Abstract

This thesis has been stimulated by my own experiences with the progressive British Jewish community's unique two-movement landscape during the eight months I studied at Leo Baeck College in London. Shortly after I arrived in London, I began to wonder what differentiated the Liberal and Reform movements, but I was unable to determine how to characterize each movement as a distinct group. My constant wondering led me to this thesis's goal: to determine how and to what extent the UK's Liberal and Reform movements have each achieved coherence, the ability to function as a consistent, unified group.

This study of British progressive Judaism is significant not only for shedding light on that community, but also for American Jews and the Jewish community worldwide because it provides a framework to ask difficult questions of our own Jewish movements, wherever we may reside. It makes space for us to ask if our Jewish movements have achieved coherence in ways that matter to our milieus; though this paper addresses ideological-theological and institutional, other movements may find other pressing areas of coherence to uncover. It allows us to ask if achieving coherence is necessary for success or, to present a bolder question, if coherence is necessary for Jewish movements' survival.

The six-chapter analysis presented here is based on academic research and twelve in-depth interviews that I conducted with rabbis, student rabbis, and lay leaders in the spring of 2019. The four body paragraphs explore the movements' histories, ideological-theological approaches, institutions, and relationships with each other. The conclusion analyzes the research and discusses its implications for the British and American progressive Jewish communities.

ACHIEVING COHERENCE:

AN ANALYSIS OF LIBERAL AND REFORM JUDAISM IN THE UK

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As we say in Yiddish, "mann tracht, un Gott lacht", "a person plans, God laughs." Our daughter Adira arrived three months early, at the same time I had intended to begin my writing process with the hope of making a deep dent before her due date. The last six months have been challenging for our family and writing this thesis has been a labor of love from so many people. I want to express my gratitude to the NICU nurses at Northwestern's Prentice Women's Hospital who learned about British Judaism for three months, to our all-star nurse-babysitters Kelly, Lindsey, and Annie for caring for Adira while I wrote, and to my mother-in-law Barbara, who helped in too many ways to count. Most importantly, I thank my spouse Jeffrey for his limitless patience, encouragement, and love. This paper is dedicated to Jeffrey and Adira, the lights of my life.

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Introduction

The Jewish denominational landscape in the UK is unlike any other in the world. Like other countries with a strong non-Orthodox contingent, the Reform movement comprises the majority of Jews who identify as progressive. In the United States, the country with the largest number of progressive Jews, one-third of American Jews consider themselves Reform, as opposed to Orthodox, Conservative, no denomination, or Other.[1] Likewise, Israel's Reform movement continues to grow into the largest progressive denomination in the country. According to the Jewish People Policy Institute's 2018 report, eight percent of Israelis identify as Reform, while five percent identify as Conservative.[2] Likewise, most of the UK's progressive Jews belong to the Reform movement. However, the UK's Jewish landscape is unlike any other country in the world because the UK is home to another sizable progressive movement, the Liberal movement. Though the Reform movement is about thrice as large as the Liberal movement, Liberal Judaism and Reform Judaism are both significant players in the progressive Jewish scene.[3] The Liberal and Reform movements developed independently of each other--whereas non-Orthodox denominations in other countries often rose out of other non-Orthodox denominations--and operate independently of each other.[4]

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[1] "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," (Pew Research Center: Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013) https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/

[2] Shmuel Rosner, "Rising Streams: Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel," Jewish People Policy Institute, http://jppi.org.il/new/en/article/risingstreams/toc/numbers/#.Xh4avNZKg6U. To be sure, the article notes the difficulty in determining denominational affiliation in Israel because of the non-dues-paying shul culture. Other studies have concluded that the percentages of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel is lower than this study. Still, each study shows that more Israelis identify as Reform than any other progressive denomination.

[3] Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, interview by author, London, March 18, 2019.

[4] In other countries, non-Orthodox denominations rose out of other non-Orthodox denominations. The Conservative movement, as it would later be called in America, detached from the German reformers when they decided to prioritize German over Hebrew in the liturgy in 1845. Rabbi Zacharias Frankel and other traditionally leaning colleagues found this unacceptable. Similarly, Reconstructionist Judaism resulted from Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan's frustration with the Conservative movement's delay in egalitarianism. He established the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1968. Elliot N. Dorff, *Modern Conservative Judaism: Evolving*

The existence of two separate, sizable, and institutionally significant progressive movements in the UK is exceptional, and their respective historical origins and unique characteristics will be the focus of this paper.

Before delving into the nuances of this UK phenomenon, here is a brief explanation of key terms whose meanings will be explored throughout this study. Liberal Judaism is an autonomous denomination in the UK with a distinct theology and history. In some other countries, particularly Germany, it is often used as synonymous with Reform Judaism. Reform Judaism, by contrast, is the largest denomination of progressive Judaism with a presence in forty-three countries. North America is home to the largest percentage of Reform Jews and the UK the second largest. The term Reform has institutional connotations that hearken back to the establishment of "Reform" congregations in mid-nineteenth century Germany.[5] It is used to cite a specific movement, unlike "liberal" and "progressive" which may be used as adjectives.

To complicate matters, in the UK some synagogues affiliated to Liberal Judaism call themselves Progressive synagogues (e.g. Finchley Progressive). For a number of decades, what is now called Liberal Judaism was known as the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues. Progressive is also sometimes used as a term to encompass all or most non-orthodox denominations; sometimes even encompassing Conservative/Masorti Judaism. The World Union for Progressive Judaism unites liberally minded congregations worldwide, including those within the UK's Liberal and Reform movements. The complexity evident in these key terms points to the complexity inherent in creating, naming, maintaining coherent

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Thought and Practice (University of Nebraska Press as a Jewish Publication Society and Rabbinical Assembly book, 2018), 8.

[5] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 425.

religious movements. This paper's conclusion will discuss the nuances of movement names and their implications.

One might wonder why an American Reform rabbinical student chooses to study the UK's progressive Jewish movements. I had the good fortune to spend my penultimate school year of rabbinical education living in London and attending Leo Baeck College, the rabbinical school that trains rabbis for both Liberal Judaism and Reform Judaism in the UK, as well as other non-orthodox denominations worldwide. I knew little about the UK's Jewish landscape prior to arriving in London and I quickly discovered how much I still needed to understand about the unique community I had entered. I noticed how strongly my British classmates seemed to identify with one movement or the other. Each morning at Shacharit prayer services, I could reliably predict which siddur the student *shaliach tzibur*, the prayer leader, would use based on their denominational identity. Despite this identification, one day when I asked a classmate what the difference was between Liberal Judaism and Reform Judaism, the question seemed to stump him. I asked more of my classmates and professors how they would differentiate the two movements and each person had a unique perspective on the question. After growing frustrated with the inability of others to give me a "straight" answer, I began to investigate the question myself. I went to a number of synagogues with the intention of teasing out a singular unifying factor amongst the congregations of each denomination, but I gained little insight into how to characterize the Liberal shuls as a group and the Reform shuls as a group, apart from the use of their respective movement siddurim. Even this metric was skewed; two of the shuls used service pamphlets they themselves had created.

These experiences propelled me to ask more questions about this unique two-movement progressive Jewish world. I wondered what makes each denomination a "movement," as they both freely characterize themselves as such.[6] Religion scholar William Bainbridge defines religious movements as "collective human attempts to create or to block change" with a distinctly religious character.[7] The word "collective" stands out as a key component to Bainbridge's concept of a movement. His definition rests on an assumption that, in order to achieve status as a "movement," the individual actors within a denomination must act cooperatively towards a common vision. In the case of secular movements, a common vision would be ideological; in the case of religious movements, such visions would not only be ideological, but also theological and institutional.

Another scholar of social movements, Suzanne Staggenborg, asserts that coherence within a movement is not a prerequisite for identification as such, "because social movements are not unified actors, but typically consist of many different types of groups and individuals with varying ideological and strategic perspectives."[8] However, the more coherent a movement's frame, the more likely it will be to "attract movement participants, form coalitions, win public approval and media attention, and influence authorities."[9] For religious movements, rather than social movements, such successes might include attracting movement participants, influencing participants to observe the religion according to the

[6] Both websites make this characterization very clear. Reform Judaism's website actually calls itself "The Movement for Reform Judaism" and the "What is Liberal Judaism?" page of their website uses the term "movement" from the outset, in the third sentence (and three more times after that).

[7] William Sims Bainbridge, *The Sociology of Religious Movements* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 3.

[8] Suzanne Staggenborg, *Social Movements, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016),23.

[9] Ibid.

movement's expected standards of behavior, being heard in the public sphere, and creating change in the umbrella religious body.

Social and religious movements almost inevitably create narratives about their pasts and futures. Joseph E. Davis says that this process of creating a group narrative is one method by which movements can achieve greater coherence. Building a narrative allows a movement to "configure key experiences into a meaningful whole" and "sustain a collective identity."[10] Self-narratives do not stand alone; they are influenced by the "preexisting" cultural and institutional narratives that surround them.[11] Movements build their self-narratives in relation to other narratives that already operate in their milieu. The way a group views itself, its history, and itself in relation to the world around it, and how it articulates these self-conceptions in a cohesive discourse contribute to a group's ability to form a coherent identity.

These scholarly approaches, when combined, provide a background to the idea of coherence that I will employ throughout this analysis. Coherence has social and institutional components; coherence occurs when individuals act cooperatively toward a shared goal. Coherence is ideological; a group can achieve coherence when people within it share an integrated set of principles and act on these principles. Coherence is storied; movements create narratives about themselves to build coherent conceptions of self. With this definition of the multiple possible facets of coherence in mind, this paper will explore the issue of coherence in the UK's Liberal and Reform movements in three areas: their theologies as expressed in their siddurim, their institutional structures, and the way they have

[10] Joseph E. Davis, "Narrative and Social Movements: The Power of Stories," in *Stories of change: Narrative and Social movements*, ed. Joseph E. Davis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 20.

[11] Ibid.

communicated their shared histories. I will try to determine to what extent the shuls, leaders, and institutional structures of the UK's Liberal and Reform denominations have achieved coherence in these three areas. And, finally, I will explore the question of whether coherence is essential for a movement's success.

Before delving into the analysis of these three areas, I will present a brief history of both movements and an overview of their institutional realities today. The analysis presented here is a case study of the Liberal and Reform movements in the UK based primarily on academic research and twelve in-depth interviews that I conducted with rabbis, student rabbis, and lay leaders in the spring of 2019, and partly on my own ethnographic observation during the eight months I lived in London. Pseudonyms are used for all but two interviewees, the senior rabbis to the Liberal and Reform movements, who have both agreed to the use of their names in this paper. This analysis represents trends that occurred at that time, in the spring of 2019, in the lives of these movements; it does not necessarily apply to the past or future, though both may figure into the current character of the movements.

This study of UK Jewry is significant not only for shedding light on denominationalism in the UK, but also for American Jews and the Jewish community worldwide because it provides a framework to ask difficult questions of our own Jewish movements, wherever we may reside. It makes space for us to ask if other Jewish movements have achieved coherence in areas that matter to their milieus; though this paper addresses theological, institutional, and identity coherence, other movements may find other pressing areas of coherence to uncover. It allows us to ask if achieving coherence is necessary for success or, to present a bolder question, if coherence is necessary for Jewish movements' survival. Underlying all of these questions is the premise that coherence is, in fact, an

achievement. It does not simply happen. It must be accomplished by people working collaboratively and intentionally.

Historical Developments, Current Realities

In order to understand and analyze the current realities of the Reform and Liberal movements today, it is crucial to understand their historical developments. The movements differ from other progressive streams of Judaism because one did not develop directly out of the other, as it happened with the three largest non-Orthodox denominations in the US.[12] Rather, they developed independently; though they were part of the same milieu, their founders emerged from separate spheres of the traditional Jewish world with unique ideologies, goals, and strategies for achieving their goals. Their foundational characteristics remain central pathways to both movements' identities today. This section will detail each movement's historical development up to the present and their current realities and will remark on the former's influence on the latter.

Jews first returned to England in the mid-seventeenth century, almost four centuries after they were expelled by King Edward I's Edict of Expulsion. The first returnees were Sephardim, Jews from Spain and Portugal. They were the original "elite" of the British Jewish community. Eastern European Ashkenazim later came in great numbers with more affluence and influence than their Sephardic counterparts. The community grew quickly in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. According to historian of Reform Judaism, Michael Meyer, the community grew from 25,000 to 35,000 people from 1815 to 1851.[13] Around this

[12] See footnote 2 about the development of Conservative and Reconstructionist movements.
[13] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 172.

time, as Jews assimilated into British society, discontent with the religious status quo began to grow. Change was on the horizon.

