

ZIONIZING REFORM OR REFORMING ZIONISM?
A HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF REFORM ZIONISTS
OF AMERICA

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio

2007
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Synopsis

In 1885 the some American Reform rabbis met in Pittsburgh to write an ideological statement. What became known as the Pittsburgh Platform included a plank that explicitly stated that the Jews were no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore are not longing for a return to Jewish sovereignty. While the political Zionist movement had not yet officially been founded, this statement put Reform at odds with Zionism for decades.

Even though the movement was officially against Zionism because the Reform Jew's homeland was the land in which the Jew lived, there were individual Reform rabbis that were leaders in the Zionist movement, such as Bernhard Felsenthal, Max Heller, Stephen S. Wise, and Abba Hillel Silver. They showed through their actions and writings that Reform and Zionism did not have to be mutually exclusive. Their influence had its effect on the movement, and by 1937 the Reform Movement started to alter its anti-Zionist stance.

By the time the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the majority of the Reform Movement supported it. This support grew even stronger after Israel's victory in the Six Day War of 1967. Jews everywhere found a renewed sense of national pride. In 1977 the Reform Movement's congregational arm, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, wanted capitalize on this attitude by making its support for Zionism official through the creating of a Zionist affiliate of the Union called the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA). This affiliate was to be the American Reform Movement's representative in the World Zionist Organization.

From the beginning, ARZA set out to achieve its goals of religious pluralism in Israel through resolutions in the World Zionist Congress and later through legal actions in Israeli courts represented by an organization it founded called the Israel Religious Action Center. In America ARZA acted as an advocate for Israeli issues through its newsletters and congregational chapters. By the end of the Nineties, ARZA was the largest American Zionist party and was very influential in creating the Reform Movement's ideological stance on Zionism.

This thesis seeks to give a critical history of the first two decades of ARZA's existence. First, there will be a study of the Zionist question in the American Reform Movement and the Zionist situation in America before the founding of ARZA. There will also be a chapter on three Zionist thinkers that were instrumental in the founding of ARZA. Finally, the last two chapters will focus on the organization from 1977-1998.

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Acknowledgements

I am blessed to have had such an exceptional advisor in Dr. Michael Meyer. Through the whole process—from helping me pick a topic to turning in my last draft—he has been there to offer advice and guidance. Dr. Meyer has been a true Rav to me in with his teaching of history. He has taught me to approach Jewish history with a scholarly eye and a Jewish heart.

There were many people who I interviewed formally and informally for this thesis. Without them this would not have been possible. Thanks are due to Rabbi Richard Hirsch who for two and a half hours spoke to me in his office in Jerusalem about his life as a Reform Zionist. I still find inspiration when I listen to the recordings. Thank you to Rabbi Dow Marmur for helping me fit the historical pieces together at the beginning stages of my research. To Dr. Michael Livni for showing me with all of his passion that there is a theoretical side to Reform Zionism. To Rabbi Ira Youdovin for his great anecdotes and for pointing me in the right direction to uncover the history of the organization he helped create. Thank you to Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch for filling in the gaps about ARZA in the nineties and engaging me in a great conversation about the state of Reform Zionism today. Thanks to Dr. Susan Einbinder for helping me look critically at the CCAR Platform on Zionism. To Mike Nitzan for living his life for Reform Zionism. I will remember the month you spent in Cincinnati and all our conversations about Israel and how to make all Reform rabbis true Zionists. Thank you also for sharing your research. And finally, thanks must go to Rabbi Stanley Davids. It is because of his presence at the Jerusalem campus of HUC during my first year in rabbinical school that I am involved in ARZA today. He has inspired me to do all that I can to bring Zionism to the Cincinnati HUC community. He is truly my Zionist mentor.

