition to this, the Society joined with the Zionist Organization of America in sponsoring a protest rally which was arranged by the ZOA and held at Madison Square Park.

With the election of Eisenstein as Assistant Leader in 1931, Kaplan began to take a less active role in the daily workings of the Society. After the High Holidays that year, Kaplan asked for a one year leave of absence as Leader of the Society in order to allow himself to devote

more time to his work at the Seminary and on his book which was nearing completion. Eisenstein, a devoted follower of his teacher, could be counted on to continue the direction and work of the Society.

By 1932, many of the members of the Society were in debt to the organization for back dues, High Holiday seats and/or Hebrew School tuition. Eisenstein was given the power by the Board to settle each member's account individually and privately so that these members would not have to give up their association with the SAJ. When it was reported to the Board that, as we have seen, the SAJ was six months in arrears in paying its staff, four thousand dollars was collected at one meeting from five Board members to allow the organization to keep functioning. Three thousand dollars of that money came as a loan from Abraham Liebovitz. The Board reluctantly accepted a check from the Women's Division to pay the bill for coal which was outstanding for several months.

Although the SAJ itself was forced to drastically curtail its activities, the SAJ building was kept busy by the many outside organizations which used it for their meetings. This was in keeping with the philosophy of the Society of making itself the center of all Jewish communal affairs. Such organizations as Hadassah, Avukah, ZOA, Young Judea, Friends of Zion, Histadruth, Menorah Society,

Pro-Falasha Committee, Kvutseh and the League of Jewish Youth met there regularly.

The depression made strange bed-fellows. The serious discussion which took place between members of the Jewish Center and the SAJ on the subject of a possible merger between the two is an excellent example of this fact. Both groups appointed unofficial committees which met during May, 1932. The first question which was raised at these meetings was, of course, the financial one. It was learned that the Center owed \$60,000. more than the SAJ. The members of the committee felt that the combined institution would be able to function on a far lower budget than the combined budgets of the two independent organizations.

The SAJ committee pointed out that they did not want to force Dr. Jung out of his pulpit although he was a bitter enemy of Kaplan. The Center committee replied that Jung was interested in going abroad anyway and they would accept Kaplan as leader. (Rabbi Jung is still at the Jewish Center.) The Center, however, insisted that men and women be seated separately at services and Kaplan did not object to this suggestion. He did insist that if the merger did go through, the Center's constitution would have to be rewritten since, as it then stood, it still committed the institution to the Shulhan Arukh. Kaplan, however, never actively participated in the negotiations. The SAJ committee

was in constant touch with their Leader since the Board had decided that there could be no merger without Kaplan's approval.

The merger talks, however, broke-up after the second meeting of the committees. The SAJ had made its committee an official representative of the Board but the Center refused to take this step. Arthur Lamport of the Center instead suggested that since a complete merger would be difficult for legal and technical reasons, the SAJ should take over the Center's building and that as many of the Center's people as would desire to join the SAJ in their new quarters might do so.

The Chairman of the Society, Jacob Klein, pointed out that this was a far different and far less attractive proposition than the original one because it deviated from the original purpose of the proposal.

We were interested in the invitation extended to us by the Center to negotiate because we felt that for the sake of unity in our neighborhood, every effort should be made, but here apparently the proposal is to take over the institution. If, as is very likely, a large number of the Center members will not be eager to join the SAJ, they would perhaps like to rent the SAJ building and continue their activities. Thus we would be confronted again with the situation of two synagogues on the same street.⁴

Although some Board members disagreed with Klein, the majority favored continuing the talks. Kaplan explained that when he was originally approached with the proposal made by the Center people, he was heartily in favor of it

for the sake of unity and cooperation. He was even willing to yield on such matters as the name of the institution and separation of the sexes at services but that was always on the assumption that the Society would be doubling its strength in membership and support. He then warned the meeting:

If, however, it (the merger) means merely that we are to take over the responsibilities of a larger building, we must be very careful because the building is not an end in itself. We do not want the Center building without the Center people in it. If, however, a merger can be made whereby the Center members will remain, immediately pressing debts can be paid, and a satisfactory budget be established, something can be achieved in this direction.⁵

The Board agreed to follow Kaplan's suggestion and continue the talks on these terms only.

The talks between the SAJ and the Jewish Center were discontinued, however, because the Center was awarded a five year extension of its mortgage and could continue operating. Furthermore, it seemed clear that Jung was not about to leave the Center. The matter, therefore, was dropped and never raised again.

By the middle of 1932, the SAJ was losing many members who were forced to resign because of economic difficulties. The Board, therefore, voted that such members be retained at a fee left to the discretion of a committee established for this purpose. In order to keep students in the Hebrew School, moreover, tuition fees had to be drastically re-

duced. Despite the economic condition of the institution, the SAJ voted to donate $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the amount collected at the Kol Nidre appeal to the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of which Kaplan was Dean. This practice was continued for many years.

In October, 1932, Jacob Klein resigned as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Since no replacement could be found who would accept the post, Dr. Ira I. Kaplan accepted the temporary chairmanship until a permanent one could be found. Five months later, Bernard Bernstein consented to accept this position and became the fourth Chairman of the Society.

During this period, the Society was saved from bankruptcy by Harry and Abraham Liebovitz. The two brothers loaned the Society twenty five thousand dollars in order to purchase land in a cemetery. The Society was then able to sell cemetery plots to its members and the income derived from this source saved the institution from being taken over by its creditors.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated in March, 1933, the Board sent a letter to the new President pledging the moral support of the Society to him in those critical days. Kaplan consented to draft the letter on the condition that it would be regarded as the first of a group to be forwarded expressing opinions and making suggestions on important issues. The first letter was given

to Senator Robert F. Wagner, Senior who presented it to President Roosevelt.

In April, 1933, Eisenstein was promoted from the position of Assistant to Associate Leader of the SAJ. The following September, Kaplan was granted another leave of absence in order to work on his book Judaism as a Civilization which was nearing completion. Kaplan would need time to find a publisher for his work.

Locating a publisher for a Jewish book, however, was not an easy task during the depression. Publishers were unwilling to sink a large amount of money into a proposition which would almost certainly not earn a profit. In order to obtain some money to back his book, Kaplan submitted Judaism as a Civilization in manuscript form to a contest sponsored by Julius Rosenwald, the ex-president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Rosenwald offered ten thousand dollars for the best book on the future of Judaism entered in the contest. The judges agreed that Kaplan's was the best book but because of its pro-Zionist stance they were reluctant to award it first prize. They accordingly divided the prize among the first three winners-- Kaplan, Eugene Kohn and Lee Levinger. A third of the prize money was enough, however, to get the book published and Kaplan handed the money over to Macmillan Company. Judaism as a Civilization appeared in May of 1934 with the SAJ acting as its main distributor.

The publication of Judaism as a Civilization revived

the idea of a broader program for the SAJ. The following fall the question of resurrecting the old SAJ Review was raised before the Board. The members of the Board were reluctant to commit themselves to the nine hundred dollars they were told would be necessary to publish the magazine for a one year period. The Board, however, gave a green light to the project when the Women's Division promised to subsidize the publication to the extent of five hundred dollars and when Eisenstein told them that the rest of the money would be raised privately and through subscriptions. The Board, therefore, sanctioned publication on the understanding that the publication would never be an obligation to the SAJ as such or any charge against its budget.

The first issue of the new magazine, which was called The Reconstructionist rather than the SAJ Review, appeared on January 11, 1935. Kaplan was the chairman of its Editorial Board which consisted of Ben Zion Bokser, instructor at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in New York, Eisenstein, Israel Goldstein, rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun and chairman of the Jewish National Fund, Eugene Kohn, vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly of America (Conservative), Leon S. Lang, rabbi of Congregation Cheb Shalom in Newark, New Jersey, and Milton Steinberg, rabbi of the Park Avenue Synagogue. Israel Chipkin, Educational Director of the Jewish Education Association of New York, joined the group two weeks later.

In the first issue of The Reconstructionist an editorial appeared which was reprinted from the January 20, 1928 issue of the SAJ Review. It became the basis for the Reconstructionist Position.