I will begin with the Reform movement because of its earlier chronological development. Reform Judaism in England rose out of both ideological and practical concerns. While radical German reformers aimed to change Jewish philosophy and practice in continental Europe, affluent English Jews of the early nineteenth century also grew tired of the Jewish status quo. Assimilation**,** business success, and relations with their Christian neighbors took priority over traditional practice. The adage "the synagogue I don't go to is Orthodox" applied to most of the English Jewish community across the socioeconomic spectrum; there was no alternative to Orthodox affiliation and so this is how people identified their Judaism, even if their practice did not reflect an Orthodox lifestyle. Those who did attend synagogue felt the disconnect between their identities as English people and their experiences in worship services. This disconnect was felt by both the Ashkenazim of London's Great Synagogue and the Sephardim of Bevis Marks. The lack of decorum and English language in their synagogues' services frustrated them. They thought the services were too long and the rabbi too removed from modern sensibilities. These feelings coincided with developments in English religious scholarship that challenged rabbinic authority; the bible, declared Biblicist Jews and Christians, should be the only source of religious teaching. Such testimony removed some more liberal-minded Jews even further ideologically from their traditional counterparts.[14]

At the same time, London's East End lost its influence as the city's Jewish hub as some established Jews, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, continued to assimilate into the

[14] Anne J. Kershen and Jonathan A. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 3-9.

middle-class economically and culturally and moved to the affluent West End. The move west brought them father away from their synagogues, geographically and relationally. They began to vie for change in their home synagogues to no avail. At Bevis Marks, the Committee for Promotion and Improvement of Religious Worship achieved no change. At the Great Synagogue, a man named Isaac Lyon Goldsmid threatened to withdraw from the community and begin his own synagogue. None of these actions prompted the desired reforms at the East End synagogues, so the West End Jews took matters into their own hands. Wealthy families from Bevis Marks and the Great Synagogue banded together to create a new West End community that would bridge the former Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide, create a more modern worship service that included a choir and English sermons, and establish a community that could include West Enders from various Jewish backgrounds.[15] In the year 1840, this Reform group was established by Horatio Montefiore and Isaac Lyon Goldsmid with nineteen others. They hired David Woolf Marks, an educated Jewish layman from Liverpool, to be their minister. This group would become the West London Synagogue of British Jews.[16]

Marks created a prayer book for the community called *Forms of Prayer*.[17] It abbreviated parts of the traditional prayer book and included both Sephardi and Ashkenazi liturgy. Services began in 1842 in a rented chapel and looked very traditional in some ways and untraditional in others. For instance, men and women still sat separately, men wore traditional garb, and there was no musical accompaniment. The liturgy still called for a return

[15] Stephen Sharot, "Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940," *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1979), 212, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4467052.

[16] Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change,* 15.

[17] David Woolf Marks and Albert Lowy, *Forms of Prayer*: *Used in the West London Synagogue of British Jews* (London: J. Wertheimer and Co., 1841).

to Zion and the coming of the Messiah, theological ideas that the German reformers fervently abolished.[18] However, the decorum was more formal, and the Hebrew was recited with Sephardic pronunciation rather than Ashkenazi pronunciation. Most notably, the community did not gather on the second day of the holidays, once again affirming the Biblicist tendencies of nineteenth century Europe and turning a cheek to the rabbinic practices of traditional Judaism. Of course, the reformers' actions begot significant backlash from their Orthodox peers. Tensions ran so high that the Board of Deputies of British Jews rejected marriages performed by Marks and rejected West London members from use of the East End cemeteries.

Around the same time as West London Synagogue was established, a Reform community was established in Manchester. Its Central European immigrants brought ideals from the German Reform movement with them to Manchester and chose to create England's first Reform Association. Though they used Marks's *Forms of Prayer* and continued to separate men from women, they chose to retain the second days of holidays and use an organ during services. A synagogue in Bradford was consecrated in 1881 following decades of growth in the city's Jewish immigrant community as a result of the textile industry boom. It was named the Bradford Synagogue of British and Foreign Jews. Its practice was influenced by the radical German reformers rather than the congregations in London and Manchester. Its rabbi, Dr. Joseph Strauss of Germany, brought much more English, a choir comprised of non-Jews, and classical music. Such reforms drew criticism from Jews across the spectrum.[19] As the nineteenth century came to an end, there were three Reform congregations who were scarcely connected. Rabbi Morris Joseph of West London Synagogue, who replaced Marks

[18] Sharot, "Reform and Liberal Judaism in London," 212.
[19] Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change,* 79.

after his retirement, did propose a non-financial federation of the three synagogues in 1898 with the goal of sharing ideas and strengthening Reform in Britain. Bradford was eager to make this federation a reality, but Manchester opposed it.[20] As a result, Reform's growth stagnated for the next few decades. Three attempts at new communities in Brighton, Leeds, and South London had been unfruitful and Liberal Judaism, whose development will be discussed below, had begun to attract Londoners who might otherwise join the Reform community. A community known as the St. George's Jewish Settlement was created in the East End for soldiers returning home after WWI. It was sponsored jointly by West London and the Liberal synagogue but remained fairly traditional in style and was considered neither Reform nor Liberal.

It was not until the 1930's that three new Reform congregations came to life: Glasgow and Hampstead Reform (later known as North Western Reform and then Alyth Gardens) in 1933 and Edgeware the following year. The latter two were created by discontented Jews from traditional communities who had made their way north due to developments in London's public transportation system. Thanks to Rabbi Harold Reinhart, who made a point to travel to newly forming communities to share the principles of Reform, they became Reform. The birth of these three congregations, and especially the two in the suburbs of London, was a tremendous step for Reform Judaism's growth in Britain and nearly doubled the Reform community from its 60-year period of stagnation.[21]

Rabbi Harold Reinhart came to West London Synagogue in 1929 from the United States with **"**radical**"** American views. Among other reforms, he encouraged the community to create closer ties with other Reform communities**.** He was prompted to build a Reform

[20] Ibid, 81.
[21] Ibid, 149-152.

network by the large number of German Jewish refugee children coming to London. Supporting their education had become incredibly expensive and many teachers from the existing Reform and Liberal communities were off to serve the country in its war efforts. The Orthodox governing bodies were taking charge of refugee children's education but still asked for financial support from the Reform congregations. This crisis brought the six Reform synagogues together in 1942 to form the Associated British Synagogues.[22] It was a practical organization rather than an ideological organization--an association of synagogues that sought to solve a pressing problem of political and educational import. Each congregation contributed financially in proportion to its size. As Kersher and Romain note, "This simple motion contained the key elements of the Reform movement's way of operating from then onwards: a central body that was both controlled and funded by autonomous constituents."[23]

The Associated British Synagogues became the Association of Synagogues of Great Britain four years later to show inclusivity for members who had immigrated from other countries and were not British by law. In 1946 the ASGB also drew up a constitution that dealt with practical matters: governance, finance, synagogue growth, rabbinic training, and education.[24] Twelve years later, the name changed to RSGB, the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, in a growing effort to emphasize its religious character and its direction as a group.[25] Throughout the following decades, the group continued to struggle to define itself as such and to determine each synagogue's relationship to the association. In 1985, after some

[22] Rabbi Professor Tony Bayfield, "Who Are Ya? II: Reform Jews" Rosh Hashanah Sermon, London, September 14, 2015, https://frsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ROSH-HASHANAH-SERMON.pdf.

[23] Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 169.

[24] Ibid., 177.

[25] Ibid, 220.

debates over finances, the then chairman Sam Rainsbury remarked, "Whereas we should have been a movement, we have become a collection of synagogues.[26]

Still today, the Movement for Reform Judaism describes itself as "the national umbrella organisation of 41 autonomous synagogue communities."[27] The forty-one Reform synagogues in the UK today are ideologically aligned in certain areas. Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism, Laura Janner-Klausner, says that certain principles remain uniform amongst all Reform synagogues: "Integrity, equality, [and a] balance between tradition and continuing the evolution of Judaism." footnote the quotation. At the same time, many interviewees noted that synagogues that belong to the Reform Judaism umbrella organization still have independence to make their own choices regarding ritual and custom, and often make choices that appeal to congregants from a wide range of Jewish backgrounds, as did Reform Judaism's founding congregations in London and Manchester. Some interviewees used the phrase "broad church" to describe Reform Judaism. One London Reform rabbi noted that each synagogue in her geographic region has a different culture and unique ritual customs, though they all use the same prayer book.[28] For instance, everyone touts inclusivity as a value, but each expresses it differently. A former staffer for the movement noted how different each synagogue was from the next in its expression of the shared value of inclusivity.[29] Upon entering a community, you might ask: Is the building accessible? Are bathrooms gender neutral? Who's being offered a kippah? In each place, you would find different answers. Just as Britain's original Reform synagogues adopted their own means of

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[26] Ibid, 257.

[27] "About Us," Reform Judaism, last modified 2019, https://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/about/. The name change from RSGB to the Reform Movement occurred in 1994 and from the Reform Movement to the Movement for Reform Judaism in 2005, according to Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 361.

[28] Janner-Klausner, interview.

[29] Anthony Rosen, interview by author, London, March 25, 2019.

expressing progressive Judaism, today's Reform synagogues are autonomous communities under one supportive umbrella organization. The movement's history of decentralization aligns with its current reality. This, too, is a form of historical coherence.

One who simply sees the chronology of Reform and Liberal Judaism's developments may infer that the Reform movement was a precursor to the Liberal movement. In many ways it was, for they emerged out of the same milieu of discontent and reformation and the Liberal movement's leaders also arose from the Orthodox world. Liberal Rabbi Lawrence Rigal and Liberal leader Rosita Rosenberg's 2004 account of Liberal Judaism, *The First Hundred Years,* narrates its story through the lens of ideology and principle.[30] At the time of its creation, traditional Jews across Britain proclaimed that they were dissatisfied with the Jewish status quo, particularly when it came to worship style, and that they were willing to step outside the Orthodox box to create their own brand of Jewish spirituality. One such Jew was Lily Montagu, who was a critical figure in shaping the Liberal movement in the UK.

Lily Montagu was born to a prominent London Jewish family of Sephardi origin--the traditional "elite" of the British Jewish community--who practiced Judaism in a traditional Orthodox manner. She was well-educated in Jewish and secular subjects and showed passion for Jewish prayer and text. In her early adult years, she became heavily involved in social work and education for young girls. Her life's experience and community work led her to feel discontent with the uninspiring way that Judaism was practiced by adults and passed on to children. She felt that Judaism should ignite a passion for spirituality and foster a relationship with God. January 1899 was a turning point in Lily's story. She published an article in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* that communicated her frustration with the way

[30] Lawrence Rigal and Rosita Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism: The First Hundred Years* (London: Liberal Judaism, Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 2004).

Judaism was practiced by the meticulous but spiritually devoid "East End Jews" and the apathetic "West End Jews".[31] Two months later, she wrote to select friends and family members to ask vital questions about the essence of Jewish theology, ideology, and practice. This letter prompted Lily's working relationship with Claude Montefiore, who responded to her at length with views that affirmed hers.

Montefiore was a prominent scholar, philosopher, and leader in the British community who was raised in a Sephardic Reform Jewish household. His family was heavily committed to the West London Synagogue and to Jewish philanthropy. As he grew into adulthood, he served in many Jewish communal roles. Together he and Lily were able to harness their unique skills and passions and arrange the first meeting of what would become the Jewish Religious Union , and, eventually, Liberal Judaism, on November 23, 1901.[32] This meeting's participants, a collective of influential ministers, lay leaders, and Lily's family members, spoke about her ideas to initiate services for children and adults, organize lectures, and publicize ideas about the need for change in Jewish life. Their first action was to arrange worship services and create a prayer book. They prioritized accessibility by scheduling Saturday afternoon services, including a great deal of English in the siddur, and limiting the service length. They also prioritized spirituality by including instrumental music, head coverings for men, egalitarian seating, and including both traditional and creative liturgy in their siddur, which allowed worshippers to combine service elements in untraditional constellations. Their first worship service was arranged for the afternoon of Saturday, October 18, 1902. It was held in a central London hotel great room and led by Reverend

[31] Ibid, 16.

[32] Ellen M. Umansky, "The Origins of Liberal Judaism in England: The Contribution of Lily H. Montagu," Hebrew Union College Annual 55 (1984), 316.

Simeon Singer and Claude Montefiore, and between three- and four-hundred participants joined in.[33] The service attracted significant media attention from numerous Jewish publications, most of which noted its strong female attendance and egalitarian seating arrangements, in particular.[34] Like most new movements, the attention that the Jewish Religious Union garnered ranged from positive to negative. The Orthodox responders unsurprisingly dismissed the service as un-Jewish because of its altered English liturgy and mixed seating, among other concerns.