אחרון אחרון חביב Janice, the last four and a half years together have been the best years in my life, and the last half a year since our wedding has been the best of the best. I couldn't imagine getting through rabbinical school without you. I am looking forward to the journey we are about to take together. Thank you for always putting up with me. I love you. מצאתי את שאהבה נפשי

Preface

The American Reform Movement has had a mixed history when it comes to its attitudes to Zionism. The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform clearly states, “[We] therefore expect neither a return to Palestine . . . nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.” With the influence of pro-Zionist rabbis like Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen S. Wise, by 1937 the Columbus Platform of the Central Conference of American Rabbis reads, “We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its [Palestine's] up-building as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.” In a little over fifty years the Reform Movement changed from an anti-Zionist stance to one that was supportive of both political and cultural Zionist thought, but it did not yet advocate for a Jewish state.

By the 1970's the Reform Movement had not only fully accepted the State of Israel, but was seeking to influence its nature. Israel had been in existence for two decades, and there was a sense of euphoria about its strength after the 1967 Six Day War. This is reflected in the 1976 CCAR platform: “We are bound to...the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties....We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security and defining its Jewish character.” One year later the Union of American Hebrew Congregations decided to step into the political world of the Zionist movement by establishing the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA).

There exists only a short pamphlet about the history of the organization, written in honor of its thirteenth year. No critical history has as yet been written about ARZA, so I will try to give a detailed history of the organization. This is a limited history, though,

because most of the documents utilized were officially published by ARZA or the Reform Movement, and not necessarily the views of all of the members. This is an organizational history, and not a history of the people that make up the organization, but I did interview many of the past leaders of ARZA and Reform Zionism in my research, and their voices are found in the work. While ARZA is an organization with paying members and chapters around the country, it is very much a top-down organization, and the research and writing of this project reflect that.

By way of full disclosure, I am currently a member of the national board of ARZA, and I have been involved with the organization since my first year in rabbinical school in 2002. I have tried not to make the thesis an "insider's history" of ARZA, but I was well aware of my Reform Zionist biases during the research and writing. It should be added, though, that most of people written about left the organization before my involvement, and all of the events in this work happened prior to 1998.

That being said, this thesis will examine the creation of ARZA in 1977 and how the organization influenced Zionist affiliation in the Reform Movement. I will take a critical look at who the leaders were who effected change in the Reform Movement's views and what the historical and social factors were that led to the founding of ARZA. The thesis will critically look at ARZA as an organization from its founding in 1977 until 1998 when the ARZA merged with the North American Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism creating a new entity. Some of the issues that will be focused on include: the evolution of the Zionist question in the Reform Movement before the creation of ARZA; why it took until the 1970's for the Reform Movement to officially join the Zionist Movement; some of the thinkers that were influential for the founding of

ARZA; ARZA's influence on the American Reform Movement in matters of Zionist affiliation and thinking; ARZA's successes and failures in the World Zionist Congress; ARZA's role in creating a Reform Zionist theology; and ARZA's role as an advocate for the State of Israel to American Jews.

Chapter 1

The Zionist Debate within the Reform Movement: 1885-1948

Much has been written about the Reform Movement's shift from ideological anti-Zionism to an embrace of the idea of a Jewish State. This shift was often hard fought and very painful for the people involved. Rabbis and laypeople often changed their views back and forth, sought the middle ground with the opposition, and even demonized the other side. Zionism was probably the only issue in the first half of the Twentieth Century that had the power to tear the Movement apart, but it was not always a history of pro-Zionist vs. anti-Zionist. The history of Zionism and Reform Judaism is one of ambiguity and nuance. This chapter seeks to be a survey of the Zionist question within the institutions of the Reform Movement in America from the late Nineteenth Century until the declaration of Israeli statehood.