We approach our task from the point of view of Judaism as a religious civilization. We envisage Judaism as the proper concern of all Jews, religious and unreligious, Conservative and Radical....In affirming that Judaism is a civilization we give emphasis to the fact that it includes...communal organization, language, art, mores, customs, as well as religion. Moreover, all of these elements are organically related to each other; to omit any one of them is to distort Judaism. All of them are functions of the group life of Israel and cannot be maintained unless we maintain the unity and integrity of the Jewish people and the continuity of its spiritual efforts. We believe that the material and spiritual welfare of the Jews can be achieved only through Jewish communal organization....We favor the establishment of Jewish communal life in America, democratically administered and organized in such a manner as to include all Jews who wish to identify themselves with the Jewish people, regardless of what their personal philosophy may be.

In affirming that Judaism is a religious (sic) civilization, we recognize first, the historical fact that the God idea has dominated the entire pattern of Jewish life in the past, and that continuity with our past is impossible without giving to religion a position, if not of primacy, at least of primus inter pares; and secondly, the social fact that a mature and complete civilization is bound to find expression in the God idea and in the forms of religious worship in which the hopes and ideals of human life are rendered articulate. It is that very sense of need for religion that impels us to reinterpret the traditional beliefs in keeping with what for us must be a tenable world outlook, and to revise and develop the traditional beliefs in keeping with spiritual needs which we can genuinely experience. We consider the establishment of Palestine indispensable to the life of Judaism in the Diaspora. We seek to enable Jewish civilization so to root itself in the soil of Palestine as to make of the land the cultural center for Israel's intellectual and spiritual rebirth. We oppose any attempt to render Palestine the object of imperialistic aims or the victim of private profit-seeking. We endorse every effort toward the establishment of a

cooperative commonwealth in Palestine based upon social justice and social cooperation.... We are opposed to fascism in every form. We object to any philosophy of government which seeks to curtail the rights of individuals to the free pursuit of personal salvation through participation in any religious or cultural activity, or through affiliation with any national or ethnic group.... Recognizing the horror and irrationality of war as a means of adjusting conflicting interests, we shall support every effort looking to the perfection of machinery for the peaceful adjudication of such conflicts and to the utilization of such machinery as exists, wherever possible. Under no circumstance shall we give countenance or support to an imperialistic war that is designed to advance the interests of exploiting and oppressing classes.... Social righteousness is possible only upon the establishment of a cooperative society, the elimination of the profit system, and the public ownership of natural resources and basic industries. Until these objectives are achieved, our sympathies and our support go to labor in its struggle with its employers for a more equitable distribution of the income of industry, and in the assertion of its right to organize for the protection of its interests without interference from its employers.⁶

This platform, because of its strong socialist and Zionist planks, was amended by the addition of the following paragraph as a result of pressure from some of the members of the Board of the SAJ:

As American Jews we give first place in our lives to the American civilization which we share in common with the Americans of other civilizations, and we seek to develop our Jewish heritage to the maximum degree consonant with the best in American life. Deprecating all forms of social segregation as detrimental to human welfare, we want so to enrich the Jewish individuality as to enable it to preserve itself without recourse to artificial barriers to social and cultural interaction. In living Judaism as a civilization we expect our Americanism and American life generally to be enhanced through the reenforcement of the noble strivings which have gone into the making of the American civilization. We deem it entirely compatible with the organic law of our country and with its highest ideals so to foster

our Jewish tradition that it may maintain its vitality, and contribute to the enrichment of our personalities.⁷

Despite the fact that the name of the Society continued to be placed on the first page on the magazine as publisher until 1940, it was actually completely independent of the SAJ.

By the time the Bar Mitzvah (thirteen) year of the Society was marked, in 1935, the SAJ was beginning to emerge from the depression. For example, its membership had begun to grow once again because of a special young-married-membership rate which was instituted a year earlier. Under this plan a couple could join the SAJ for only twenty-five dollars a year for the first five years of their marriage. Furthermore, the registration of the SAJ's Hebrew School had risen once again to a total of fifty-five students. The classes met three days a week and the curriculum included Hebrew, spoken Hebrew, history, Jewish folkways, current events, arts and crafts and dramatics and singing classes.

The Board became particularly upset with the new Reconstructionist when it printed an editorial entitled "Is God a Capitalist?" in April, 1935. They requested that the Editorial Board of the magazine publish a statement indicating that the editorial opinions expressed are the opinions of the editors and do not necessarily reflect the official attitude of the Society. The Editorial Board

immediately complied with the wishes of the SAJ's Board.

An attempt was made in 1935 to form a Men's Club of the SAJ. Its first meeting was held in February, 1936 with the Anglo-Jewish historian Cecil Roth as guest-speaker. Two months later, however, the Men's Club suspended its activities due to lack of interest and participation on the part of the men of the Society.

Remaining true to its steadfast support of Palestine, the SAJ collected over seventeen thousand dollars for the United Palestine Appeal in the spring of 1936. That June, A.T. Thomson was elected as the fifth Chairman of the SAJ replacing Bernard Bernstein. One of the first acts taken by the Board under his leadership was the reinstatement of Friday evening services which had been experimented with during the 1920's.

The Fifteenth Anniversary celebration was held at the Biltmore Hotel on March 21, 1936. The dinner was tendered in honor of the surviving founders of the Society. Kaplan addressed the gathering and paid tribute to the founders and the goal for which they strove.

Among the forces that have gone into the shaping of American Jewish life during the last fifteen years, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism will undoubtedly occupy a place of importance altogether beyond what the limited number of men and women associated with it would lead one to expect. This is because our Society represents the first attempt of a lay group in American Jewry to dedicate itself to the purpose of furthering a philosophy of Jewish life which takes into account tradition, environment, and

the growing needs of the human spirit. In the world at large, these years have been years of reconstruction, both in thought and in social institutions, on a scale unprecedented. Jewry distracted by the spread of violence of anti-Semitism, has unfortunately lagged behind in the development of its cultural and social life. But, if there is still ground for hope that Jewry will catch up and ultimately take its place in the vanguard of progressive mankind, our Society has exerted a decided influence in keeping that hope alive.

The initial enthushaism of the Founders and the vigor of their pioneer spirit have made its possible for our Society to carry on throughout the trying years of the depression, in the face of tremendous odds. The ideas and ideals which originally united us, and which as oral teachings were confined to our immediate circle, have by this time taken on the permanent form of the written word, which is reaching out to all parts of American and world Jewry.

Our only regret is that death has taken its toll of many of our devoted and faithful collaborators, and that they are not with us to share our joy in this fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the Society. May our resolve to rededicate ourselves to the sacred purpose which they cherished help to maintain their souls in the bond of the living, and find fulfillment in a more active and creative Jewish life on our own part.⁸

In keeping with its support of the Zionist movement in the United States, the SAJ took an important step in tying their organization to the Zionist Organization of America. The Board voted in April, 1937 to include membership in the ZOA in its own membership fee. With this move, the Society itself became a chapter of the Zionist organization. Although a few members objected to this procedure and were permitted to request non-membership in the ZOA, most members enthusiastically endorsed the new program.

The following month, Kaplan asked for and received still another leave of absence from the Board. This leave of two years was granted in order to allow him to accept an appointment to a professorship at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in the Philosophy of Education. The Board passed the following resolution:

For fifteen years, Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan has been the Leader and the prime inspiration of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. During these years he has preached a beautiful and creative conception of Judaism. He has served the Society and the American Jewish community selflessly and fearlessly. He has now been called to occupy a high academic position at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, for a period of two years. Be it resolved, therefore, that on the occasion of his departure for Erez Yisrael, the Trustees and members express their deep love and admiration for him, their joy for his having achieved the brilliant recognition due him, their sense of deprivation at his leaving, and their profound prayer that he may return in good health once more to assume his leadership among them.⁹

In addition, the Board collected over two thousand dollars for Kaplan to use as he desired in order to accomplish the most effective work at the University. Eisenstein, the Associate Leader, was elevated to the post of Acting Leader, a position which he had held de facto for several years.