Just weeks after the first service, West London Synagogue extended an invitation to the Jewish Religious Union to hold its Shabbat worship in their facilities. Within a few months, the Jewish Religious Union and West London Synagogue leaders met to work out the details of this possibility but were unable to compromise on ideological issues, the most pressing being the issue of mixed-gender seating.[35] The Jewish Religious Union's unwillingness to compromise on its principled positions meant that it could and would not be absorbed by any preexisting denominations. Seven years later, its principled positions were finally articulated in a twenty-two-page report called "The Jewish Religious Union, Its Principles and Its Future" written by Claude Montefiore.[36] The paper covered principles including human authorship of the *Tanach*, the Union's intention regarding festival observance, a metaphorical approach to messianism and Jewish distinctiveness, among others. The report came alongside an announcement that the Jewish Religious Union was working to set up its own synagogue. These bold actions received both intense criticism and

[33] Sharot, "Reform and Liberal Judaism in London," 219.

[34] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism*, 22.

[35] According to Sharot's article, the Jewish Religious Union rejected West London Synagogue's proposal by eighty votes to twenty-two votes. Sharot, "Reform and Liberal Judaism in London," 220.

[36] C. G. Montefiore, "The Jewish Religious Union, Its Principles and Its Future," *Papers for the Jewish People no. 6,* (London: Jewish Religious Union, 1909).

significant interest. Montefiore and Montagu were ostracized from the more conservative organizations of which they had taken part. At this point in its evolution, the Jewish Religious Union changed its name to The Jewish Religious Union for the Advancement of Liberal Judaism and set up its synagogue, The Liberal Jewish Synagogue. They sought a minister from the United States and found Rabbi Israel Mattuck, a Lithuanian-born rabbi who had come to serve a congregation in New Jersey. According to Rabbi Danny Rich, current Senior Rabbi and Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism, the union's choice to bring Mattuck over from the United States demonstrates its uniquely radical position in the UK's Jewish landscape at the time. "Claude Montefiore went to the states, to CCAR, to find a radical rabbi, and he found Israel Mattuck who was our founding rabbi. Israel Mattuck really shaped our movement because he came out of HUC, out of the radical movement there."[37] Liberal Judaism attracted fairly low numbers in its early years, as the service was "highly anglicized" and charged higher fees than the Orthodox synagogues.[38] As this paper will continue to explore in subsequent sections, Liberal Judaism's particular approach draws an equally particular crowd.

The story of Liberal Judaism's early years reflects themes that continue to permeate its story throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. Liberal Judaism was, from the beginning, an ideologically driven movement. Montagu and Montefiore espoused views that the UK's preexisting Jewish denominations--including Reform Judaism, the most liberal denomination at the time--perceived as radical. The Jewish Religious Union unabashedly and intentionally made choices that reflected these radical views, even with the knowledge that they would receive criticism from the wider Jewish community.

[37] Rich, interview.
[38] Sharot, "Reform and Liberal Judaism in London," 222.

The Union's actions have fulfilled its founders' principles on the subject of inclusivity, in particular, from its genesis. It did so from the very beginning when it made the financially- and institutionally risky decision not to align with West London Synagogue because of its unwillingness to allow mixed gender seating, and the principle of gender equality remained a priority over time. In a time when the British government still denied many of its female citizens the right to vote, the Jewish Religious Union put women on the pulpit.[39] Lily Montagu preached from the pulpit in 1918 and two years later the Council approved a motion for women to lead Shabbat afternoon worship.[40] Almost every Liberal interviewee from my research mentioned that Liberal Judaism has been consistently radical in its inclusivity. Even today, Liberal rabbis were the first rabbis in the UK to officiate same-sex marriages and give interfaith marriages blessings, and it has accepted Jews of both matrilineal and patrilineal descent since 1955. The pathway from the Jewish Religious Union's foundational principle of inclusivity to Liberal Judaism's modern and contemporary work on behalf of inclusivity demonstrates ideological coherence. The idea of ideological coherence figures heavily into the denomination's identity. In *Liberal Judaism: The First Hundred Years,* Rigal and Rosenberg construct a narrative that demonstrates pride in this quality:

> The greatest strength has been the movement's unswerving commitment to a clear ideology [...] Paramount in that ideology is the inclusive nature of Liberal Judaism--the equality of men and women, and the welcoming of sincere proselytes, of the partners in mixed marriages and their children, and of gay and lesbian Jews.[41]

[39] Though women led prayer and sermonized from the pulpit from Liberal Judaism's early days, the first female rabbi to serve a Liberal congregation, Rabbi Baroness Julie Neuberger, was not ordained until 1977. She was the second female rabbi in the UK after Rabbi Jackie Tabick, who was ordained in 1975 and worked for the UK's flagship Reform synagogue, West London Synagogue.

[40] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism,* 60.

[41] Ibid, 290.

Expressed Ideology-Theology

In his piece "The Liturgy of Liberal Judaism," John D. Rayner makes an important assertion about the function of a progressive prayer book. Unlike a traditional prayer book, which is essentially a compilation of all liturgical material from antiquity to today, the selectivity of the material in a progressive prayer book "defines the ideology of the movement by and for which it has been compiled. It shows where the movement stands, or at least where the compilers think that its membership stands, or should stand, on a whole range of issues."[42] Editors of progressive prayer books intentionally add to, subtract from, and "translate" the traditional liturgy into vernacular. These choices communicate a particular ideological approach grounded in religious language--what this study will call an ideological-theological approach--to their constituents, to the non-progressive Jewish world, and to the rest of society. As Judith Plaskow notes in her discussions about feminist theology, "feminist theological reflection is often embedded in ritual and liturgy, fiction and historical research, textual interpretation and midrash."[43] Her theory holds true for other Jewish movements. A particular Jewish movement's "theological reflection" will be "embedded" in all of these artifacts. This study focuses on just a small slice of one of those artifacts, liturgy.

Early in their histories, British Reform and Liberal Judaism both set out to develop new liturgy to reflect their novel ideological-theological approaches and separate themselves from their Jewish contemporaries. David Woolf Marks, Reform Judaism's first minister, created *Forms of Prayer* almost immediately upon taking his post at West London Synagogue in 1841. Though he wrote the siddur for his particular congregation and their

[42] John D. Rayner, "The Liturgy of Liberal Judaism," Limmud Conference, Manchester, December 29, 1997, 1.

[43] Judith Plaskow, "Feminist Theology," Jewish Women's Archive: Sharing Stories, Inspiring Change, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/feminist-theology.

unique mix of Sephardi and Ashkenazi congregants, over time it spread to other Reform synagogues that were established throughout the country and eventually it became the official siddur of the Reform association. It even spread internationally to St. Thomas within a year of its publication.[44] In general, Marks' first version of *Forms of Prayer* approached change conservatively. Unlike his peers in the United States, who made drastic changes to traditional liturgy, particularly in controversial matters like messianism and universalism, Marks' intention was to "reduce the forms of the service to the length required" and to avoid unnecessary repetition.[45] The result was a prayer book that closely resembled the traditional Sephardic rite in form and linguistic style, and its characteristically Sephardic inclusion of the lengthy High Holy Day liturgical poetry. [46] However, two pieces of liturgy stand out as markers of Marks' and the newly formed Reform synagogue's ideological-theological approach: *Aleinu* and the Prayer for the Land of Israel.

The *Aleinu* originally appeared in the additional *musaf* service on Rosh Hashanah and found its way into the conclusion of weekday and Shabbat worship. The text focuses on the people Israel's uniquely close relationship with God. The text praises the Divine Creator of the heavens and earth for sustaining this relationship and prays for all people to accept God's sovereignty. The traditional Hebrew text calls out other nations who "worship vanity and emptiness, and pray to a god who cannot save."[47] It asks God to terminate idolatry and false Gods, and turn all of the wicked back to the sovereign one. Unsurprisingly, the *Aleinu's*

[44] Judah M. Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time: A History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 70.

[45] Eric L. Friedland, *Were Our Mouths Filled With Song: Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy* (Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 95.

[46] Ibid, 89.

[47] Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur: The Lobel Edition* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2006), 180.

particularistic and seemingly anti-Christian message caused controversy in Medieval Europe.[48] Christian attacks on the *Aleinu* and Christian censorship of the text caused Jews to self-censor the prayer by eliminating its controversial portions.[49] So it happened that the *Aleinu's* particularism was revised early in its history by even the most traditional Jews for the sake of security.

It should be no surprise that the modern reformers continued to omit the prayer's problematic statements. The newly emancipated Jews of the reformation "felt themselves to be part of that wider world" and reflected this worldliness in their liturgy by emphasizing universalism rather than particularism.[50] This holds true for the Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews from the East End who joined together to create the West London Synagogue of British Jews, and who employed this descriptor, "British," in their quest to emphasize the importance of their British identity. In Marks' earliest version of *Forms of Prayer* and again in the 1931 edition, the *Aleinu* is reduced to the one traditional paragraph that begins *al kein n'kaveh*.[51] The Hebrew text is not without controversy. An English translation of this Hebrew paragraph reads:

> Therefore, we place our hope in You, LORD our God, that we may soon see the glory of your power, when You will remove abominations from the earth, and idols will be utterly destroyed, when the world will be perfected under the sovereignty of the Almighty, when all humanity will call on Your name, to turn all the earth's wicked toward You.[52]

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[48] Ruth Langer, "The Censorship of Aleinu in Ashkenaz and its Aftermath," in *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy: Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer*, ed.Debra Reed Blank (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 150.

[49] Ibid, 156.

[50] John D. Rayner, "Universalizing Tendencies in Jewish Liturgy," Pamphlet created for the British Association of Jewish Studies Summer Conference (Hatfield College at Durham University, 2003), 2.

[51] Ministers of the West London Synagogue of British Jews, *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship, Volume I: Daily, Sabbath, and Occasional Prayers, sixth edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 152.

[52] Sacks, *The Koren Siddur*, 180.

Interestingly enough, the English "translation" of this paragraph in *Forms of Prayer* avoids mention of idolatry or false Gods. It translates this section of the Hebrew as such:

> We hope in thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily behold thy power and thy glory, when the world will be established under thy kingdom, when all the children of men will call upon thy Name, and thou wilt turn unto thyself all the wicked of the earth.[53]

This English translation avoids any potentially insulting comments about other faith groups. Clearly, Marks assumed that his congregation would not be skilled Hebrew readers. His English interpretation is markedly different from the Hebrew text! Marks' choice to translate the Hebrew in this way proved consistent with his and his congregation's historical position. Jews had achieved emancipation in England in 1833, less than a decade before Marks created his first prayer book. Their position in British society was not yet solidified, despite certain Jews' ability to achieve prominent positions in government.[54] To include a particularistic sentiment in their prayer book, the first significant artifact of the new community's expressed ideology-theology, could give the impression of divided loyalties to the rest of British society. The Jews of the West London Synagogue were wholeheartedly committed to demonstrating their ability to integrate into British society in action and word. As Kershen and Romain explain in their account of Reform Judaism in Britain, "anything which identified the Jew as an outsider [...] was to be discouraged and eradicated during the process of assimilation and acculturation."[55]

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[53] Ministers, *Forms of Prayer*, 152.

[54] For example, in the 1830's and 1840's, various Jewish Londoners were admitted to the Bar, appointed sheriff, became candidates for Parliament, were knighted, and became baronet. From Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 106-164.

[55] Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 96.

Forms of Prayer underwent a significant editorial revision process in 1977 spearheaded by Rabbi Lionel Blue and Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Magonet.[56] This version veered from the 1841 and 1933 editions by including the entirety of the *Aleinu's* original censored Hebrew text. It does not eliminate the statement of chosenness, but instead declares in both Hebrew and English: "It is our duty to praise the Lord of all, to recognise the greatness of the creator of first things, who has chosen us from all peoples by giving us His Torah."[57] This move back to tradition with the *Aleinu* was accompanied by other liturgical changes in a more traditional direction, including restoration of Havdalah prayers, inclusion of the formerly-omitted references to Jerusalem, and prayer for donning of tefillin. After World War II, the movement as a whole trended back towards tradition as immigrants and refugees from post-Shoah Europe yearned to connect with their heritage and with the greater Jewish community.[58]

Aleinu in the 2008 *Forms of Prayer* veers from the 1977 edition to reflect the wide diversity of perspectives that make up the contemporary Reform community. It includes both the version of *Aleinu* that was in the 1977 siddur and an alternative version of the *Aleinu* that includes more universalistic language and eliminates the idea of chosenness. It also includes footnotes that explain its editorial choices. These choices demonstrate the Reform Movement's continued efforts to satisfy its constituents' wide range of ideological-

[56] Rabbi Lionel Blue z"l (of blessed memory) was one of the first two ordinands at Leo Baeck College, along with Rabbi Michael Leigh, and Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Magonet became the College's first principal in 1985. Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Magonet still serves the College as a professor of liturgy. "Our History," Leo Baeck College, https://lbc.ac.uk/about-us/our-history/.

[57] The Assembly of Rabbis of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship: Daily, Sabbath, and Occasional Prayers, Seventh Edition* (The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1977), 167.