David Polish divides the evolution of the Zionist question in the Reform Movement into four time periods. This chapter will use these time periods for ease, but it must be noted that there are inherent issues with using these dates because they all correspond to events that happened in the Central Conference of American Rabbis. While the CCAR is and was very influential in shaping the opinions of the Movement, the rabbis are not the Movement in its entirety. The periods are as follows: 1885-1917; 1917-1936; 1936-1943; 1943-1947, each time period corresponding to a shift in attitude towards Zionism in the CCAR.¹ The first period begins before the formal inception of political Zionism with the publication of Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State* in 1896, but the seeds of Zionism were very much alive in the 1880's in Europe when the Reform

¹ David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 49-50.

Movement in America was solidifying its base as a unified ideological movement with the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885.

1885-1917: Reform=Anti-Zionism

In 1885 nineteen like-minded rabbis met in Pittsburgh to formulate a set of principles that could define Reform Judaism in America against Orthodoxy on one side and total universalism typified by Felix Adler's Ethical Culture on the other. Called by Kaufmann Kohler and presided over by Isaac Mayer Wise, the conference saw itself as a continuation of the rabbinical conferences held in Germany in the 1840's and the meeting of rabbis held in Philadelphia in 1869. These Reform rabbis wanted to create a document that affirmed what Reform Judaism was but also clearly showed what it was not.

Overflowing with the optimism of its day, the "Declaration of Principles," or as it is commonly called "The Pittsburgh Platform," has eight planks that cover everything from the Reform view of God to Jewish law and social justice. The underlying subtext of the document is the late Nineteenth-Century situation of the Jews in America. Jews were no longer forced to live apart from their Christian neighbors in ghettos, and as a part of this new society it was the Jews' task and mission to teach Ethical Monotheism to the world. Through this mission, enlightened Jews could help usher in the messianic "brotherhood of man." Many Reform leaders believed that the advent of this non-personal, universal "messiah" was imminent.

This belief in universalism was so strong that these Reform leaders disregarded the traditional Jewish belief of the gathering of the exiles back to Land of Israel at the time of the Messiah. The rabbis in Pittsburgh believed that the Exile, or as they preferred

to call it, the Dispersion, was actually not a punishment but divinely ordained for Jews to spread the truth of the universal God. Therefore, Reform Judaism, as set out by the Pittsburg Platform, rejected both the traditional view of exile, waiting for God to end the exile as found in the traditional prayerbook, and the new Zionist view that was fermenting mainly in Eastern Europe about a return to the Land. As the fifth plank of the Platform reads:

We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.²

The most important line of the plank for what would become the Zionist debate in Reform Judaism is: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation . . ." This would become the Movement's main argument against political Zionism. If the Jews were not a separate nation, but a religious group found in many nations, they should have no claim on any piece of land except the countries in which they live. The Pittsburgh Platform declared that we Jews were Americans of the Jewish religion. There was much debate at this convention, but nobody objected to the rejection of a separate Jewish nationality.³

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, founded in 1889 as the union of Reform rabbis, officially adopted the Pittsburgh Platform in 1891.⁴ The Platform was then the official "creed" of American Reform Judaism for the next five decades, and with that came official anti-Zionism. Naomi Wiener Cohen writes, "Reform did not merely

² "The Pittsburgh Platform" in Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, 1988), pp. 387-388.

³ Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, CA, 1981), p. 20.

⁴ David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 51.

question the means employed by the Zionists to achieve their ideal, but rather discarded on theological grounds the very objective, Orthodox as well as Zionist, of a return to Zion.”⁵

Right before the First Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897 and not long after it, both main bodies of Reform Judaism in America, the CCAR and the congregational Union of American Hebrew Congregations, came out on record as being against Zionism. The CCAR unanimously declared, “We totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel’s mission.” And the UAHC resolution reads, “We are unalterably opposed to political Zionism. The Jews are not a nation, but a religious community . . . America is our Zion. Here, in the home of religious liberty, we have aided in founding this new Zion, the fruition of the beginning laid in the old.”⁶