In June, 1937, the Chairman presented a plan to the Board for the renovation of the SAJ's building. The Society's quarters had been in need of repair for many years but because of the depression no work could be done. Now the Board felt that it could go ahead with the plans for repair and expansion of the facilities of the building. The fund-raising and the work itself went on for nearly

eighteen months. The effects of the depression upon the SAJ, as upon the nation as a whole, however, still lingered as this 1938 letter from the Board testifies:

We are outlining to you a very frank situation. Our bank balance at the moment is almost nil. Salaries will definitely stop immediately unless the obligations of a few past due members are paid immediately. If this situation occurs, the non-payment of salaries will be on the conscience of those members who are not up to the minute in the payment of their dues. Surely, we would not like to work without the expectation of being paid. It is unfair of us to expect our staff to do likewise. The situation can only be corrected by the prompt cooperation of yourself and a few others. This is a frank appeal, with cold facts. The importance of hearing from you is imperative.¹⁰

Because of the Arab rioting in Palestine reported in American newspapers, the Board became concerned about the safety of Kaplan and his wife in Jerusalem. They therefore sent a cablegram urging him to return to the United States at once. At the same meeting, the Board also sent a telegram to President Roosevelt urging him to exert his influence toward getting Great Britain to make no changes in the status of Palestine and thereby freeze out more Jews. Kaplan replied to his cablegram immediately.

On behalf of Mrs. Kaplan and myself I wish to express to you and the members of the SAJ Board of Trustees our heartfelt appreciation of the solicitude you all manifested in discussing the advisability of our continuing our stay in Jerusalem under present circumstances, and of the telegram you sent us urging our immediate return. We could not imagine what could have led you to believe that conditions grew so much worse as to warrant our return at this time. Perhaps there was some report about the Arabs getting out of hand that we did not know about. That is possible, since the news here is pretty strictly censored. This is why we replied: 'Why alarmed now?' Since we received no

answer, we concluded that it must have been the alarming news about England's possible repudiation of the Balfour Declaration that decided you to send the cable to us.

I must admit that staying here these days is far from pleasant. Just now about 600 Arab Brigands are said to be in possession of the Old City of Jerusalem and defying the government forces who seem to be unable to dislodge them. For the last three days and nights the shooting and rat-a-tat of Lewis guns have been going on incessantly, and are not entirely conducive to the formulation of ideas on the philosophy of education. But so long as we can manage to endure the strain, we feel that we ought to stand by. Only great world powers can afford to break solemn pledged and treaties. But a humble individual like myself must try to live up to what he promises.¹¹

During the weekend of March 25, 1939, the dedication of the newly renovated SAJ building was observed. A special Hanukat-Habayit (Dedication Service) Service was held on Saturday morning. The main speaker at the service was Louis Finkelstein, Provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Rabbis Israel Goldstein of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Louis I. Newman of Temple Rodeph Sholom, William Rosenblum of Temple Israel, Elias Solomon of Congregation Shaare Zedek, Nathan Stern of the West End Synagogue, and Joseph Zeitlin of Temple Ansche Chesed represented their synagogues and addressed the gathering. The following evening a dinner was held at the Society marking the event and the following message was read from Kaplan who was still in Jerusalem:

Jews must do all in their power to render Jewish life interesting, worthy and beautiful to themselves and to their families. Jewish life can be made interesting only by an ever increasing knowledge of its history

and its strivings. It can be made worthy only through continued efforts to translate its teachings into deeds of righteousness and kindness. It can be made beautiful only by encouraging every form of Jewish creativity. Nowadays, when there is so much hypocrisy and covenant-breaking in high-places, let truth and fidelity find shelter at least among us humble people, so that we and our children may find human life worth living. In these evil days, let us draw comfort from the thought that Jewish destiny has become vitally identified with the destiny of human decency and freedom. If these will survive, Israel will survive. And if there is a God, they must survive.¹²

The Society, at this time, was able to report a membership of one hundred seventy-five families.

The crisis for European Jewry, however, was deepening. The SAJ, like many synagogues in the United States, seemed quite removed from these events. Perhaps the difficulty of pulling itself out of the depression left it, and the other synagogues, with little energy to spare. Nevertheless, the Society remained a large contributor to Zionist and world Jewish causes. In 1939, the SAJ raised nearly seventy thousand dollars for the combined campaign of the United Palestine Appeal and the Joint Distribution Committee. The campaign was aided by Stephen Wise who addressed the SAJ membership from its pulpit on the final day of Passover on behalf of the UPA-JDC.

In addition to this, the Society undertook to sponsor a committee to aid refugees from Germany now living in New York City. This committee was designed to help these refugees adjust themselves to their new environment and give

them once again a feeling of security. Furthermore, the Board gave the use of the SAJ synagogue to a congregation of German-Jewish refugees in order to hold late Friday evening services. This group was headed by Rabbi Joachim Prinz who had recently arrived from Germany.

In reaction to the British White Paper of 1939 which threatened to cut Jewish immigration into Palestine to a trickle, the Board organized a protest service at the SAJ. Other congregations were invited and letters were sent to government officials. Newspaper and radio stations were asked to cover this event.

Nevertheless, Eisenstein continued to urge the United States government not to get involved in the European events. His isolationist stand only changed immediately prior to the United States' entry into World War II. In September of 1939, two weeks before the invasion of Poland, Eisenstein spoke out against possible American involvement in European affairs from the pulpit of the SAJ.

The time has come for those who seek peace and pursue it to proclaim courageously that our beloved United States must keep ourselves clear of the intrigues, perfidies, ambitions and plots of the European nations. The Jewish prophets of old somehow sensed that a nation which seeks to work out a fresh and different destiny, one which dreams dreams of human salvation and not dreams of power, a nation which hopes to evolve an ethical civilization must do so by not entangling its purposes with the purposes of other nations. That is why Isaiah and Jeremiah were 'isolationists.'

Of course, circumstances and conditions are very different from what they were in ancient days in

Judea. But the essential truth remains. Why should we involve ourselves in the mess of a continent in which Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia have been betrayed; in which violently anti-Fascist Russia embraces violently anti-Communist Germany; in which ancient wrongs and established feuds are sugar-coated by lofty ideals of freedom and democracy?¹³

Since the founding of the SAJ, one of Kaplan's chief aims had been the creation of an experimental liturgy in order to make the service responsive to both the tradition and the needs of the times. A step in this direction was taken with the publication of the volume Shir Hadash: New Prayers and Meditations for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in 1939. This collection of prayers, edited by Kaplan's student Eugene Kohn, although not strictly a publication of the SAJ, clearly reflects its philosophy and the experimentation carried out there throughout the twenties and thirties. The introduction to the volume attempted to explain its purpose.

In endeavoring to supplement the traditional liturgies with prayers written in our day, we are doing what the Medieval Hebrew poets did when they inserted piyutim (liturgical poems) into the prescribed texts that had come down to them from the past.... The language of these proposed additions to our ritual is English. We recognize the importance of maintaining Hebrew as the main language of Jewish worship, in the interest of the cultural unity of Israel and continuity with its past, but we nevertheless feel the need of praying in the language of our daily speech, since so many of the congregation have little understanding of Hebrew. We hope, however, that, in time, some of these prayers may be translated into Hebrew or, better still, may stimulate the writing of original Hebrew prayers worthy of finding a place in a traditional prayer book.... A significant feature of this book is that it can be used in connection with any Holy Day prayer book used by Jewish congregations, whether Orthodox, Conservative

or Reform, and that the congregations may select for its own services as many of the prayers as it finds adapted to its needs. Under present conditions of Jewish life, it is impossible for all Jews to be satisfied with one and the same form of worship. We believe, however, that congregations of very diverse types could still find in these pages prayers that they would wish to include in their ritual.¹⁴

Most of the prayers contained in Shir Hadash were written by Kohn, Eisenstein and Milton Steinberg, Kaplan's three best-known disciples.

In December, 1939, Samuel Poses was elected sixth Chairman of the SAJ succeeding A.T. Thomson. The Society as it left the 1930's was vastly stronger and more viable than it was ten years earlier. Its membership was once again growing and its influence was beginning to be felt outside of its newly renovated building. The fact that the SAJ was able survive the economic storms of the depression at all must be attributed to just a handful of its trustees. These men, far from learned in Jewish matters, somehow sensed the importance of their organization and almost singlehandedly saved it from bankruptcy. The 1940's would mark a new period of creativity for the Society.