[58] Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 225-226.

theological preferences, as it has done for almost two centuries, and encourage "self-understanding, [...] spiritual growth, and [...] religious insight" among its worshippers.[59]

The Reform movement's evolving relationship with Israel throughout history is reflected through its siddur's Prayer for the Land of Israel. The background of this prayer has a rich history; in his namesake prophetic text, Jeremiah implores the exiled people Israel to "seek the welfare of the city...and pray to the Lord on its behalf."[60] The prayer for the welfare of the government, *Hanoten Teshua* ("the one who gives salvation"), has appeared in prayer book manuscripts since the 17th century and the practice of praying for the state has persisted until today in Jewish communities worldwide.[61] Some debate surrounds the question of who wrote the first prayer for Israel, specifically. Many people who write about the prayer believe that it was written in 1948, the year of Israel's statehood, by either S.Y. Agnon or Isaac Halevi Herzog.[62] In the 1950's, *Forms of Prayer* began to include this supplemental Prayer for the Land of Israel to be read after the prayers for the British government.[63] It reads:

> Oh God and God of our fathers we ask thy blessing upon the land of Israel. May her leaders and counsellors be guided by thy wisdom and strengthened by thy help. May the people of Israel proclaim the message of righteousness and peace to all mankind so that out of Zion may go forth the law and thy word from Jerusalem. Amen.

This prayer is much shorter than the 1948 Israeli composition and reflects the reformers' efforts to be brief in their worship, their allegiance to Britain, and a hesitance to reveal any controversial politics in their siddur. This Prayer for the Land of Israel is starkly different

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[59] Eric L. Friedland, "A Sectarian Rite Gone Mainstream and Cutting-Edge: The Blossoming of 'Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship Volume I", *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Autumn 2011), 26.

[60] Jeremiah 29:7, translation from Sefaria.com.

[61] Barry Schwartz, " Hanoten Teshua' The Origin of the Traditional Jewish Prayer for the Government," *Hebrew Union College Annual* Vol. 57 (1986), pp. 113-120 (8 pages), 113.

[62] Tracy Frydberg, "Mystery of who wrote the 'Prayer for the State of Israel' is finally solved," *The Times of Israel,* April 18, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/mystery-over-who-wrote-the-prayer-for-the-state-of-israel-is-finally-solved/.

[63] Friedland, *Were Our Mouths Filled With Song,* 104.

from the original text; it makes no mention of a return to Zion, its redemptive character, or militaristic success. What it does not include tells a story about its writers' approach to the new state. Even its name, the Prayer for the Land of Israel, rather than the State of Israel, just years after Israel's declaration of statehood, confirms the reformers' unease about publishing a supplement with that name. Political Zionism "was a strictly personal matter and not subject to the censorship of synagogal bodies."[64]

The 1977 version of *Forms of Prayer* presents a significantly different prayer for Israel than the 1950 supplement, necessitated by the reality of violence between Israel and her neighbors. Though they leave it untitled--it simply sits between the prayers for Britain and the prayers for healing--the prayer itself is quite a bit longer than the first version. One standout new line in this version states: "May the spirit of friendship and understanding remove all fears and heal all wounds."[65] As Eric Friedland notes in his analysis of the prayer's trajectory over time, both the prayer for Britain's government and the prayer for Israel "more accurately reflect modern geopolitical realities [...] for a more realistic awareness of physical insecurity, hostility without, and division within."[66] The 2008 version is an exact replica of the 1977 version, demonstrating the historical coherence of the movement's ideology. It also reflects the movement's ongoing hesitance to alter liturgy and alienate its more traditional constituents; unlike in 1977, the movement sensed no pressing need to change the prayer text, so it retained the previous version. However, one change was necessary. The 2008 prayer book includes headings for each prayer and this one is clearly labeled Prayer for the *State* of Israel. Over sixty years after Israel declared statehood, it is

[64] Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 115.
[65] The Assembly of Rabbis, *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship, Seventh Edition*, 161.
[66] Ibid, 105.

reflected in the Reform siddur. It is also worth noting that the Prayer for the State of Israel in the 2008 version diverges from much of the rest of the siddur because it does not contain any footnotes. This reflects, once again, the movement's hesitance to reveal more about its political leanings in its expressed ideological-theological approach. Senior Rabbi to the movement, Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, noted in our interview that, overall, the Reform community advocates a "very liberal, open, robust Zionism" but does not always feel a "real love in your kishkes for Israel."[67] Though some of the major Reform synagogues are doing Israel programming, "it's hard for people--there's ducking and diving around the hard issues" because of the synagogues' desire not to alienate any of their constituents by advocating particular Israel politics.[68] As noted by one London rabbi who has served both Reform and Liberal congregations, "whatever one says about Israel, you'll upset one half of the congregation and please the other."[69]

Unlike the Reform movement, the Liberal movement did not publish a prayer book until two decades after its creation, though they did create a seventy-two-page service brochure for use at their first service in 1902 that grew more substantial in the following years. Founding minister Israel Mattuck edited the first version of the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* in 1926. Subsequent versions were released in 1937, 1967, and 1995, and Liberal rabbis are currently working on a new version to be released soon.

It comes as a surprise that the Liberal movement, which tends to see itself as radical, includes a nearly-traditional version of the censored *Aleinu* in its 1967 *Service of the Heart*. I specify "nearly-traditional" because of one significant difference: it replaces the statement

[67] Janner-Klausner, interview.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Kope, interview.

"that God has not made us like the nationals of other lands, nor placed us like other families of the earth" with the positive statement, "for he chose us to make known his unity."[70]John D. Rayner edited the siddur along with Rabbi Chaim Stern, a rabbi from the states who came to serve the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. He notes that one of their goals in creating the 1967 edition was to unify Liberal constituents from both radical and traditional backgrounds; many of the provincial congregations were more traditionally-minded than their urban counterparts and sought a slightly more encompassing liturgy.[71] In the case of the *Aleinu*, the value of inclusivity was prioritized over innovation. Still, Rayner and Stern strove to retain "intellectual honesty" in their siddur, and thus replaced what could be construed as an insult to other nations in the *Aleinu's* opening paragraph with a positive statement of identity.[72]

The 1995 edition of *Siddur Lev Chadash* presents an almost identical text of *Aleinu* with a notable change in the English translation-interpretation: Gender-neutral language. This change takes into consideration the recent decades' wave of feminist Jewish scholarship and alters all of its formerly masculine language to gender-neutral language, using a greater diversity of nouns to describe God and altering some of the Hebrew syntax to avoid gendering pronouns. Instead of translating the Hebrew word *melech* to "king," for instance, the English translation uses "Sovereign." Instead of translating *baruch hu* to "blessed is He," the English text says, "ever to be praised." The English text exercised creativity and took some liberties to craft gender-neutral English translations of the Hebrew text. The Liberal movement's efforts to use gender-neutral pronouns and imagery coheres with their historically radical and inclusive roots. In his 1995 address to the Rabbinic Conference of the

[70] *Service of the Heart: Weekday Sabbath and Festival Services and Prayers for Home and Synagogue* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 1967), 364.

[71] John D. Rayner, "The Liturgy of Liberal Judaism," 7.

[72] Ibid, 8.

Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues about the new siddur, Rabbi Charles Middleburgh noted that the change to "gender-inclusive" language could still make some members uncomfortable, but that it was "right to make the change [...] on a human level."[73] The change also reflects their tendency to follow in the footsteps of the American Reform movement's progress. The 1978 American Reform High Holy Day prayer book, *Gates of Repentance*, was the US movement's first attempt at gender-neutral God language. Perhaps had Liberal Judaism published a new edition of their prayer book sooner than 1995, it would have made the linguistic change earlier, but it had just come out with its newest edition the year prior to the American change. The UK's Reform movement introduced gender-neutral language in its 2008 siddur but began extensive discussions about this topic almost a decade earlier at its 2000 Rabbinic Kallah.[74] An anonymous source confirmed that, "since at least the 1990s, some Reform rabbis and *shlichei tzibbur* (prayer leaders) in some congregations informally replaced problematic terms with inclusive variants. So reading 'ancestors' instead of 'forefathers', 'sovereign' for 'king', [and] adding in the *imahot*."[75]

Similar to *Forms of Prayer's* 1950's insert, *Service of the Heart* from 1967 reflects a hesitance to make any claims about Israel that could be misconstrued as misplaced allegiance, even two decades after the declaration of Israel's statehood. In two of the five Shabbat morning service options available in the prayer book, brief mentions of Israel's well-being follow the prophetic Haftarah reading. One service devotes only two sentences to "our fellow-Jews in the land of Israel" and delivers a universalist message about blessing for "all

[73] Charles H. Middleburgh on behalf of John D. Rayner, "Introducing Siddur Lev Chadash" (Speech, Delivered at the ULPS Biennial Conference, Bournemouth, April 30, 1995), https://lbc.ac.uk/direct-archives/lectures/L475-L538/513A.pdf

[74] Anonymous, interview by author, online communication, January 14, 2020.

[75] Ibid.

mankind."[76] Another service integrates wishes for Jews in our "own land, where we worship you in freedom" with prayers for Jews who work to build in the "ancient birthplace of our faith."[77] This universalism is characteristic of Liberal Judaism's ideology at the time of *Service of the Heart's* publishing and much of the siddur reflects this tendency.[78] Danny Rich, Liberal Judaism's Senior Rabbi and Chief Executive, explains that that movement's founders "believed, as did most of the progressive Jewish world at one time, that we were going to be Jewish citizens of the world and that Zionism was a return to the Judaism of a tribal thing rather than an international thing and would encourage antisemitism."[79] The movement's drive to be "citizens of the world" persists through its liturgy.

The 1995 edition of the Liberal siddur includes an English-only Prayer for the State of Israel that mimics some of the tropes from the original Israeli version, including references to God as Rock and Redeemer and prayers for its leaders. Unsurprisingly, it excludes references to Israel as sprouting of the Jewish peoples' redemption or the state's military success. In alignment with Liberal Judaism's 1992 Affirmation that asserts support for a two-state solution, the 1995 prayer calls on the state's leaders "to develop the land for the benefit of all its inhabitants, and to implement the Prophetic ideals of liberty and justice."[80] Although the prayer does not outwardly name the movement's political position on statehood, its poetry reflects the movement's stance on how the state ought to treat all of its inhabitants.

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[76] *Service of the Heart (1967),* 174.

[77] Ibid, 193.

[78] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism*, 122; Rayner, "Universalising Tendencies." Rayner's article outlines ten ways in which progressive prayer books, and especially Liberal prayer books, have universalized many liturgies that have traditionally particularistic tendencies. For instance, in the morning blessings, the progressive liturgies changed a negative statement about Gentiles to a positive statement about Israelites. In the prayer for the sick, the progressive liturgies altered the prayer to include *all* "the sick," not just those from the "people Israel" who are sick.

[79] Rich, interview.

[80] *Siddur Lev Chadash: Services and Prayers for Weekdays and Sabbaths, Festivals and Various Occasions* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 1995), 485.

However, some still feel that the prayer does not adequately communicate the Liberal stance on Israel's current situation. One London rabbi wrote a prayer for Israel to use in her congregation because the siddur's prayer "Didn't feel relevant anymore. It didn't address itself to the real difficulties of peace and conflict and what needs to happen."[81] Her congregation readily accepted her new prayer and "nobody's complained so far."[82] The movement tends to welcome creative liturgy for particular occasions, both challenging and joyous, and many Liberal rabbis innovate for their congregations' worship services to reflect current realities and worldviews.

An exploration of the Reform and Liberal liturgical developments over time reveals insight into their expressed ideological-theological coherence. The development of *Aleinu* shows how each movement has addressed Jewish particularism and chosenness and the development of prayers for Israel demonstrate each movement's relationship with Zionist ideas. In its initial decades, the reformers of West London Synagogue felt uncomfortable with particularism and chosenness and, thus, eliminated any controversial statements from *Aleinu*. But as the individual Reform synagogues formed an association with a wide range of approaches, and as Jews became more integrated into British society, they turned back to a more particularistic version of the text. On the other hand, the Liberal movement's choice to keep the traditional censored version of *Aleinu* demonstrates the movement's core value of inclusivity from its beginning. Both movements' Prayers for the State of Israel affirm their connection to Israel without disaffirming their allegiance to Great Britain. However, throughout its iterations, the Reform prayer book stayed much more generic in its approach

[81] Kope, interview.
[82] Ibid.

to Zionism, while the Liberal prayer book's Prayer for the State of Israel implies compassion for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

One should not be surprised that the Reform movement's choices seem to be influenced most strongly by historical currents and the image it strove to project to the wider community in each era. Its liturgical choices also continue to reflect its "broad church" tendencies--its desire to make decisions that satisfy the widest range of its constituents. Liberal Judaism's approach to the prayers similarly shows a desire to be inclusive of its membership's range of ideological-theological viewpoints, but not without prioritizing ideological-theological integrity. Inclusivity and ideological integrity manifest as key pillars of the Liberal movement's identity once again.