By 1897, the American Jewish landscape was greatly changing. The established Jewish community of German background that filled the membership of Reform congregations was witnessing a great wave of Jews, mainly from the Russian Empire, to the urban centers of America. These Jews spoke a foreign language, Yiddish, and were on the whole more traditional than their Americanized cousins. If they weren’t actually practicing traditional Judaism, traditional ways of thinking about Judaism were definitely prevalent in their communities. Because of this, seeing Judaism as only a religion would have been something very much against the very nature of the new immigrants. Jewish nationalism, Zionist or not, was very natural with the arriving Jews. This was seen as an ideological threat by Reform rabbis and laypeople alike for it stood in great contrast to

⁵ Naomi Wiener Cohen, “The Reaction of Reform Judaism in America to Political Zionism (1897-1922),” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 40 (1951): p. 361.

⁶ Meyer, p. 293.

the Pittsburgh Platform. As Polish writes, "Anti-Zionism was a response to a two-fold challenge—the threat of Zionism to the security of American Reform, and the threat of East European immigrants bearing the Zionist message."⁷

One of the main Reform arguments in these years against Zionism was that Zionism validates the claims of antisemites that Jews are different. This is tied into Classical Reform theology. Since Jews are not a separate nation but merely a religious group found within different nations, the more Jews mix with non-Jews as equals, the more non-Jews will realize that antisemitism is wrong. This idea is found within the resolution from the Committee on the President's Message from the 1898 CCAR convention. This resolution came after a speech by Isaac Mayer Wise saying that Reform Jews should not be concerned with what Theodore Herzl was speaking about in Europe. The resolution states about Zionism: "Such attempts do not benefit, but infinitely harm our Jewish brethren where they are still persecuted, by confirming the assertion of their enemies that the Jews are foreigners in the countries in which they are at home, and of which they are everywhere the most loyal and patriotic citizens."⁸ The resolution says nothing about alleviating the situation of the Jews of Eastern Europe. In fact, it seems to be almost blaming the victims for their misfortunes.

Hebrew Union College, the rabbinical seminary of the Reform Movement, was also officially anti-Zionist under the leadership of Isaac Mayer Wise until his death and then with the presidency of Kaufmann Kohler starting in 1903. Kohler, the architect of the Pittsburgh Platform, would not allow Zionism to be discussed at the school. Judah L. Magnes, later to be the first chancellor of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was hired in

⁷ Polish, pp. 53-54.

⁸ Polish, p. 57.

February of 1903 to be an instructor at HUC, but resigned in September 1904. The Zionist leader Louis Lipsky said that it was a forced resignation because of Zionist views.⁹ Lipsky's claim might have some validity because two years later Bible professor Caspar Levias was forced to leave. In 1899, the Russian born Levias was called upon by the CCAR to write its only article that shows Reform and Zionism could be reconciled. He wrote, "Nationalism is a genuinely Jewish idea, running like a thread though all our history, from its very beginning to our days." He does not throw out the Reform idea of the Jewish mission, though. He continues, "The whole nation reunited will then be able to carry out its mission among the nations of the world."¹⁰ Three more Zionists on the faculty, Henry Malter, Max L. Margolis¹¹, and Max Schloessinger were pressured to quit in 1907. Many alumni of the College were outraged by the lack of freedom of speech at the college, while others chided Kohler for not keeping the peace at HUC, but David Philipson, a member of the first graduating class at HUC and a member of the Board of Governors at the time said:

In the interest of truth it must be stated that had there been nothing involved except the Zionist issue the professor [Margolis] and his colleagues could have remained despite the fact that the president of the institution and the Board of Governors were almost to a man strongly non-Zionistic.¹²

It is important to note that Philipson describes the governors as "non-Zionistic" and not "anti-Zionistic."

⁹ Cohen, p. 373.

¹⁰ Polish, pp. 101-104.

¹¹ There is an oral tradition that Margolis dreamed of displacing Kohler as president, which makes the firing even more complicated. See Michael Meyer, *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875-1975* (Cincinnati, 1992), p. 66.