Chapter VII

If the 1930's can be characterized as a period of revitalization for the broader program of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, the 1940's can be regarded as the period in which much of this broader program was removed from the hands of the SAJ itself and placed under the auspices of a larger group. As this transition occurred, the Society became more and more "another" West Side congregation, albeit a very good one. This, of course, is just what Kaplan had feared would happen to his experiment two decades earlier.

During the 1930's, the Friends of Reconstructionism was formed by wealthy members of the SAJ and the Park Avenue Synagogue in order to cover the expenses of publishing the Reconstructionist magazine. This group was disbanded in 1940 and the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation was formed in its place.¹ This new organization, which was to be completely autonomous of the SAJ, took over responsibility for the publication of the Reconstructionist and made plans as well to publish books and pamphlets pertaining to its philosophy of Judaism. The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation moved into the Society's building and used its office space and staff for some time. (It is still located there although its staff is now completely independent of the synagogue's employees.)

In the last issue of the Reconstructionist which was published under the auspices of the SAJ, the editors attempted to explain the reason for the change in publishers and the creation of the Foundation.

Our readers will be pleased to learn that the projected Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation has come into being. ...The creation of this instrument for the advancement of Reconstructionism marks a milestone in the history of the movement which was initiated by the publication of Judaism as a Civilization, by Dr. Kaplan in 1934. By the beginning of 1935, the present editors of the Reconstructionist rallied around the author of Judaism as a Civilization, and offered their editorial services in the publication of a periodical which would expound the fundamental principles of Reconstructionism and apply them to the events of the contemporary scene. The organization best adapted to assume responsibility for the publication of this magazine was, of course, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, with which Dr. Kaplan has been so closely identified. With their unfailing cooperation, the Reconstructionist was able to carry on for five years. During this period, the members of the Society, its Women's Division, and a smattering of friends bore the burden alone. They deserve the thanks and gratitude of all who wish to see the growth of the Reconstructionist movement.

As the years went by, however, both the editors and the SAJ realized that Reconstructionism was being mistakenly regarded as the exclusive concern of the SAJ and the Reconstructionist was the organ merely of that local institution. In addition, the need was felt for an expansion of activities; the editors believed that in addition to the publication of a magazine, the movement required the creation of other works which would help American Jews to carry out the purposes of the movement. To effect a larger scope program, it would be necessary to establish a broader base of support, and a greater popular understanding of Reconstructionism. Thus arose the demand for a new entity which would include other elements of Jewry outside the SAJ and which would undertake projects in addition to the publication of the magazine.

The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation is the answer to that demand. As it makes its appearance upon the Jewish scene, we wish it Godspeed. As Dr. Kaplan points out..., Reconstructionism does not seek to create a new party, or to enter a new organization into the competition for

the attention of American Jewry. It seeks to enlist members who will undertake to influence the course of Jewish life through the existing institutions by imbuing those institutions with the knowledge and the spirit of Reconstructionism. There need be no conflict of loyalties -- on the contrary, the members of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation who will serve best will be those who have affiliations in organizations and institutions already existing.

The small number who have undertaken the work of this movement have the abiding faith that, as the years go by, American Jewry will produce an American Judaism to which all American Jews will be able to subscribe, one which has its roots deeply planted in the traditions of our people, and in the contemporaneous civilization of Palestine, and which at the same time will bear fruit indigenous to the intellectual climate of America. With that faith, they enter upon the second stage in the history of Reconstructionism.²

The SAJ formed a Reconstructionist Group the following month. This group met every other week for a course of study which included various aspects of the program of Reconstructionism. In this second phase of history, the Society was definitely not center-stage.

One of the most important innovations at the SAJ in 1940 was the addition of a public Seder held on the second night of Passover. For many years, the custom of holding the second Seder publicly had been growing in the United States although Kaplan had severely criticized this practice in the old SAJ Review. The SAJ's public Seder was necessary, he felt, in order to try out for the first time a new text of the Haggadah upon which the Reconstructionist's editors had been working for several years. Even in the early days of the SAJ, Kaplan felt the need for some supplementary

material which would take the place of certain passages in the traditional Haggadah. As a result, a supplementary Haggadah was published in the 1920's and proved useful. This was not completely satisfying because of the fact that using two different books made it rather awkward to handle and the material did not go far enough toward revising the structure of the service. "Internal revision was necessary," Kaplan wrote, "and not merely the grafting on of outside readings."³

The success of the mimeographed version of the Haggadah at the SAJ's first public Seder led to the publication in 1941 of The New Haggadah. This volume was the first book sponsored by the newly formed Reconstructionist Foundation. Because of the publication of the Haggadah, Kaplan was denounced in a letter sent from the faculty of the Seminary. The letter was clearly written at the instigation of Kaplan's old adversaries Louis Ginzberg and Alexander Marx.⁴ This incident, however, was merely a mild foretaste of the reaction that would accompany the publication of a new Reconstructionist prayerbook.

Anticipating such criticism, the editors of The New Haggadah, Kaplan, Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn, wrote a foreword to it which attempted to explain why a new Haggadah was necessary.

The age-old struggle between those who cherish freedom and those who would deny it to their fellow-men has become more embittered than ever. In that struggle the Jews are deeply involved. They have a great stake in

the ultimate victory of the cause of freedom. In all previous generations Jews derived their faith in that ultimate victory from their tradition and their religious heritage, and particularly from the epic of the Exodus. For centuries, it was to the Pesah (Pass-over) Haggadah that Jews turned whenever they suffered oppression and injustice. The Exodus of the Israelites from ancient Egypt was a constant assurance that they too would be delivered from tyranny. They believed that just as God had liberated Israel from Pharaoh, by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, so would He redeem Israel from the tragedy of the Galut (Exile). Times have changed. We live in a new world; we are confronted with new conditions, but the problem is still the same. The problem is: how, in the face of setbacks and despite the demagogic appeals of false prophets, to keep alive in men the love of freedom and their faith in it.

That is why the Pesah Haggadah has assumed once again a major role in the lives of Jews. It has a message that is fraught with power and beauty. It needs only to be transposed into a new key -- into the key of modern thought, modern experiences, and modern idiom. The language and the concepts of the ancient rite need to be revised so that they go straight to the minds and hearts of the men and women of today.⁵

The Board of the SAJ established in 1940 a Committee on Jewish Law and Custom. It was always Kaplan's idea that these questions be settled by the community rather than by individual rabbis since they were communal rather than personal problems. If the Committee felt the question brought before it was of interest to the entire membership, it was empowered to consult with the entire Society.

As the Nazi menace spread over Europe, American Jewry began to react more forcefully to the emergency. In 1940, the SAJ raised over fifty thousand dollars for the United Jewish Appeal. In addition, it granted the use of its facilities to another group of German refugees from Cologne

for the purpose of conducting late Friday evening services. The Board sent a telegram urging Rabbi David de Sola Pool, the President of the Synagogue Council of America, to have his organization collaborate with non-Jewish religious forces to defend democracy, religious freedom and civilization throughout the world.

That year, several innovative programs were added at the SAJ. For example, a Sunday afternoon "At Home" program was introduced in which Kaplan, Eisenstein and their wives could meet socially with the membership and in which the members had an opportunity to participate in discussions concerning the ideas preached and written about at the SAJ. The first joint Thanksgiving service was conducted by the Society and the Park Avenue Synagogue. Eisenstein and Milton Steinberg wrote a special service for the occasion. Finally, a Bikkurim (First Fruit) Festival was added on the first day of the festival of Shavuot. About fifty children represented the pilgrims coming to bring their first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem. The service, written in part by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, was also intended to enhance the children's ties to modern Palestine.

The problem of obtaining ten men for the daily minyan became more acute that year. The Board voted three hundred dollars to pay Minyanaires to attend the service. Kaplan used this opportunity to express his general dis-

approval of hired minyanim and urged a reorientation towards the Kaddish (mourners) prayer to make it compatible with the spirit of the prayer.

With the War in Europe going poorly for the Allies, the SAJ began to turn more of its attention toward aiding the cause of the democracies. In June, 1941, the Society undertook to raise money in order to endow a nursery room in Great Britain. This program was never successful. More successful, however, was a committee established by the SAJ to service army camps in and around New York. A Torah scroll was loaned to the army for the duration of the war.