Institution

While the prior two sections demonstrated aspects of the movements' historical and ideological coherence, this section will elucidate the two movements' efforts toward social and institutional coherence, and each movement's ability to act cooperatively among itself toward shared goals. Both organizations have central offices with full and part-time staff who manage their general functioning in areas such as finance, operations, youth programming, and public relations. They also have adjunct bodies composed of their rabbis and cantors, the Assembly of Reform Rabbis and the Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors, plus Reform and Liberal *Batei Din* (rabbinic courts).[83] Rabbis for both movements primarily receive their

[83] Cantor Zoe Jacobs, ordained by HUC-JIR in 2009, was the first Reform cantor in the UK and entered the Assembly of Reform Rabbis that year. Cantor Tamara Wolfson was ordained by HUC-JIR in 2018 and her hire at two Liberal synagogues prompted Liberal Judaism's Conference of Liberal Rabbis to change its name to the Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors.

training at Leo Baeck College, the UK's progressive Jewish seminary.[84] The College was founded and originally housed by West London Synagogue, but later moved to the Sternberg Centre and came under the jurisdiction and funding of both Reform and Liberal Judaism. In order to examine the institutions' coherence, we must ask: How do the administrative and clerical bodies of the Reform and Liberal movements act cooperatively toward shared goals?

The concept of a Reform rabbinic organizing body and of a *Beit Din* (rabbinic court) were both first brought up at the 1942 gathering of Reform leaders. The Assembly of Ministers, later known as the Assembly of Rabbis, was established five years later as the rabbinic organizing body. There was, on the other hand, considerable discomfort about a centralized *Beit Din*; after all, "the lack of an organised Reform movement until 100 years after the first synagogue means that individual congregations were accustomed to both administrative and religious independence."[85] The conflict over the Beit Din was so extreme that Rabbi Reinhart established it on his own in 1948 and the Assembly took two years to fully recognize it. At first, synagogues left marriage and divorce to the *Beit Din* but retained control over conversion cases. By 1954 the *Beit Din* was the primary centralized body that made all status decisions for all Reform synagogues. Yet tension about the particulars of dealing with converts persisted. The Conference (what is now called the Reform Judaism), the Assembly, and the *Beit Din* all believed themselves to be the appropriate decision-makers. "The underlying tension over who determined religious issues--the rabbis or the movement--remained unresolved and was to surface in later decades."[86] The tension was particularly strong during the 1970's debate regarding ritual immersion for converts. Once

[84] Reform and Liberal synagogues in the UK also accept rabbis trained at other seminaries, such as the Hebrew Union College.

[85] Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 198.

[86] Ibid, 200.

again, the question arose about whether the Assembly or the Association held authority in religious issues. A conversation about this question resulted in some clarification about the division of roles and increased communication between the rabbis and lay leaders.

In its early days, the Assembly of Ministers banded together to sort out other logistical concerns. They devised a pension plan for the ministers and debated calendrical issues. They also set out to create a way to train future ministers for Reform congregations. After some debate about whether to join in this effort with the Liberals, the Reform ministers rejected the idea and decided to form a rabbinic course on their own. Each congregation added five shillings to their membership bills to help fund the project and increase awareness about the need to train ministers for the future. The college was named the Jewish Theological College. It was inaugurated on September 30, 1956 at West London Synagogue. Two months later, the name was changed to Leo Baeck College after Dr. Baeck's death to honor Baeck, who had emigrated to the UK after the war and was involved in the College's development.[87]

The Association also served congregants from all of their member synagogues through their work with children's religious education and teacher training. It provided resources, both tangible ones and human resources; educational professionals traveled to religion schools to help them write syllabi and give tutorials on instruction methods. The focus on youth extended to youth programming, camps, and away weekends. Youth work became a primary activity of the Association.[88]

Another activity of the Association in its early days was supporting and establishing new communities. The Expansion Committee consulted with burgeoning communities and

[87] "Our History," Leo Baeck College, https://lbc.ac.uk/about-us/our-history/.
[88] Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 204-206.

provided them with resources, including prayer books and preachers. The Expansion Committee became the Congregational Development Committee in 1967 and expanded its assistance to all Reform congregations. It was successful and the Reform synagogues saw great growth in its membership over the course of the mid-20th century, and especially in the 1970's. In 1978 alone, about 1,000 people joined Reform synagogues, bringing the total number of Reform adults in Great Britain to 21,000![89] This growth propelled the Association to appoint a General Secretary (later known as Executive Director), Raymond Goldman, to oversee the Assembly's administration and lead a major institutional reorganization.[90] Over time, it created even more specialized committees to support the Assembly's range of responsibilities. In return, the congregations that could afford to do so continued to pay membership subscriptions to the Assembly, though these costs continued to increase and frustrate both the congregations who were in fiscal binds and those who were not.

In the 1980's, the RSGB moved from a room at West London Synagogue to what is now called the Sternberg Centre. As to be expected in the case of a significant purchase of property and move, there was tension over the relocation's financial repercussions, particularly from small and less financially secure congregations outside of London. The funds were eventually raised and the centre grew to house other Jewish gathering places, including the first Reform Jewish day school in the UK and Leo Baeck College. Rabbi Tony Bayfield became the centre's director in early 1983 (and later became the head of RSGB). From here, the RSGB's work was carried out in a dedicated, unified, and purposeful space. Its education and youth work expanded, publications were created and distributed, liturgy

[89] Ibid, 245.

[90] Jack Wertheimer, "Great Britain", in *American Jewish Year Book 1995, Volume 95*, ed. David Singer and Ruth R. Seldin (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1995), 271.

was produced, and the Assembly met. Though they had established themselves as an organization with an intentional space of its own, the RSGB and Assembly did not tend to take unified stances on current issues. Rabbi Bayfield urged them to establish a voice but coming to consensus with the whole group was time consuming and cumbersome. "Rabbis and laity [were] equally keen to preserve autonomy and avoid any religious regimentation."[91]

In 1992, the RSGB decided to pursue an organizational restructuring in light of the financial recession. One major goal of the project was to create greater coherence between the RSGB and its constituent synagogues "through real empowerment via democratic structures and through better communication with the mass membership," and through more face-to-face outreach to congregations.[92]

Thirty years later, has this institutional coherence been achieved? Have the movement and the congregations been able to unify in a manner that allows them to work together productively on shared goals? Opinions on this vary amongst Reform leaders. Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi to the movement, believes that the movement and its constituents have melded to create a unity in full support of its congregations: "The institution of Reform Judaism doesn't matter, really. It's a mirage. We're here to serve congregations and shouldn't have an existence of our own that's a being of our own." She said that the movement tries to eliminate top down management and decision making. In fact, she said that the organization would dismantle if that was in the best interest of the congregations.[93] However, she also said that the movement often gets blamed for actions with which

[91]Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 341.
[92] Ibid, 352.
[93]Janner-Klausner, interview.

Assembly rabbis disagree. This implies that the institution does have a being of its own that has acted contrary to the wishes of members of the Assembly.

Another rabbi in the movement who serves a large London synagogue reflects Janner-Klausner's implication that the movement and the Assembly find themselves in tension on some issues. She notes: "I think more recently there have been moments of conflict which have stemmed from, I think, a frustration where it has felt sometimes that the movement were working against us rather than for us, which was not intentional." She gives a recent example of a student who was supposed to be a staff member on the youth program's Israel Tour and it was taken away from her for political reasons. The student, Nina Morris-Evans, had attended a "Kaddish for Gaza" event at which young British Jews recited the Kaddish prayer, the prayer for the deceased, on behalf of sixty-two Palestinians (fifty of whom were subsequently found to be associated with Hamas) killed by violence in Gaza. Their recitation was intended as a public way to decry the Israeli occupation and draw attention to the violence inflicted by the State of Israel.[94] It sparked great upset amongst British Jewry, including the Reform movement, which held that the recitation represented a more extreme position on Israel than it could espouse. The Reform institutions initially believed that Morris-Evans could continue to lead the tour if she received mentoring from Janner-Klausner, but eventually decided that they could not "arrive at a position of certainty that [her] leading tour is in the best interests of the participants."[95] The rabbi with whom I spoke believes that the movement did wrong by the student because it was more concerned about its reputation amongst the broader Jewish community--the movement erred on the

[94] Rosa Doherty, "Reform youth leader who attended Gaza Kaddish is dropped from Israel tour," *The Jewish Chronicle*, July 2, 2018. https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/no-israel-tour-for-kaddish-for-gaza-participant-1.466421

[95] Ibid.

conservative side of Israel politics in this instance--than about the student's well-being. The student's home congregation was one of the few that spoke up on her behalf and, in the end, the movement made a final decision in spite of the student and her congregation's protests. One might wonder if this would have been the case if other congregations had united in support of this student? In this case, a lack of unity in their ideological approaches about Israel, in addition to lack of communication between the institution's branches, stirred up controversy among the movement and its congregations. It is important to note that Rabbi Danny Rich of LJ decided to allow Morris-Evans to staff a Liberal Judaism Israel tour. To be sure, this was not without pushback from Liberal colleagues and board members who were upset that Rich made the decision without their input.[96] Perhaps not surprisingly, the Liberal movement's most senior leader was not timid about bringing on young adult leadership with ideology that strayed from the more widely-accepted Jewish position on Israel as a matter of principle. In fact, a number of other LJY-Netzer (the Liberal youth movement) staffers attended Kaddish for Gaza with Morris-Evans. Following a massive backlash from other young Reform Israel tour leaders, Reform Judaism issued an apology about how they handled the case.[97] Still, the situation left a bad taste in the mouth of many Reform leaders and lay people from both sides of the issue.[98]

While the movement intervenes in some situations that its constituents find inappropriate, some say the reverse, that it also steps back more than it ought to. One rabbi notes that the movement tends to leave too much autonomy to communities in areas in which

[96] Elizabeth Sher, interview by author, London, February 28, 2019.

[97] "Reform 'sincerely apologises' for 'hurt caused' in removing Israel tour leader," *Jewish News* from *Times of Israel*, July 25, 2018, https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/reform-sincerely-apologises-for-removing-israel-tour-leader-over-gaza-kaddish/.

[98] Sher, interview.

it could provide valuable support. For instance, as baby boomers begin to age out of their rabbinic roles, many communities find themselves with rabbis who can no longer serve their needs in the best way possible. Instead of helping to facilitate smooth rabbinic transitions, the movement has stood back and unintentionally let these communities suffer. One rabbi notes that "the movement could achieve a better balance of intervention versus allowing autonomy. They need to do what's right and make bolder decisions instead of being apologetic for the synagogues that might not get on board."[99] A former RSGB staffer echoes the sentiment that the movement and communities are unsure about how to best interact. He says that there have been "major discussions...I was going to use the word fight! [laughs] about the synagogues' relationship to movement."[100]

The Assembly of Rabbis itself seems to have difficulty achieving ideological coherence. This may not be surprising given the movement's historically broad ideological framework. At their monthly meetings at the Sternberg Centre's Manor House, they mainly discuss practical considerations, like remuneration and recruitment. When they do make time to discuss ideological current issues, the conversations tend to take a long course. The movement is hesitant to speak on an issue publicly if there is any dissent within the Assembly, so there tends to be more silence than speaking up on the movement's part. One rabbi says that the "process takes so long they "miss the moment" to make their voices heard.[101]

The Assembly is still working on developing social coherence, according to one of the Assembly's younger rabbis:

[99] Rabbi Claire Langerman, interview by author, London, March 19, 2019.
[100] Rosen, interview.
[101] Langerman, interview.

> I'm not sure it's as collegial as it could be or should be […] there's a familiarity between everybody, a knowledge of everybody. There's clearly a group of people that all know each other. Do they feel safe with each other? Are they friends with each other? Not really. I think I've watched the culture of the Assembly change quite a lot since I've been in it. I think thirteen years ago there was a kind of old guard of the rabbinic Assembly who were the older male rabbis who gave it a bit of a different culture that was a bit more...you were a bit more nervous to say something in case you were told you were wrong, which doesn't, I don't think, exist now.[102]

The Assembly's social and ideological incoherence seem to walk hand in hand. Were the Assembly able to engage in meaningful and open dialogue about their ideological differences, perhaps they would be able to create unified statements that reflect their range of positions. Were they more aligned ideologically, they may be able to find more common ground on which to relate to each other when interacting socially and professionally. However, from its very beginning, the movement's constituents represented a wide range of approaches to Jewish tradition and felt connected to the movement in varying degrees of intensity. The Assembly's social and institutional coherence, or lack thereof, reflect its history.