¹² Cohen, p. 381.

Besides the five professors, there were some Zionist members of the CCAR at this time. Gustav Gottheil of New York and Max Raisin of New Jersey were both early Zionists. Also, the great champion of Classical Reform, Bernhard Felsenthal of Chicago called Zionism "the most significant and profound Jewish endeavor of the present century."¹³ He was one of the founders of the Chicago Zionist Organization, and if he were younger, he would have attended the First Zionist Congress in Basle. He was a realist and saw Zionism as a safeguard against those wishing to attack Jews. Felsenthal also believed that a Jewish state would be the best vehicle to promote the Mission of Israel. He wrote in the 1899 HUC Journal: ". . . will you dare say that their [Russian Jews'] Zion is Russia . . . 'Have faith in Humanity! Wait till to-morrow!'—This tomorrow may be at a *very* distant day, it may occur after a thousand years or more; it may never come true."¹⁴

The CCAR's first Zionist president was Max Heller of New Orleans. He was also the honorary vice-president of the Zionist Organization of America from 1911-1929. In his presidential message to the Conference in 1911 Heller said:

In my view . . . the religious life must be the crown and summit of any full-blown culture; the real point of divergence between Zionism and anti-Zionism cannot be the question, as it is sometimes crudely put, whether we are a religion or a race, but whether we shall achieve our religious mission as a people scattered to the four corners of the globe, or as a nation up-building a typical culture upon its ancient soil.¹⁵

While the Reform Movement in America was ideologically anti-Zionist, in the years after World War I the Movement's attitudes began to change to become more "non-Zionist." Most in the Movement, even I. M. Wise and Kohler, believed in or tolerated

¹³ Meyer, p. 294.

¹⁴ Polish, p. 105-106.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

"colonization" of Palestine by this time. Also, with Jews of Eastern European background graduating from HUC in bigger numbers, the idea of Jewish peoplehood was creeping its way into Reform thought.

1917-1936: Reform =Non-Zionism? The Debate Continues . . .

In 1917 the British government issued the Balfour Declaration stating that the government of Great Britain supported a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine. In 1920, after World War I, Great Britain was given a mandate for Palestine, and two years later it was ratified by the League of Nations. These facts on the ground changed the views of even the anti-Zionist Kaufmann Kohler. He proclaimed something that could have been written by Ahad Ha'am in 1919:

Let Palestine, our ancient home, under the protection of the great nations, or under specific British suzerainty, again become a center of Jewish culture and a safe refuge for the homeless. We shall all welcome it and aid in the promotion of its work. Let the million or more of Jewish citizens dwelling there . . . be empowered and encouraged to build up a commonwealth broad and liberal in spirit to serve as a school for international and interdenominational humanity. We shall all hail the undertaking and pray for its prosperity.¹⁶

With the Balfour Declaration and British Mandate for Palestine, the CCAR lost its anti-Zionist fervor, but still did not quite move in a Zionist direction. In 1922 David Philipson and Isaac Landman testified against Zionism to the US Congress. Polish writes, "Unquestionably, the Central Conference was anti-Zionist, but . . . it was trying very hard to differentiate between aid for the *Yishuv* (Jewish community) and the acceptance of a political ideology."¹⁷

¹⁶ Meyer, p. 295.

¹⁷ Polish, p. 142.