An experiment to enlarge the membership of the Society was tried by the Board. They lowered the family membership fee to only twenty-five dollars. In six months, the Society as a result of this plan added over fifty new members. The Society also experimented with the idea of a career clinic for its young people. The Board hired Dr. Daniel Harris, a psychologist and vocational counselor, for this purpose.

As the United States entered the War in December of 1941, the rabbis of the SAJ outlined the steps the Society must take in a message to the membership.

Our American nation is at war! Now is the time for all of us to give it our wholehearted devotion and our every effort. We Jews have always rallied to the defense of our country. This time we shall do so with even greater hope in a happy ending, for our leader, President

Roosevelt, has inspired us all with his vision, his humanity and his courage. How can we best serve? First: we must be calm and cool. We must not yield to hysteria. On the other hand, we must not be complacent. We must be alert and active. Second: we must carry on (sic), so far as possible, the routine habits of our lives. Our morale will be greatly enhanced if we allow our daily comings and goings to be disturbed as little as possible. Third: we must come together more often, to enjoy the comfort and solace which can be gained only through our fellowship with one another. We must gather for study, for prayer, for service to others, for celebration. We must have more rather than fewer occasions to meet. The SAJ is aware of the value of such gatherings and will arrange them. Fourth: we must redouble our efforts in behalf of Palestine, our fellow Jews in other lands and our fellow Jews here in America. We must help them all to achieve that same faith and courage, that same unshakeable determination that are ours.⁶

In the Spring of 1942, the Society began experimenting with the Sabbath services in order to make them more meaningful and beautiful. The Sabbath Morning Service was to last exactly two hours and be divided into four parts. The first would be a half hour Shachrith (Morning) Service followed by the Torah reading which was to take fifty minutes. The sermon was scheduled to last twenty-five minutes followed by a section called the Program Service which would vary from week to week and deal each time with another theme suggested by events or commemorating events which were of religious, ethical or national interest to the Jewish people. Each of the worship sections of the service was to be enriched with the introduction of choral as well as cantorial and congregational music. Chemjo Vinaver was hired as Coral Director in order to enhance the musical component

of the service.

For a period of three years the congregation prayed from a loose-leaf prayerbook. This enabled changes to be made in the service and experiments to be added or cut out depending upon their success. This experimentation led to quite a fight within the Society and several families left the organization. Many of the leaders of the SAJ attempted to talk Kaplan and Eisenstein into deferring the changes in the service. They, however, refused and the experimentation continued, culminating in the publication of a new prayerbook in 1945.

Although the Board had approved the idea of a Confirmation program for the Society as early as 1930, the first Confirmation Service was not conducted at the SAJ until May, 1942. At that time, thirteen girls and three boys were confirmed on the first day of Shavuot. That same month over nine hundred people gathered to pay tribute to Kaplan on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. The sponsoring committee for this dinner included Judge Irving Lehman of the New York Supreme Court, Stephen Wise, the Reverend Reinhold Niebuhr of the Union Theological Seminary and Sidney Hook, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at New York University.

In July, 1942, Maurice Linder was elected as the seventh Chairman of the Society. He replaced Samuel Poses.

Despite his earlier isolationist stance, Eisenstein enlisted as a Chaplain in the army in September, 1942 and was granted an indefinite leave of absence for the duration of the war. His application, however, was rejected on physical grounds.

About a quarter of a century before the present concern over the Generation Gap, Kaplan urged the SAJ Board to give the young people of the Society more responsibility in the running of the institution in order to interest them in Judaism. "The tradition of having only elders run the congregation," he held, "is more responsible than anything for the lack of interest on the part of the young people. The very important work of running our institution should be shared by our children -- we should put them on committees, put them on the Board and in numerous other ways give them responsibilities which will encourage them to take a more active part in our activities."⁷

In January, 1944, the Jewish Reconstructionist Fellowship, sponsored by the Reconstructionist Foundation, was launched at the SAJ. The fellowships were designed to consist of small groups of men and women in various communities who would attempt to translate the philosophy of Reconstructionism into positive living. In reality, the fellowships were the same as the Reconstructionist clubs, most of which had disbanded by 1943.⁸

That spring, an assistant was hired for Eisenstein in order to allow him more time to travel about the country

to present the Reconstructionist viewpoint to American Jewry. Eisenstein's itineraries were so designed so that he could be away from the Society from Monday to Friday and return for Sabbath Services. The salary of the administrative assistant was paid for by the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation.

At the same meeting (January 16, 1945) in which Daniel G. Ross was elected eighth Chairman of the SAJ, the following letter was read from Kaplan to the Board:

This letter is long overdue, as you will note in what I am about to say. The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, which will soon complete twenty-three years since its establishment, is at present on a sound basis, materially and spiritually as may be expected, if we take into consideration the limited physical facilities within which it has to operate. I took an active part in the conduct of the SAJ until Dr. Eisenstein was appointed Associate Leader. Since then I have confined my activity mainly to preaching once a month and on all holidays and participation in meetings and formal gatherings, though I have continued to act in an advisory capacity in all matters pertaining to the SAJ. When I returned from Palestine, a little over five years ago, I asked to be relieved even of the limited schedule of duties, because I found that during my two years' absence Dr. Eisenstein had proved himself entirely qualified to take full charge of the SAJ. I was eager at that time, as I am now, to concentrate on teaching and writing. The Board of Trustees, however, urged me very strongly to resume my activities at the SAJ and I acceded to its request. I believe that whatever reasons may have prompted the Board to urge me to continue my service five years ago no longer exist. I am therefore writing this to you to ask that you kindly submit to the Board my request to be relieved of such duties as I have hitherto been expected to perform and to have my status changed to that of Leader Emeritus. I am particularly desirous that all such pastoral duties as officiating at weddings and funerals should henceforth devolve entirely upon Dr. Eisenstein, who, I assume, will succeed me as

Leader of the SAJ.

I want to take this opportunity to express to the trustees and members of our Society my profound gratitude for having afforded me a unique field for service to the Jewish people, and for their whole-hearted and generous cooperation in my efforts to render Judaism worth living for. As for the warm personal friendships I have gained during my association with the SAJ, these I shall treasure beyond words.⁹

In response to this letter, the Board named Kaplan Leader Emeritus of the SAJ and Eisenstein as its Leader. This change took effect immediately. Kaplan's relationship to the SAJ did not, of course, cease with this resolution and his most dramatic encounter with Orthodoxy was still six months off.

The Society for the Advancement of Judaism was formed in 1922 because of a battle which its leader was having with Orthodoxy. Kaplan, immediately upon his retirement from the Society, was once again catapulted into the leadership of the anti-Orthodox forces in America. This battle, however, became the subject of national debate and discussion and provided the SAJ with greater notoriety than it had ever received in the past.

In the spring of 1945, the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation announced that it was finally prepared to publish its new Sabbath Prayer Book. At that time, the SAJ reported that it had two hundred ninety six families on its membership rolls. The prayerbook, edited by Kaplan and Eugene Kohn with the assistance of Eisenstein and Milton Steinberg, contained a complete service for the

Sabbath. Devotional readings were provided in both Hebrew and English which were representative of different periods of Jewish history including the present time. It was designed so that its use would be flexible and from the prayer anthology a fitting prayer for each Sabbath reflecting the mood and tempo of the day could be selected.

The prayerbook was introduced at Sabbath services on May 5, 1945. Following the dedication of the prayerbook, a Kiddush (Sabbath reception) was held in the Society's Social Hall. The Kiddush was hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Max Hillson of the SAJ who provided the funds for the new volume's publication.

Generally, the publication of a new book of prayers is received with practically no notice by the American public and press. On June 15, 1945, however, the following story appeared in The New York Times under the headline "Orthodox Rabbis 'Excommunicate' Author of Prayer Book Though He Is Not A Member:"

The Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada has issued a proclamation of excommunication, the first in its forty-three year history, against Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, dean of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, accusing him of expressing 'atheism, heresy and disbelief in the basic tenets of Judaism' in the compilation of a recently published prayer book, it was learned yesterday. Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, President of the Union, announced that the ancient cherem, one of the severest forms of Jewish excommunication, was invoked Tuesday at a meeting of the members of the organization. After the edict was passed unanimously, Dr. Kaplan's work, the 'Sabbath Prayer Book,' was burned before the Assembly.