Unlike the Reform institution, which developed after its first six congregations were founded, the Liberal institution was the basis of its founding and existed before any Liberal congregations were created. This institutional chronology plays a role in the union's coherence; from its very first meeting of twelve prominent Jews on November 23, 1901, the group united over ideological concerns. At their second meeting, they appointed Montefiore as president, Reverend Singer, Mr. Jessel and Miss Montagu as vice presidents, and Mr. Spielmann as secretary and treasurer. They also agreed on a name: the Jewish Religious Union.[103] The Committee grew quickly and proceeded to arrange worship services and a

[102] Ibid.
[103] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism,* 19.

prayer pamphlet. Within eight years, Montefiore published a manifesto entitled *The Jewish Religious Union, Its Principles and Its Future* on the union's behalf. Shortly after, they changed the name of Jewish Religious Union to "The Jewish Religious Union for the Advancement of Liberal Judaism."[104] There was a backlash against both the manifesto and the name change, particularly from traditional Jews and the liberally-minded East End branch which felt that the West End branch was excluding it, or its members.. Efforts to build the union's activities in the West End continued to gain traction and soon the Liberal Jewish Synagogue was built there, spearheaded by Rabbi Israel Mattuck from the U.S.

Initially after the founding of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, the leadership of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and Jewish Religious Union were the same but their memberships were different. A report was issued in 1913 to create more clarity around the union and the synagogue's respective roles and differentiate them from one another. While the union, with Montagu at the helm, spearheaded most of the propaganda of Liberal Judaism's ideals throughout Great Britain, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue produced most of its prayer material and interacted with Reform communities.[105] From its founding, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue was asked to contribute financially to the union in greater quantities than other synagogues in the union. One Liberal rabbi notes: "The Liberal Jewish Synagogue has always been the largest synagogue and therefore not necessarily dependent on liberal Judaism but necessary for the survival of liberal Judaism because, of course, the movement requires synagogues to pay a levy towards them."[106] In these early decades and still today, the Jewish Religious Union used much of its budget to build communities in provincial areas,

[104] Ibid, 40-43.
[105] Ibid, 94.
[106] Rabbi Linda Kope, interview by author, London, February 21, 2019.

provide those congregations with ministers, and create educational resources and training programs for them.

From early on, the Jewish Religious Union met regularly for meetings, services, and Teacher's Conferences. Its leadership was comprised of an Executive committee, led by a Chairperson (formerly known as the Deputy President and held by founding Rabbi Israel Mattuck), and various committees in charge of separate functions like education and publication. Today there are ten board members with distinct responsibilities.[107] Rabbi Sidney Brichto was appointed Executive Director in 1964 when the Jewish Religious Union's leadership decided that a rabbi should serve in the executive role. Brichto's appointment was accompanied by a big move - the office, which had been in the Liberal Jewish Synagogue building since its founding, moved to the West Central congregation's building at Whitfield Street, which is now known as the Montagu Centre.[108] The Montagu Centre houses all of the functions of Liberal Judaism, the institution, with sixteen staff: the Israel desk, youth programming, publications, the Senior Rabbi/Chief Executive's office, education, and so on.[109] All of these components of the institution intend to serve the congregations and their members. Some do so more directly than others. The youth movement, for instance, operates on a movement-wide scale by running weekends and summer camp for all of the movement's young people. Education, on the other hand, tends to serve congregations directly by providing each synagogue's religion school with resources.

To be sure, though the movement has a wide geographical reach (all the way to Copenhagen!), its membership is about one-third the size of Reform Judaism's. Rosenberg,

[107] "Who's Who," Liberal Judaism, https://www.liberaljudaism.org/who-we-are/whos-who/
[108] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism,* 201.
[109] Rabbi Danny Rich, interview by author, London, February 27, 2019.

former Executive of the movement, wonders if the smaller numbers can be attributed to external forces or to the waning of Liberal Judaism's "pioneering spirit."[110] A number of my interviewees attributed Liberal Judaism's smaller numbers to its focus on building communities in provincial areas with fewer Jews, a task on which it focused since its early days. These interviewees also mentioned the Liberal Judaism's radical ideology as a contributing factor to its smaller size. Its ideological nature attracts a more niche membership. Though remaining ideologically coherent is not always fiscally beneficial, the movement's narrative still places ideology at the helm of its institutional choices. On the "What is Liberal Judaism?" page of its website, Liberal Judaism quotes the late Rabbi John D Rayner: "Rabbi John D Rayner z"l once said that it is better to be few and right than many and wrong."[111] In *Liberal Judaism: The First Hundred Years* Rosenberg writes: "We believe the message is still the same as it ever was."[112]

Like the Reform Rabbinic Assembly, the Liberal Rabbinic Conference (previously known as the Ministers' Conference) is both part of, and separate from, the movement's central institution. It meets separately once a month as its own distinct group with its own agenda, but is intricately tied to the movement's staff and attends to movement-wide issues that affect its members. Danny Rich, the Senior Rabbi and Chief Executive to the movement, and the acting rabbinic chair of the Conference both attend Conference meetings and Liberal Judaism board meetings to ensure continuity and connection between the two bodies. Also like the Reform Rabbinic Assembly, the Conference has had to navigate the tension between speaking as individuals and speaking as a unified whole. This tension first came to light in a

[110] Rigal and Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism,* 291.
[111] "What is Liberal Judaism?" Liberal Judaism, https://www.liberaljudaism.org/who-we-are/what-is-liberal-judaism/
[112] Ibid.

significant way when the movement appointed its first Executive Director in 1963. Rabbi Sidney Brichto found himself in a bind in many instances when he published personal opinions because outside groups took them as the opinions of Liberal Judaism at large. These situations angered his Liberal rabbinic colleagues. One such case occurred in 1987 when Brichto wrote a piece about the Orthodox and Liberal *Batei Din* standardizing practices regarding questions of personal religious status. Other Liberal rabbis were particularly upset by this article because they had spent a great deal of time and effort differentiating their standards about status from traditional Judaism's. Rosita Rosenberg writes in *The First Hundred Years*, the Liberal movement's autobiography, "Although the thorny problem of who speaks for the Liberal movement still remains unsolved, good will and consultation has so far ensured that such a situation has not recurred."[113]

Have good will and consultation superseded the movement's challenges in navigating this tension? One rabbi at a large London synagogue remarks that the Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors is, in fact, a group with much good will. "There's a special feeling of support amongst ourselves," he says.[114] Another rabbi makes a point to mention his regard for his Liberal colleagues and the excitement he feels about their yearly away weekend, at which they cherish the time to learn together and strengthen their relationships.[115] The decrease in tension between the movement and the Conference, however, has less to do with good will and consultation than with practical considerations, according to one Liberal rabbi. He believes that the Conference now lacks the confidence and decisiveness to speak up about the world as Conferences of previous generations did. Though rabbis still do plenty of that

[113] Ibid, 189.
[114] Rabbi Scott Lieber, interview by author, London, March 8, 2019.
[115] Rabbi Alan Bowman, interview by author, London, February 27, 2019.

individually, the Conference speaks up less because the Senior Rabbi and Executive Director, Danny Rich, has taken that role more. "He speaks for us all [...] we're relatively passive as a Conference."[116] Perhaps there is something to be said for the strength of Liberal Judaism's social and ideological coherence in all of this; the Conference seems to be amenable to letting Rabbi Rich speak for them because they trust him to represent the collective and, for the most part, he accurately represents their views. Alternatively, one might argue that the ideological coherence of the movement has diminished over time. If the movement continued to be as ideologically sound as it was in the past, the rabbis might be just as assertive about their stances on worldly issues as their rabbinic predecessors.

We return to the question posed at the beginning of this section about institutional coherence: How do the administrative and clerical bodies of the Reform and Liberal movements act cooperatively toward shared goals? Our examination of the movements suggests that the Reform administrative and clerical bodies have, throughout their history and today, faced difficulty acting cooperatively toward shared goals because of their wide range of ideological approaches and the Reform association's historical inclination towards synagogal autonomy. On the contrary, the Liberal movement originated as an ideologically and institutionally coherent body and still acts this way today. Both of these realities emphasize, once again, that the movements' historical building blocks have paved the pathways to their current realities.

[116] Lieber, interview.

Self-Perceptions of Reform and Liberal Jews

After exploring the ways in which Liberal and Reform Judaism have achieved historical, ideological-theological, and institutional coherence, we turn to contemporary Liberal and Reform Jews' reflections on and perceptions of their cultural differences. Though many interviewees suggested that the differences between the movements are imperceptible and I had difficulty drawing conclusions about cultural themes during my synagogue visits, a closer look at my interviewees' comments reveals that Liberal Jews do, in fact, perceive themselves as quite distinctive, while Reform Jews embrace their "broad church" history. A notable number of my interviewees initiated a conversation about the history of the movements' unsuccessful attempts to merge. These conversations further elucidated key themes about their self-perceptions as distinct from each other.

My twelve interviews with Reform and Liberal leaders focused in part on questions of culture. While I was unable to identify aspects of culture that were entirely coherent across each movement's synagogues, there were some cultural themes that reached across both movements. Every congregational rabbi that I interviewed, both Reform and Liberal, claimed their synagogue to be welcoming and focused on building community. Many interviewees spoke about their efforts to create an infrastructure that facilitates a caring community, their congregation's diversity (especially synagogues in the heart of the city), and about their robust social action programming. However, the level of formality, norms such as dress, musical style, and political transparency, and the level of accessibility vary widely between congregations in both movements. The social culture and the worship culture are not even necessarily coherent in a single synagogue. One rabbi described his congregation as "heimische" and warm in social contexts but spoke about the strong sense of decorum during

worship.[117] My analysis of these twelve interviews led me to conclude that one would be hard pressed to create definitive generalizations about each movement's culture. As one rabbinical student noted: "From working at (synagogue X), I don't feel equipped to work at (synagogue Y) and they're right down the road."[118] Another interviewee says, in response to the question about a unified movement culture, "I think the unifying factors are much more practical, in terms of, you know, we use the same siddur, but we use them really differently. I'm not sure there are many unifying factors."[119] And yet another interviewee claimed that "all generalizations that one could make about a movement could be defied by another example."[120]

My interviewees' remarks about culture illustrated that the two movements share a great deal in common. However, despite the apparent similarities, it became strikingly clear that Liberal and Reform Jewish leaders believe that the movements are and have always been distinct from each other. Many interviewees related this deeply held conviction when they spoke about the interaction between the two movements. Six interviewees brought up the idea of a merger between Reform and Liberal Judaism without any prompting from my questions. This section will give an overview of the movements' history of interaction and how their discussions about the idea of a merger today reflect their perceptions of their own distinctiveness. As it will demonstrate, the movements still see themselves as products of their particular histories.

The history of the movements' relationship ebbs and flows. They have acted as both partners and rivals at different points of time in the last 120 years, while consistently

[117] Lieber, interview.
[118] Sher, interview.
[119] Langerman, interview.
[120] Rabbi Nancy Helms, interview by author, London, February 26, 2019.

maintaining separate identities. As aforementioned, the Jewish Religious Union and West London considered joining together at the very genesis of the Jewish Religious Union's formation but could not come to agreements about particular customs such as gendered seating. Ideological and logistical disagreements have peppered their relationship over time, including a number of occasions on which the movements felt competition about the establishment of new progressive synagogues in towns with small Jewish populations. Yet, on numerous occasions they cooperated for the benefit of themselves and people in need. Perhaps the greatest example of this early on in their history is the Settlement Synagogue, which operated for almost half a century thanks to the two movements' cooperation.[121] They joined forces before the Second World War to create educational material for child refugees and continued to work together on education matters until quite recently; together they operated the CJE, the Centre for Jewish Education, at the Manor House. The rabbis of both movements united to form the Council of Reform and Liberal Rabbis in 1968, a council whose intention is said to be more positive than its impact.[122] The two movements share staff to this day on both the Israel desk and the college chaplaincy department.[123] And, of course, they both support and employ rabbis who were trained at Leo Baeck College. The movements cooperate on numerous other occasions--too many to name.

As the ULPS and RSGB initially collaborated about the ULPS becoming a partner at Leo Baeck College in the mid 1960's, discussion began about a potential merger between the movements. The discussion of a merger continued to hit many roadblocks, including

[121] According to Rosenberg in *Liberal Judaism*, page 159, the Settlement Synagogue merged with a Reform synagogue in 1996.

[122] Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism*, 169.

[123] Rich, interview.

disagreements about whether they could sort out ideological differences. They perceived their ideologies to be too distinctive to reconcile.

Merger discussions resumed in the eighties when the ULPS considered joining the RSGB and Leo Baeck College at the Sternberg Centre's Manor House. They set up six committees to address six different areas of negotiation.[124] According to the account of Liberal leaders, they produced "feasibility reports" that were able to propose solutions to seemingly insurmountable differences on topics like Jewish status, conversion, marriage, and divorce. The Reform leaders' account recalls that the feasibility reports presented an opportunity for reconciliation to the proponents of the merger and that they presented a clear picture of the two movements' irreconcilability to those who were already opposed to the merger. In the end, the merger did not go through. The movements cite a variety of reasons for the lack of success. According to the Liberals, the merger failed because of fundamental differences regarding autonomy, "differences in ethos and style," and many key congregations' lack of willingness to participate.[125] It claims that the final settlement was, in fact, a "unilateral decision by the RSGB.[126] Clearly Liberal Judaism perceived that there were key cultural differences between the movements. The Liberal account does not further elucidate what these "differences in ethos and style" were, specifically; perhaps they were so obvious to those immersed in the community that they need not be spelled out. Their distinctiveness is innate to their self-perception.