By the Twenties and Thirties, more and more HUC students were being swayed by Zionist ideas. Already in 1915 Rabbis Stephen S. Wise and Max Heller persuaded Kaufmann Kohler and the Board of Governors to allow Zionist addresses by outside speakers to take place outside of the school chapel and to let students give Zionist sermons if the sermon was religious in tone.¹⁸ A survey conducted by D. Max Eichorn comparing HUC students in 1900 with those of 1930 shows that in 1930 69% of the students had a favorable attitude towards Zionism, and only 9% were opposed. In 1900 only 17% were favorable and 46% were opposed. There were also huge jumps towards the positive side in the question of are "all Jews our brothers."¹⁹ Greenstein writes, "They were Zionists, as a result of their prescription for improving the quality of Jewish life. Zionism was for them a key to Jewish survival and regeneration in the Diaspora."²⁰

Julian Morgenstern, who would become the president of HUC in 1921, said in 1919, "It matters little if one labors for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, even as an independent state, so long as it does not affect his personal attitude toward Americanism, and his perfect faith in the future of America as a unified nation, and in American Judaism as a living religion in America."²¹ While this statement can be described as a form of non-Zionism, it shows that Morgenstern wasn't as hostile towards Zionism as his predecessor was. Morgenstern let his students and professors have freedom of speech and ideas. Because of this many Zionists were being educated in Cincinnati.

These students undoubtedly looked for inspiration to two of the most celebrated Zionist leaders and rabbis of the day: Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen S. Wise. Both of

¹⁸ Cohen, pp. 381-382.

¹⁹ Greenstein, p. 175.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

²¹ Polish, p. 146.

them were champions of the Zionist cause in the Reform movement and on the world stage. Silver, who served as both president of the CCAR and the Zionist Organization of America was a staunch defender of Reform and Zionism. "For him, Zionism represented a vital addition to Reform, not a substitute."²² Silver believed that Reform and Zionism complemented each other. He wrote that Zionism and Reform are "an expression of this self-same Messianic hope."²³

Stephen S. Wise, by contrast, was often an outsider in the Reform Movement. In 1922 he opened his own seminary called the Jewish Institute of Religion to rival HUC and to be a Zionist seminary for Jews of all denominations. It is interesting to note that even though Silver and Wise saw Zionism as a religious movement and they advocated for it that way in the CCAR and UAHC, they never took part in the religious debates in the greater Zionist community. Because of Zionist Movement politics, especially in regard to Silver who had the Orthodox Mizrahi faction as an ally, they never advocated for Reform in Palestine and Zionist politics.

One Zionist debate within the CCAR that Wise played a big role in was the "*Hatikvah*" controversy of 1930. That year the CCAR was revising its hymnal for congregational singing. Wise noticed that the Zionist national anthem was going to be excluded from the new edition of the hymnal. When he asked why it was to be omitted, he was answered that only religious songs were to be included. The next day Wise and his allies noticed that "America" and "The Star Spangled Banner" were to be included. He said, "If you omit the '*Hatikvah*' . . . you are saying to the world: 'We have nothing to

²² Ibid., p. 117.

²³ Ibid., p. 119.

do with the collective life of the Jewish People . . . we stand alone, a Jewish Church.”²⁴

It was decided that “*Hatikvah*” would be included (all of its verses), but one should note what the anti-Zionist Louis Witt gave for his reasons for agreeing to include the song:

There are . . . many members of our Conference who are Zionists, and to them this hymn is a very precious thing . . . the one great outstanding mass song of our people . . . Since we will include ‘America’ and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ I feel, in the same spirit ‘*Hatikvah*’ can be included . . . I was leaving Trieste bound for the holyland. There was a little group of people on the pier. As the boat was leaving I heard a very plaintive melody . . . Something touched me very deeply, and a wave of emotion surged within me and brought tears to my eyes. I recognized the ‘*Hatikvah*.’ I felt then that this hymn was expressive not so much of this or that ‘ism’ as of the indestructible hope of my people, of their yearning not for Zionism but for Zion.”²⁵

This debate is interesting because twenty or thirty years earlier, this debate would have never happened. It is also important to note the language that Witt uses. He is saying that he may not be a Zionist, but he can understand the Zionist position. He clearly sees Israel as a “people” but not quite a “nation.”