In an interview at the Union's headquarters, 132 Nassau Street, Rabbi Rosenberg said statements in Dr. Kaplan's introduction to the book outlining a 'modification of traditional doctrine' were contrary to the spirit and law of Judaism. He added that there was danger that the book might be confused with the traditional volume of prayer, and that the edict prohibited its use in synagogues. Although Dr. Kaplan is not a member of the Union and is not an Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Rosenberg said the proclamation was directed to 'all Jewry.' Dr. Kaplan, who is the founder of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism and head of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, publishers of the book, said the charge that he was an atheist was 'absurd.' 'How can any one who edits a prayer book be an atheist?' he asked. He added that since he was not a member of the Union and had no responsibility to it, he was 'excommunicated from nothing.' The preparation of the book, Dr. Kaplan explained, was motivated by a desire to develop a religious service that would give 'modern-minded Jews a form of worship in which they could participate with devotion and sincerity.' He said it was not intended for those Jews who were satisfied with the traditional prayers, and that the action against him raised the question of 'freedom of worship.' He added that the excommunicating rabbis were merely 'making themselves ridiculous.' The 'modifications' in Dr. Kaplan's introduction included the statement that Jews are not a divinely chosen race; that the Torah is a human document and not one 'supernaturally inspired,' and that modern Jews no longer look forward to the advent of a personal Messiah.¹⁰

The story reached a national audience when it was carried ten days later in a story headed "The Old and The New" in the religion section of Time magazine.

'How can anyone who edits a prayer book be an atheist?' To stocky, white-haired Dr. Mordecai M. (for Menahem) Kaplan, 64, dean of the Teachers Institute of Manhattan's Jewish Theological Seminary, the question was rhetorical. But the Union of Orthodox Rabbis had a flat answer. For years the Union had regarded Dr. Kaplan with suspicion. Last week it came right out and called him an 'atheist.' Mordecai Kaplan, always an unorthodox thinker, began outraging Jewish fundamentalists a decade ago by

launching the 'Reconstructionist' movement to liberalize Hebrew doctrine. The issue last week was a newly published Sabbath Prayer Book, for which Dr. Kaplan had edited traditional prayers to give modern Jews a form of worship in which they could participate...Defying basic Orthodox tenets, Dr. Kaplan stated in his introduction that: 1) Jews are not a divinely chosen people and 2) the Torah is not 'supernaturally inspired.' In solemn session in Manhattan last week, the Union called the prayer book a compound of 'atheism, heresy and disbelief...' and hurled at Dr. Kaplan (who is not a member of the Union) a proclamation of excommunication* (Footnote: The now obsolete cherem dating from 516 B.C., and most severe of three forms of Jewish excommunication. It totally ostracized the person at whom it was directed and last made history in 1656, when invoked against the Dutch philosopher, Spinoza.) -- first in its history. Then, after Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, President of the Union, banned the Kaplan-edited prayers from all synagogues, an excited young rabbi set fire to a copy of the book. Undismayed by the Union's edict ('As I am not a member...I was excommunicated from nothing.'), Mordecai Kaplan retorted that the rabbis were 'merely making themselves ridiculous...The Union...speaks in medieval terms.'¹¹

Judith Eisenstein, Kaplan's daughter, recalls that all this free publicity which the prayerbook was receiving had a beneficial effect upon its sales. "We sold out the whole first edition. People expected to find salacious, seditious and heretical material."

The publication of the Sabbath Prayer Book was also received with hostility by several members of the Seminary's faculty but their opposition was toned down because of the bitter attack upon Kaplan by the Orthodox rabbis.¹² The publication of its own prayerbook was one more indication that Kaplan and the Reconstructionists were moving away from the Conservative movement toward an independent stance. Its use at the SAJ clearly delineated its service from that

of other Conservative congregations.

Kaplan's personal reactions to all of this controversy can be found once again in the pages of his journal.

Last Saturday evening, after the service, Rabbi Geffen called my attention to the fact that an advertisement had appeared in the Jewish Morning Journal of Friday, June 8, announcing a special conference of rabbis for the purpose of denouncing a so-called prayer book issued by atheists and common heretics who call themselves rabbis. This convention was called by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. That advertisement appeared in last Monday's and Tuesday's Morning Journal. The third ad was more strident than the preceeding. Last Wednesday the Jewish Morning Journal and The Jewish Day carried reports of the conference. According to these reports the rabbis present not only carried through the formal ceremony of cherem against me, which was concluded with the reading of the First Psalm, but also had a copy of the prayer book burned on top of the table at which the presiding officers sat....

At 1:00 I went to Professor Marx's room (at JTS) on the fourth floor to attend the special luncheon in honor of Finkelstein whose fiftieth birthday anniversary had come round. As I entered the room I noticed that Professor Liberman did not give the slightest sign of recognizing my presence. I was a bit flustered for a moment, but soon adjusted myself to the situation, because I had always known him to be violently antagonistic to me and my work. At the table later, I noticed that he sat at the very end together with Davis, instead of a place near the head of the table, according to his status on the Faculty. When the luncheon was over I was waiting for the elevator to take me downstairs, Liberman was coming in my direction. As soon as he noticed me, he lowered his eyes and hastened his steps. 'Why are you angry with me?' I said in all innocence. 'I am not angry,' he replied and ran on. Later it occurred to me that possibly he regarded it his duty to obey the cherem of the rabbis. Sure enough, when I was at the Seminary on Friday, I learned that that was actually the case.¹³

A similar repercussion of the cherem took place in the office of the SAJ itself. One of the workers in the office who had

been employed by the Society for three years stated that she would have to leave because of the cherem. Herbert Goldstein, Rabbi of the West Side Institutional Synagogue and a student of Kaplan in his early days at the Seminary, advised her that she may finish the work on which she was actually working at the time but she would then have to leave.

As the publicity surrounding the book-burning grew, Kaplan's attitude toward the Orthodox rabbis hardened.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency called me up on Wednesday to give them a statement, which I did. On Thursday, I gave interviews to reporters from the Jewish Day and The New York Times. I was reluctant to see The New York Times reporter, but when I was told that he had been invited by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis to get a statement from them, I was glad I had a chance to reply. The appearance of the news item in The New York Times yesterday created quite a sensation. I had always had nothing but profound contempt for the rabbis associated with the Union. I had had enough of a close-up view of them to know their immoral dealing. I could not help seeing in them a demonstration of the low moral level of at least fifty per cent of the Tannaim and the Amoraim (Mishnaic and Talmudic authorities), as reflected in the Talmud. This dastardly action of theirs at the present time when even the greatest reactionaries are still lying low and dare not violate publicly the Four Freedoms for which the war against Germany was supposed to have been fought and won is liable to render us Jews odious even to the more liberal elements of the general community. What a shattering effect this exhibition of moral degeneracy on the part of men who call themselves rabbis has upon me I can hardly express. All my efforts depend upon faith in the Jewish people. With so much corruption wherever I turn, I find it exceedingly hard to carry on the struggle for Jewish survival. Truth to tell, I experience neither the sufferings nor the consolations of a martyr. If I were asked what I regarded as the most disheartening aspect of Jewish life as reflected

in this tragi-comedy of the cherem, I would say that it is the fact that on the one hand we have rabbinical gangsters who resorted to Nazi methods in order to retain their authority, and on the other hand, our Jewish journalists are cynical about the whole business and treat the very attempt to articulate religious values in terms of a modern outlook in life as silly and superfluous.¹⁴

Kaplan could not help but returning to the idea that the actions of the rabbis in burning the prayerbook bore a remarkable resemblance to that of the Nazis.