[124] Rosenberg, *The First Hundred Years*, 211. The six areas of negotiation were: Halachic matters; youth and education; Kashrut and Sabbath observance; liturgy, prayer books, and synagogue; Israel and Jewish peoplehood; administration and accountancy.

[125] Ibid, 213.

[126] Ibid, 213.

The Reform movement attributes the conclusion to key congregations' (Edgeware, in particular) lack of willingness to merge, and thus the high "emotional and financial cost of merger," as well as the "unbridgeable" nature of status issues and youth group culture.[127] This comment about youth culture is striking, given the contemporary reports of the movements' indistinguishable cultures! The RSGB's official report recommending an end to merger discussions explains that the reason for not creating a unified association was the "diversity of attitudes and practice [... which] would require too broad a stance, making it difficult to generate policy and to provide any clear direction." When all was said and done, the logistical benefits of a merger could not overcome the two groups' perceptions of their significant attitudinal and practical differences.

My Liberal interviewees' commentary about a merger demonstrates that they still hold onto these strong perceptions that they are culturally distinct from Reform Judaism. Perhaps their self-perceptions of cultural difference have become more pronounced in recent years as the gap in their approaches to Jewish status has all but disappeared. In July 2015, the Reform movement approved a new policy to accept equilineal descent, the equal status of people born to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother as those born to a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father, which revolutionizes traditional Judaism's sole acceptance of those with matrilineal descent.[128] The Liberal movement has held this position since the 1950's. With this 2015 decision, the question, "Who is a Jew?" no longer remains a barrier to collaboration. Neither are questions of same-sex marriage, which the Reform movement's

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[127] Kersher and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 314.

[128] Of note is Brighton and Hove Reform Synagogue's rejection of the policy. They have decided to abide by the traditional standard of Jewish status, matrilineal descent, and welcome those of patrilineal descent to undergo an individualized conversion process. Simon Rocker, "Brighton Rejects Reform Change on Jewish Status," *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 18, 2015, https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-jewish-chronicle/20150918/281852937360499.

Assembly of Rabbis agreed to officiate in 2011 and the Liberals have done since 2003, and mixed faith blessings, which both movements leave up to the discretion of individual clergy members. In spite of the recent policies that have brought the movements closer together, the movements still hold onto their historically-based self-perceptions of distinctiveness.

When my interviewees spoke about the present possibility of a merger, their self-perceptions about the movements became even more evident. Of the six interviewees who brought up the idea of a merger, four are steeped in Liberal Judaism and two in Reform. Two of the younger Liberal interviewees believe that merging is no longer a possibility because "the Liberal movement would get swallowed up" and would have to compromise to too great a degree.[129] However, two other Liberal interviewees, including Rabbi Rich, believe that a merger might be on the horizon. Rich says that he "would be surprised if my great grandchildren don't experience one progressive movement in this country" but adds the caveat that both movements must enter a merger feeling "strong and confident" in their own positions, rather than forced into a partnership because of financial concerns.[130] The other Liberal person who sees a merger in their future believes that it will happen out of financial necessity, but fears that "the culture of Liberal Judaism will be wiped down" when it happens.[131] All of these comments reflect the Liberal recognition of its ideological distinctiveness and small size relative to Reform Judaism. These Liberal leaders feel the tribalism that many interviewees mentioned; their loyalty to Liberal Judaism's principles and community affect their feelings about a potential merger. Their comments demonstrate a palpable sense of fear that their Judaism, a singular movement that has barely grown outside

[129] Daniel Feldman, interview by author, London, February 27, 2019; Sher, interview.
[130] Rich, interview.
[131] Benjamin Miller, interview by author, London, February 20, 2019.

its country of origin, might become a shadow of its former self if it merged with the larger, less ideologically distinct, more financially stable Reform movement. Rich's comment, that both would need to feel "strong and confident" entering a merger demonstrates that, at the moment, this is not the case. While ideologically confident, there remains a sense amongst the older Liberal Jews with whom I spoke that the movement lacks strength in numbers and resources. The younger Liberal interviewees reflected a greater sense of confidence in both ideology and institutional longevity. Perhaps this results from the optimism of youth; perhaps they have a stronger pulse on the movement's young people and, thus, a keener sense of its future. As this study demonstrates time and again, the Liberal self-perception today aligns with its historical self-perception as ideologically and culturally distinct.

Both Reform interviewees who suggested that the movements might merge indicated the practical necessity of a merger. One spoke about a merger as a sensible move in the face of declining resources. She noted that the two movements could share space and staff without becoming one in the same ideologically. "They could be two corner shops that both succeed."[132] The other Reform interviewee brought up similar concerns about practicality. He called the two separate offices "a terrible waste of resources" and believes that they will merge into one organization with two branches in the next generation, as the young people have grown closer together through the youth movements.[133] These comments reflect the "practicality" that many interviewees attribute to the Reform movement. One Liberal rabbi suggested that the Reform movement seems to be more "business-driven" than the Liberal Judaism, and another person even used the descriptor "corporate" to describe Reform

[132] Langerman, interview.
[133] Rosen, interview.

Judaism.[134] Perhaps it is this very practicality, along with their long history of being "broad church," that allows both of these Reform interviewees to feel confident that a merger could succeed without compromising either movement's principles. Neither of the Reform leaders with whom I spoke suggested that they feel trepidation about a potential merger. As this study has demonstrated throughout, the Reform movement has perceived itself as an association of autonomous synagogues united for the sake of practicality since its founding and continues to hold onto that identity today.

As the two movements continue to become more ideologically aligned, merger talks may increase. They already created an "Alliance for Progressive Judaism" in 2014 which brought together key functions: The Israel Desk, the student chaplaincy program, and Safeguarding measures. The movements split costs for the staffers of these programs. They supplement the collaborative efforts that already existed, such as the long-standing partnership at Leo Baeck college, social justice efforts, and aspects of their youth programs. Some other non-ideological areas could show promise for collaboration, such as operations, finance, and technology. Yet, there would be significant hurdles to overcome in consolidating other areas with more ideological foundations, like youth programming and publications. And, of course, the office of Senior Rabbi/Chief Executive would be all but impossible to unify. This is where the "two corner shop" analogy may come into play if circumstances in the future necessitate further discussion about a merger. Were that time to come, the movements will undoubtedly take significant measures to ensure the continuity of their distinctiveness.

[134] Miller, interview; Kope, interview.

Conclusion

From the outset of this study I sought to discover what British progressive Jewry's two-movement structure can teach the progressive American Jewish community about our own movements. The answer lies in the tension I encountered time and again during my research: The fundamental struggle both movements encountered in balancing ideology and community. The Liberal movement has prioritized ideological coherence throughout its history and continues to do so today, as evidenced by its expressed theology, the actions and policies of the movement itself, and its self-narrative. The movement and its rabbis take pride in Liberal Judaism's ideological coherence and also feel grounded in its institutional and social coherence, the "tribalism" that so many of my interviewees mentioned. Liberal Judaism's strong sense of coherence in these areas requires the movement to sacrifice in other areas-- namely, mass appeal and numerical growth. A group that espouses such a distinct ideology limits its ability to grow and retain a large constituency and, thus, gain financial stability. To be sure, Liberal Judaism understands this limitation and is willing to make these sacrifices for the sake of its principles.

Conversely, the Reform movement has not made ideological coherence a priority; from its genesis, each synagogue developed a unique expression of progressive Judaism. Despite attempts to unify institutionally, Reform Judaism's membership and its leaders come from such a broad range of ideologies that institutional and social coherence has still not become a reality. This "broad tent" mentality may not help the movement release strong statements about current events, but it does provide more demographic and financial stability for the movement. People who want to join a progressive synagogue may be more likely to find a Reform congregation that works for them because each reaches a different subset of

the progressive demographic. This holds most true in London, where there is a wide range of Reform synagogues from which to choose.

The two movements have seemingly determined how best to balance ideology and community for their brand of Judaism at this moment in time. The root of this tension lies in a fact that is particular to the UK; the two progressive Jewish movements there draw from a narrow demographic. According to the Board of Deputies for British Jews, only 0.5% of the UK population identified as Jewish in the 2011 census, and only 18% of those 0.5% identified as Reform or Progressive in a 2013 survey.[135] Another figure on this page reports that only half of Jews in the UK belong to a synagogue. This leaves the maximum number of UK Jews who might belong to a progressive synagogue (with an acknowledgement that the half who do belong are more likely to be traditional or orthodox) at approximately 23,000 people. Though this might look like a big number, it is actually rather small if you consider that these 23,000 people would divide themselves between two movements and over 80 synagogues. In comparison, over one million American Jews belong to Reform synagogues.[136] The way in which the UK movements balance the tension between ideology and community, therefore, depends on their economies of scale.

The Liberal movement seems to accept the fact that its principled nature both limits its size and ensures participation from its key synagogues; were it to weaken its ideology, the primary synagogues may no longer feel beholden to the movement. They are beacons of the movement's strong ideology, and vice-versa. In contrast, the Reform movement has operated with the knowledge that its very existence relies on the membership of some key synagogues,

[135] "Jews in Numbers," Board of Deputies of British Jews: Advocacy for the Community, https://www.bod.org.uk/jewish-facts-info/jews-in-numbers/ .

[136] "The Reform Movement," Union for Reform Judaism, https://urj.org/reform-movement.

and that some of these key synagogues are ideologically left or right of the majority. For instance, one reason that the Reform leaders gave for their choice not to merge with the Liberals in the 80's was because what was then Edgware Reform Synagogue, historically a traditional-leaning synagogue, would not have remained in the movement if it had merged. Edgware was one of the largest synagogues and, thus, one of the main financial and demographic contributors to the movement. Losing that single synagogue could have been detrimental for Reform Judaism. The movement's priority to remain ideologically broad, recognized that every synagogue's membership counts when the initial pool of eligible constituents is limited --they do not have the economy of scale to exclude a synagogue (especially a large synagogue) with a controversial ideological statement. This theme showed up repeatedly in my interviews. The movement remains hesitant to alienate any synagogue or rabbi, but some Reform rabbis wish that it would feel more confident to speak up about current issues. One Rabbi suggested that the movement could continue to achieve its balance between ideology and community by outwardly acknowledging and embracing its plurality of perspectives. He believes that, rather than remaining silent on important issues, Reform Judaism could publish statements with multiple viewpoints from leaders in the movement.[137] This would have to be done with great care not to raise any leader's voice above the other and could upset the balance that Reform Judaism has worked for so long to achieve.

The US's Reform movement does not have a financial need to be as ideologically broad as the UK Reform movement because of the larger number of progressive Jews in America. The URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) has the luxury to remain ideologically distinct without fear that a single synagogue's disaffiliation will pose a crisis to the

[137] Langerman, interview.

movement's security. To be sure, the impact of synagogues leaving the Union in larger quantities cannot be underestimated. When over 30 congregations left the movement between 2005 and 2012 for political and logistical reasons, there were concerns about the movement's stability. In turn, the URJ's president, Rick Jacobs, overhauled its organizational structure and revisioned its engagement efforts. Throughout this process, the movement's ideology remained consistent.[138]

The URJ's ideological coherence reflects the particular way that American Jews seek to express their Judaism. In light of concerns about American Jewish continuity at the turn of the twenty-first century, American Jewish sociologists Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen conducted a pivotal study of American Jews and analyzed its results in their book *The Jew Within*.[139] One primary finding of their study is that American Jews tend to express their Judaism in the "private sphere" and do not feel beholden to particular Jewish obligations. The "sovereign self [is] the principle authority for contemporary American Jews," as opposed to the communal ties and obligations of generations past.[140] American Jews therefore seek a DIY (do-it-yourself) type of Judaism. Those who live in urban centers have access to a Jewish landscape in which they are able to choose between multiple expressions of Judaism to find one that best cater to their senses of self. The ideologically strong Reform movement is unapologetic about its (small L) liberalism, as are most progressive American Jews, which places it in a prime position to provide these seekers with ways to discover

[138] Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "Nod to Change at Jacobs Takes URJ Reins," *Forward*, June 15, 2012 https://forward.com/news/157814/nod-to-change-as-jacobs-takes-urj-reins/?p=all.

[139] This paper uses two publications of Steven M. Cohen. Dr. Cohen was accused of sexual misconduct by several people in 2018. He did not deny the accusations and subsequently resigned from his posts at the Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion, the Berman Jewish Policy Archive, and New Voices. He issued an apology for his behavior.