The Nazis made the attack on the Jews the spearhead of their attack on democracy. They pointed to the Jews, who are the most conspicuous beneficiaries of the freedom which democracy avows, as the main cause of democracy's ills, hoping thereby to confuse and weaken the people of the democratic countries through inner strife. Likewise the 'Rabbonim' point to my 'atheism,' which I am able to promulgate as a result of the liberal policy of the Seminary and the Conservative movement generally, in the hope that it would cause inner strife among our group and weaken its influence on American Jewry.¹⁵

The effect of the controversy on the SAJ was to strengthen its cohesion and its backing of Kaplan. Immediately following the book-burning, Eisenstein reported to the Board that the outcome of the controversy was one that the Orthodox rabbis might not have foreseen -- a renewed interest in the prayerbook and an unprecedented demand for it by individuals and bookshops. Innumerable letters from individuals and organizations throughout the country were received by Kaplan and the Reconstructionist Foundation condemning the action of the Orthodox rabbis. National groups responded immediately by drawing up resolutions denouncing the Ban and the burning of the

book. Outstanding among the resolutions, Eisenstein pointed out, was the one issued by the Rabbinical Assembly which was reported in The New York Times.

After considerable discussion, the Board of the SAJ decided to condemn the action of the Orthodox rabbis and that Eisenstein in his sermon the following Sabbath should discuss the controversy. Furthermore, an announcement of the sermon should be inserted as an ad on the religious page of the Times. Kaplan wrote the following in his diary concerning that service:

This is Saturday morning at 11:30. I should have been at services at the SAJ synagogue. This is the first time in my rabbinical career that I stayed away from Sabbath services without indisposition being the cause. Ira (Eisenstein) is speaking this morning on the excommunication. Advance notice of the sermon appeared in an ad in yesterday's Times. There is likely to be a large crowd. Anticipating embarrassment at being the main subject of Ira's talk, I thought it best to stay away.¹⁶

Kaplan personally responded to the Orthodox rabbis in a pamphlet issued by the Reconstructionist Foundation the following September. The pamphlet, "A Challenge to the Freedom of Worship," was sent to the Foundation's members in order to acquaint them with the facts of the situation and the reaction of individuals and organizations throughout the country. The Times once again carried the story bearing the headline "Dr. Kaplan Assails Orthodox Rabbi Unit."

Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, who has been 'excommunicated' by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States

and Canada for editing a new Sabbath prayer book, issued a thirty-page defense of his position yesterday, calling the incident a 'challenge to freedom of worship' and charging his opponents with helping bring about a state of 'religious sterility' in Palestine. The 'excommunication' of Dr. Kaplan, who is not a member of the Union, took place at a meeting called by the organization on June 12. After a series of speeches accusing Dr. Kaplan and his coworkers of atheism and disrespect for the tenets of the Jewish religion, the audience of two hundred rabbis unanimously voted for an edict of cherem, one of the severest forms of excommunication.

Dr. Kaplan said it was no longer possible to expect that every Jew would conceive of his faith in exactly the same way as all his co-religionists. He added that it was for the Jews who could no longer believe in many of the traditional doctrines that the new prayer book was written.

Dr. Kaplan contended that in reviving the use of the cherem the Orthodox rabbis not only over-stepped their rights, but 'gave proof of the menace to Judaism which still exists within traditional Jewish life.' He added that the fact that the mandatory power in Palestine only recognizes Orthodox Jewish clergymen placed them 'in the saddle' and has brought about a situation where religiously Palestine 'is merely another European ghetto, with medieval religious and nationalistic secularism being the only expression of man's relation to the cosmos.'¹⁷

The very opposition of the Orthodox rabbis, however, helped to bring the Reconstructionist movement before the public and served to give it added strength. In the very year in which Mordecai Kaplan gave up his active leadership of the Society which he founded, that institution grew stronger than it had ever been before because of an unjust and sensational attack upon its leader. Though no longer directly involved in the daily running of the SAJ, Kaplan's influence and philosophy remain great. His charismatic presence, enhanced by this brush with Orthodoxy, continues

to be reckoned with by his successors at the Society.

Chapter VIII

In commenting upon rabbinical training in the United States, Kaplan recently remarked that the trouble with American seminaries is that "they teach student-rabbis history rather than teaching them how to make history." No matter what one's criticism of Mordecai Kaplan as a philosopher or theologian might be, one cannot deny the importance of his place in American Jewish history. Although there are a few American Jewish thinkers of note, he is the only one of this group who has taken his ideas and attempted to translate them into concrete programs. Kaplan's understanding that the American Jewish community needed revived forms of worship and communal organization is, perhaps, his greatest contribution to American Jewry.

Trying to understand the Society for the Advancement of Judaism without Kaplan is futile. The very foundations of the Society are built around his philosophy. Although, as we have seen, Kaplan often felt his own influence upon the membership there to be minimal, without his charismatic personality and forceful leadership, the SAJ would have died any number of times during its first twenty-five years.

Even after Kaplan himself retired from active leadership, his philosophy permeated the Society. Eisenstein, after all, was a disciple of Kaplan and perhaps his most

successful popularizer. His work at the SAJ and later with the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation has always been clearly intended to spread the ideas first presented by his father-in-law.

One is hard-pressed to find a single program or innovation at the SAJ during the period under study which does not bear the unmistakable stamp of either Kaplan or Eisenstein. It seems clear that one of Kaplan's major disappointments at the SAJ was the inability of the lay leadership to lead the Society in a creative fashion. In many instances, the lay group actually impeded the innovations which Kaplan desired to make. This can be traced partially, however, to Kaplan's own strong personality and the membership's dependence upon him.

One of the great strengths of the SAJ throughout this period was that it was a homogeneous group. In the 1920's this homogeneity was based upon social class, business ties and familial connection. These were the bonds which unified the group. Although they were not Jewishly illiterate (they could, for example, read the Hebrew prayers), they did not understand the thrust or radicalism of Kaplan's philosophy of Judaism for its time. For them, the SAJ was almost a family club (replete with gymnasium). Religiously, it seemed a respectable alternative

to Reform Judaism for the children of East European immigrants. It is not surprising, therefore, that they opposed most of the ritual changes which Kaplan attempted during the twenties. The theoretical changes they did not understand and, therefore, did not question, but changes in ritual were obvious and deeply troubled them.

The situation, however, changed as the Society emerged from the depression and began to grow in membership once again. The newer members were not as unified socially and economically but were, to a great extent, unified ideologically. They joined the SAJ because it stood for something and had a philosophy behind it. They joined not so much because they were related to someone who was already a member but because they were attracted to the type of Judaism espoused by the Society's founder. In fact, each application form mailed to prospective members was accompanied by a copy of the SAJ's "Thirteen Wants." Furthermore, after the publication of Judaism as a Civilization in 1934, the Society began to attract Jewish intellectuals who were drawn by Kaplan's ideology and personality. This group, although small in number, contained some of the most influential Jews in New York in the field of Jewish social work, education and literature. So although the entire SAJ was comparatively small even in 1945, its influence was far greater than its numbers would allow us to assume.

The influence which the SAJ in New York had upon the growth of the Reconstructionist movement throughout the country is beyond the scope of this study. It is part of a recent article by Charles S. Liebman entitled "Reconstructionism in American Jewish Life" in the 1970 edition of the American Jewish Year Book. Suffice it to say, as we have seen, for many years the SAJ was the entirety of the Reconstructionist movement and still remains its largest and most important congregation. Without the financial support of SAJ members, the movement would have long ceased to exist and, indeed, might never have been born.

Once again, it is difficult to assess the influence of the SAJ's structure upon other synagogues in the United States. Certainly, Kaplan's idea of a synagogue-center has become the model of many Conservative and Reform congregations. It has, indeed, also been influential among modern Orthodox synagogues particularly in suburban areas of the country. In fact, it is often difficult to distinguish between the program of the SAJ and other synagogues because of this fact. It isn't so much that the SAJ is like all other synagogues but rather that so many other synagogues have adopted the SAJ style perhaps without even realizing it.

Moreover, Kaplan's philosophy of Judaism has become so widely accepted by American Jews that one would suppose

that Reconstructionism was the dominant movement in American Jewish life. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the actual case. Liebman, in the article mentioned above, comments that "so many American Jews are resonstructionists, (but) so few are Reconstructionists." Although, once again, the reason for this disparity between the acceptance of Reconstructionist ideas and the failure of the organized movement is not the subject of our study and far beyond its scope, one can find the genesis of an answer in a study of this kind.

Kaplan had two opportunities to advance his philosophy of Judaism and help it grow into a national movement during the 1920's. The first was Stephen Wise's repeated invitation to come to his newly formed seminary, the Jewish Institute of Religion. Had Kaplan accepted Wise's offers to head that school, he might have been able to train rabbinical leadership who could have carried his ideas to the nation. He turned this position down first of all because of his belief that the newly founded SAJ could not survive without him. His assessment was, undoubtedly, quite correct. But his failure to train a lay leadership was much less crucial than his failure to train rabbinic leadership. The more important reason, of course, for Kaplan's rejection of Wise's offer was his loyalty to the Jewish Theological Seminary. He continued to believe through most of his

life that his ideas would prove victorious within the Conservative movement. The Seminary, however, turned out to be too hostile an environment for his thinking to survive in. The students who were influenced by him at the Seminary (for example, Ira Eisenstein, Eugene Kohn, and Milton Steinberg) were able to increase the number of Kaplan's followers. The opposing forces at work within the Seminary were, however, too great to allow this number to grow to such an extent as to make a sizable dent in the Conservative group.

The second opportunity lost by Kaplan in the 1920's was the failure of the SAJ movement of that period to grow to such a strength as to allow it to outlive the economic pressures of the Great Depression. Had there been the skeleton of a movement left by the 1930's and had there been an important rabbinical leadership group outside of New York prepared to guide it, the Reconstructionist movement might have been one of the beneficiaries of the post-World War II boom in religious affiliation of the late 1940's and 1950's. The fact that it was unprepared for this spurt of unprecedented growth in institutional Judaism may have proved fatal to the prospects of its ever becoming a national movement of importance.

Yet the failure of the movement must not overshadow the success of the SAJ itself. As a congregation, it was

'an important innovative force in American Jewish life.

If it is today difficult to distinguish between it and other American congregations, this very fact is a tribute to its success. Mordecai Kaplan, through his association with the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, is an excellent example of how one goes about making history rather than merely studying it. The SAJ was and remains a living monument to his life and thought.

Notes

Chapter I

¹ Mordecai M. Kaplan, The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), p. 17.

² Mordecai M. Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), p. 88.

³ Kaplan, Meaning, p. 20.

⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶ Mordecai M. Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 306.

⁷ Kaplan, Meaning, p. 76.

⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

⁹ Kaplan, Civilization, p. 324.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 329.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 388.

¹² Kaplan, Meaning, p. 306.

¹³ Arthur A. Cohen, The Natural and the Supernatural Jew (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), p. 215.

¹⁴ Kaplan, Civilization, p. 178.

¹⁵ Kaplan, Civilization, pp. 258-59.

Chapter II

¹ Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation, ed. Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1952), pp. 117-18.

² Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Influences that Shaped My Life," The Reconstructionist, June 26, 1942, p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

⁶Arthur A. Goren, New York Jews and The Quest for Community (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 88.

⁷Kaplan, "Influences," pp. 32-33.

⁸Ibid., p. 33.

⁹Goren, p. 252.

¹⁰Kaplan, "Influences," p. 33.

Chapter III

¹Charles S. Liebman, "Reconstructionism in American Life," in American Jewish Year Book 1970 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1970), p. 26.

²Kaplan, "Influences," p. 34.

³Kaplan, "The Jewish Center," in SAJ Minutes, January, 1922.

⁴Kaplan, Journals (unpublished), I, p. 366.

⁵Ibid., pp. 368-70.

⁶Ibid., p. 370.

⁷Ibid., p. 371.

⁸Ibid., p. 371.

⁹Ibid., II, p. 24.

¹⁰Mordecai M. Kaplan, "A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism," The Reconstructionist, October 23, 1970, p. 8.

¹¹Liebman, p. 27.

¹²Kaplan, Journals, II, p. 33.

¹³Kaplan, Journals, II, p. 34.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 63.

²⁰Ibid., p. 65.

²¹Ibid., p. 71.

²²Ibid., p. 72.

²³Ibid., p. 73.

²⁴"The Jewish Center and American Judaism," in Twentieth Anniversary Journal of the Jewish Center, 1937.

Chapter IV

¹Kaplan, "A Program," p. 14.

²H.L. Simmons, "Chairman's Report," in SAJ Minutes, January, 1922.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹SAJ Minutes (unpublished), January 24, 1922.

¹⁰Goren, p. 276.

¹¹Kaplan, "Influences," pp. 34-35.

Chapter V

- ¹SAJ Minutes, January 31, 1922.
- ²Ibid., March 13, 1922.
- ³Kaplan, Journals, II, p. 77.
- ⁴Ibid., pp. 79-80.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 85.
- ⁶SAJ Minutes, June 29, 1922.
- ⁷Kaplan, Journals, pp. 86-87.
- ⁸Ibid., pp. 100-1.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 114-15.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 117.
- ¹¹Ibid., pp. 124-25.
- ¹²Ibid., pp. 128-29.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹⁴Liebman, p. 29.
- ¹⁵Kaplan, Journals, II, pp. 162-63.
- ¹⁶Mordecai M. Kaplan, SAJ Bluebook (New York: Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 1923), pp. 5-6.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 20-22.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 25.
- ²⁰Kaplan, Journals, II, p. 161.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 190.
- ²²Ibid., p. 202.
- ²³SAJ Minutes, May 11, 1924.
- ²⁴Kaplan, Journals, II, p. 230.

- ²⁵Ibid., pp. 241-42.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 242.
- ²⁷SAJ Minutes, December 29, 1924.
- ²⁸SAJ Review, February 27, 1925.
- ²⁹SAJ Minutes, April 21, 1925.
- ³⁰Kaplan, Journals, III, p. 48.
- ³¹SAJ Review, January 1, 1926.
- ³²Kaplan, Journals, III, p. 64.
- ³³Ibid., pp. 76-77.
- ³⁴SAJ Review, May 14, 1926.
- ³⁵Ibid., June 18, 1926.
- ³⁶Ibid., September 17, 1926.
- ³⁷Ibid., November 5, 1926.
- ³⁸Ibid., March 13, 1927.
- ³⁹Kaplan, Journals, III, p. 156.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 154-55.
- ⁴¹SAJ Review, December 2, 1927.
- ⁴²Kaplan, Journals, III, pp. 214-15.
- ⁴³SAJ Minutes, February 6, 1928.
- ⁴⁴SAJ Review, February 24, 1928.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., March 10, 1928.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., May 24, 1928.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., September 28, 1928.
- ⁴⁸Kaplan, Journals, IV, pp. 113-14.
- ⁴⁹SAJ Minutes, May 26, 1929.

Chapter VI

- ¹Liebman, p. 31.
- ²SAJ Minutes, May 25, 1930.
- ³Ibid., May 25, 1930.
- ⁴Ibid., May 28, 1932.
- ⁵Ibid., May 28, 1932.
- ⁶"The Reconstructionist Position," The Reconstructionist, January 11, 1935.
- ⁷Ibid., May 9, 1936.
- ⁸SAJ Minutes, March 21, 1937.
- ⁹Ibid., March 3, 1937.
- ¹⁰Ibid., May 9, 1938.
- ¹¹Ibid., November 7, 1938.
- ¹²Ibid., March 25, 1939.
- ¹³Ibid., September 15, 1939.
- ¹⁴Shir Hadash: New Prayers and Meditations for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, ed. Eugene Kohn (New York: Behrman House, 1939), pp. vi-vii.

Chapter VII

- ¹Liebman, p. 33.
- ²The Reconstructionist, February 16, 1940.
- ³SAJ Bulletin, April 5, 1940.
- ⁴Liebman, p. 34.
- ⁵The New Haggadah, ed. Mordecai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, Ira Eisenstein (New York: Behrman House, 1941), pp. v-viii.
- ⁶SAJ Bulletin, December 12, 1941.

- ⁷SAJ Minutes, June 15, 1943.
- ⁸Liebman, p. 35.
- ⁹SAJ Minutes, January 16, 1945.
- ¹⁰The New York Times, June 15, 1945, p. 11.
- ¹¹"The Old and the New," Time, June 25, 1945.
- ¹²Liebman, p. 34.
- ¹³Kaplan, Journals, XIII, p. 146.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 147.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.
- ¹⁷The New York Times, September 6, 1945, p. 12.

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