[140] Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2.

personal meaning in an atmosphere that fits their worldview.[141] American Reform Judaism can give people the personalized Judaism they seek--social action projects, learning opportunities, adaptable worship experiences--without compromising its ideological distinctiveness. In fact, ideologically coherent synagogues and movements are attractive to people who want to express their Jewish sovereign selves in the private sphere, for the "synagogue for them is not so much the house of God as another Jewish house [...] in which they can be at home."[142] This other "home" is a grounding place for "aspirations crucial to their sense of self: moral, spiritual, social."[143] Someone who is on a journey to develop their sense of self seeks a religious community in line with their moral, spiritual, and social identities. Cohen and Eisen's study demonstrates the American progressive Jew's yearning for a community that consistently reflects their values and principles.

In response to Cohen and Eisen's study, Cohen teamed up with London-based researcher Keith Kahn-Harris to research whether the same findings hold true for British Jews. Their finding most significant to this paper is that British Jews "exhibit relatively high levels of ethnic belonging."[144] In practice this means that many British Jews, especially Londoners, live in the areas with heavy Jewish populations in an effort to stay close to family and friends. The inmarriage rate of moderately engaged British Jews is quite high at 88% (compared with 55% rate of inmarriage among Jews by Religion reported by the Pew Research Center in 2013) and 74% of those interviewed say that most of their close friends

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[141] According to the 2013 Pew Report, 77% of American Reform Jews vote or lean left on the political spectrum. A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Chapter 6, Social and Political Views" (Pew Research Center: Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013) https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-6-social-and-political-views/

[142] Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within,* 177.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Steven M. Cohen and Keith Kahn-Harris, *Beyond Belonging: The Jewish Identities of Moderately Engaged British Jews* (London: United Jewish Israel Appeal, 2004), 19.

are Jewish.[145] Cohen and Kahn-Harris found that synagogue membership amongst their interviewees was around 88% but few mentioned spirituality. Most spoke about community and family tradition as their motivation to belong to a synagogue. British Jews tend to be what sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls "dwellers," people who seem to be satisfied with the religious status quo. Dwellers appreciate spiritual stability while "seekers" who "search for personal meaning through religious involvement."[146] Where do these British Jews "dwell"? Amongst their family and friends. For British Jews, belonging to a synagogue is not necessarily for the purpose of finding their spiritual selves or promoting a particular ideology. Rather, they join synagogues to take part in their family's tradition and pass that tradition to their children, to be in community, and find comfort in their Judaism's familiarity.

For British Jewish "dwellers," a movement's ideology is far less important than the sense of tradition and community that they feel within their synagogue's walls. This may explain, at least in part, why the ideologically inconsistent UK Reform movement has gained greater numbers than the ideologically more distinct Liberal movement. Ideological consistency is not necessarily what British Jews are after. Their dweller mentality may make it easier for them to dwell within a congregation that is ideologically different from them; *Beyond Belonging* found that many interviewees spoke about an "authentic' way of being Jewish" even if they did not subscribe to that particular way of Jewish practice.[147] So too, the dweller mentality may make an ideologically-based movement like Liberal Judaism a hard

[145] Cohen and Kahn-Harris, *Beyond Belonging*, 20; A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Chapter 2, Intermarriage and Other Demographics," (Pew Research Center: Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013), https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-2-intermarriage-and-other-demographics/.

[146] Ibid, 58. Cohen and Kahn-Harris quote Carroll and Roof's description of dwellers and seekers. Carroll and Roof's piece cites sociologist Robert Wuthnow.

[147] Ibid, 59.

sell for these British Jews who go to synagogue hoping to experience the comfort of tradition and community, not necessarily the ideological consistency of a worship service or a social justice campaign. To be sure, a number of British Reform synagogues straddle the line between serving dweller and seeker populations. These congregations' rabbis strive to innovate, and they often assert their stances on current events, even when the movement remains quiet. These congregations serve the British Jews about whom *Beyond Belonging* calls dwellers with "seekerly" tendencies, people who are open to alternative ways of expressing Judaism and seek a Jewish practice that is personally meaningful.[148] Fortunately for progressive Jewish Londoners, and especially those in the heavily-Jewish north suburbs of London, the large number of progressive synagogues should give everyone--dwellers, seekers, and dwellers with seekerly tendencies--the opportunity to find a synagogue that fits their needs.

These two studies, *The Jew Within* and *Beyond Belonging*, and their implications for British denominationalism provide crucial questions for American progressive Judaism to consider. The takeaways for the American Reform movement are couched in the story of the American Conservative movement, since the Reform movement only became mainstream when the Conservative movement's numbers decreased.[149] Like British progressive Judaism, American Conservative Judaism now pulls from a smaller pool than other American denominations. The 2013 Pew Research Center's report found that 18% of American Jews identify as Conservative, relative to the 35% that identify as Reform, 30% who do not

[148] Ibid, 61.

[149] It is worth noting that the British Masorti movement, what most consider to be the American Conservative movement's British counterpart, has more than doubled its small membership since 1990. This difference highlights the different desires of "dwelling" British and "seeking" American Jews when it comes to choosing denominational affiliation. Donatella Casale Mashiah and Jonathan Boyd, *Synagogue Membership in the United Kingdom in 2016*, (Institute for Jewish Policy Research on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, July 2017), 12.

identify with any denomination, 10% that identify as Orthodox, and 6% in the "other" category.[150] Like their British counterparts, the movement tends to represent a wide array of approaches to *halacha* (Jewish law), theology, and ideology. A 1988 Statement of Principles created by the Conservative movement states: "The formulation of basic doctrine is a particularly difficult task for Conservative Judaism, far more than for its sister movements" because it is tied to both tradition and change equally, while Reform Judaism is more comfortable prioritizing innovation over tradition, and Orthodoxy clearly prioritizes tradition.[151] Though the Conservative movement was once the largest denomination in the US, it no longer enjoys the freedom to risk alienating any of its communities because of ideological disputes.[152]

Unfortunately, there remains one ideologically based policy that has caused great tension between ideology and community in the Conservative movement recently. As the rate of intermarriage continues to increase among American Jews, there has been more resistance to the movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards's nearly 50-year-old policy that prohibits Conservative rabbis from officiating intermarriages.[153] On one hand, the

[150] "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," (Pew Research Center: Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013) https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/. The "Other" category in this report includes Jews who identify as Reconstructionist. Reconstructing Judaism is a small, tribal movement with strong ideological coherence, much like the British Liberal movement. They boast a powerful history of inclusivity, innovation, and a focus on Jewish peoplehood.

[151] Robert Gordis, "Emet Ve'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism," (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, by The Rabbinical Assembly, and by The United Synagogue of America, 1988), 11, https://masortiolami.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Emet-VEmunah-Statement-of-Principles-of-Conservative-Judaism.pdf.

[152] In the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 38% of Americans identified as Conservative, making it the largest denomination in the US at the time. Daniel Septimus, "Conservative Judaism: The State of Conservative Judaism Today," Jewish Virtual Library, 2016, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-state-of-conservative-judaism-today.

[153] The CJLS released its resolution prohibiting members of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly to perform intermarriage in December 1971 "after extensive discussion." Rabbi Jerome Epstein, "Congratulations to Mixed Marriage Families," Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, 1986-1990,

Conservative movement's ideology asserts the "indispensable" nature of *halacha*, Jewish law, and the movement's Rabbinical Assembly "contend that Jewish legal sources, such as the Talmud, explicitly outlaw Jews from marrying non-Jews."[154] On the other hand, Conservative ideology also asserts that one constant in Jewish history has been the rabbis' need to "[apply] the law in new ways to meet the demands of the time."[155] Many rabbis, lay people, and Jewish sociologists believe that the "demands of the time" require this law to be adapted now. They associate the Rabbinic Assembly's ban on its rabbis' ability to officiate intermarriages to the movement's dwindling numbers. This policy alienates some people from the movement; if an interfaith couple approaches a Conservative rabbi with the hopes of being married within the movement and faces the choice of either conversion or rejection, the couple may very well be pushed away from the Conservative movement and towards the Reform or Reconstructionist movements, which allow their rabbis to officiate intermarriages at their own discretion. In this case, the movement continues to sacrifice numbers for this particular policy regarding intermarriage. Moreover, this policy that forbids intermarriage can be perceived as incoherent with its wider ideology of tradition *and* change. The American Jew, who seeks a religious community to represent its "sovereign self," may be turned off by this policy's pairing of ideological rigidity and incoherence. American Jews in interfaith relationships are also turned off by a religious movement that cannot serve as another "home" for both partners.

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https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19861990/epstein_congratulations.pdf.

[154] Gordis, "Emet Ve'Emunah," 20; Ari Feldman, "With Intermarriage Endorsement, Rabbi Hopes to Start 'Grass Roots' Movement," *Forward*, December 19, 2018, https://forward.com/news/national/416230/with-intermarriage-endorsement-rabbi-hopes-to-start-grass-roots-movement/

[155] Gordis, "Emet Ve'Emunah," 21.

The British experience may be instructive for the Conservative movement as it navigates responses to its current situation. It could take a cue from the Liberal movement and learn that ideological coherence is both achievable and, according to Cohen and Eisen's research, desirable for some American Jews. To achieve ideological coherence, it would need to adjust its policies. This would either necessitate a move towards tradition in its expressed ideology or a move away towards adaptation in its expressed ideology. Either choice may alienate some congregations on the periphery of the issue. Were it to move towards tradition, it would need to find a way to differentiate itself from Orthodoxy. Were it to move towards adaptation, it would need to find a way to differentiate itself from American Reform Judaism.

At the same time, Conservative Judaism could take the British Reform movement's "broad church" approach, which demonstrates that religious movements can be successful when there is enough variety in synagogues for people to find a spiritual home to align with their worldview (like in London). The movement could permit each community to practice according to their own *halachic* approach, with the knowledge that the movement would lose some control over its ideological standards and that some communities would find this permissibility unacceptable. This may be more difficult because of the movement's decreasing number of synagogues; only in major urban centers are there enough conservative synagogues to provide a variety of Conservative options for Jewish seekers. Both approaches, following in the footsteps of the British Liberal or Reform movements, calls for strategic conversations, deliberate transformation, and bold decision-making.

This explanation of Conservative Judaism's challenges sets the stage for the Reform movement's unprecedented success. As the American Conservative movement declined in numbers during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the American Reform

movement became the largest denomination in the United States. Despite the Reform movement's history of radicalism, the URJ and its synagogues have made its liberal, ideologically coherent approach normative for American Jews. This is particularly true right now, in the year 2020. In the current American political climate of extreme conservatism and division, progressive American Jews are seeking safe spaces to express their liberalism. Liberalism is under attack and the occurrence of antisemitic events has risen sharply. Reform Judaism offers a haven for American Jews who seek the comfort of like-minded communities during this challenging time. The American Reform's ability to normalize its ideological coherence throughout its fairly short history has benefited the movement and its members. But what might the URJ lose by being so strongly coherent in its ideological liberalism, now and in the future?

UK Reform Judaism provides an example of a movement that has embraced incoherence as a path to success. It has become fairly mainstream in the British Jewish landscape by maintaining its historical trend of ideological incoherence. Though coherence and normativity may go hand-in-hand in the US at the moment, as demonstrated by the URJ's success, it remains clear that they do not necessarily go hand-in-hand in the UK. British Reform Judaism encompasses synagogues with a variety of approaches and is, therefore, able to serve as a safe space for people of different backgrounds to pray, learn, and build community. Its history serves as an example of incoherence's great benefit: the ability to deal with difference. British Reform Judaism's ability to grapple with issues of ideological difference offers a timely reminder to the URJ that such issues are inevitable and worthy of our attention now. The time will come when we will need to embrace a wider diversity of perspectives, so we ought to begin considering how we will take on this responsibility with

the same unapologetic confidence with which our movement has taken on the responsibility of developing a coherent ideology.

This paper's introduction posed a key question: Does the survival of Jewish denominations rely on their ability to achieve coherence? The answer is both yes and no and depends entirely on a denomination's context. As this study demonstrated, the British Reform movement continues to maintain a strong membership base, despite its inability to achieve both ideological and institutional coherence. Cohen and Kahn-Harris's study elucidated some of the cultural factors that allow the British Reform movement to survive despite its incoherence. On the other hand, the Liberal movement prides itself on its theological, ideological, and institutional coherence, and continues to survive with a small and more "tribal" membership. The American religious landscape shows a complete reversal of these trends in the relationship between coherence and participation. American Reform Judaism boasts ideological and institutional coherence and large numbers, while American Conservative Judaism has more difficulty with coherence and has lost a great deal of its membership in recent decades. Clearly context matters. The ability of a Jewish denomination to survive and flourish relies not on its coherence, but rather on its ability to meet its community's desires, which may or may not include coherence. As progressive Jews continue to evolve with their societies, so will their religious yearnings and needs. Progressive Jewish denominations in the US and UK must continue to tread a fine line between their ideological and community commitments in order to best serve their unique populations and, ultimately, sustain the vibrancy of progressive Judaism.

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