It was views like Witt’s that helped pass the CCAR’s 1935 resolution on Zionist neutrality. With a large number of Zionists in the Conference and Mordecai Kaplan’s idea of Judaism as a civilization gaining much prominence, the CCAR declared that “acceptance or rejection of the Zionist program should be left to the determination of individual members . . . [The CCAR] takes no stand on the subject of Zionism . . . [but] will continue to cooperate in the upbuilding of Palestine, and in the economic, cultural and spiritual tasks confronting the growing and evolving Jewish community there.”²⁶ The CCAR was almost to the point of reversing its anti-nationalist stand in the Pittsburgh Platform.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

While rabbinical students and many rabbis were becoming more Zionist in their thought, the majority of Reform lay people were still anti-Zionist in the 1920's. One such lay person, Isaac W. Bernheim of Louisville, KY, a large supporter of HUC, was so against Zionism and how Zionists use the word "Jew" as an ethnic term, he proposed forming the "Reform Church of American Israelites." He presented his arguments in front of the CCAR and the UAHC. While his program was not taken up, many members of Reform congregations had similar views, and they voiced these views loudly as the rabbis of the CCAR moved closer to an endorsement of Zionism in the late 30's and 40's. But, there was also a large Zionist contingent in the laity. As Meyer states, "In 1930 one family out of five in the large cities already had a member who belonged to the Zionist Organization of America or to Hadassah."²⁷

It is important to note that at this time children in Reform congregations were learning from text books that were edited by the cultural Zionist Emanuel Gamoran. While Reform children of earlier generations learned about the beliefs of Judaism, often by rote, Gamoran taught about the Jewish people and how to live as a Jew. Educated by Mordecai Kaplan, Gamoran believed and taught that the Jewish religion could not exist without Jewish peoplehood, but also the people could not exist without the religion.²⁸ The ideas that the children were learning were very different from the ideas about nationality laid down by the Pittsburgh Platform.

With growing fears for the safety of the Jews of Europe, by 1936 Zionism seemed like a logical solution. The stage was set for there to be a major change in Reform Judaism.

²⁷ Meyer, p. 330.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 301.

1936-1943: Zionism and a Fractured Movement

In 1935 the Zionist Felix Levy became president of the CCAR. He pushed the conference to reexamine its views, and at the CCAR convention of 1937 in Columbus a new platform called "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism" was adopted. On the committee that drew up the platform were Samuel Cohon (chairman), James Heller, Felix Levy, David Philipson, Max Raisin, and Abba Hillel Silver. All men but one (Philipson) were Zionists. The Columbus Platform was a huge departure from the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, especially when it came to Jewish peoplehood. This plank reads:

Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body. Living in all parts of the world, Israel has been held together by the ties of a common history, and above all, by the heritage of faith. Though we recognize in the group-loyalty of Jews who have become estranged from our religious tradition, a bond which still unites them with us, we maintain that it is by its religion and for its religion that the Jewish people has lived . . . In all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.²⁹

This paragraph is extraordinary in that it affirms Jewish peoplehood (even non-religious Jews) while at the same time affirming the primacy of religion. It promotes the settlement of Palestine without negating the Diaspora. Also, the fear of dual-loyalties to America and Palestine is quelled. Kaplan and Ahad Ha'am are very much influences, but one can still see hints of the Pittsburgh Platform especially in the next three sentences that read, "Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to

²⁹ "Columbus Platform" in Meyer, p. 389.

cooperate with all men in the establishment of the Kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal." The Columbus Platform, as the Zionists of the Conference always held, showed that universalism and particularism could be synthesized. The Platform passed by Levy giving the tie-breaking vote. Greenstein notes, "The victory was virtually a *coup d'etat* on the part of the Zionist minority which very carefully and skillfully engineered the proceedings to ensure that their viewpoint would prevail."³⁰

That same year the UAHC took a huge step towards Zionism when it passed a resolution that read:

We see the hand of Providence in the opening of the Gates of Palestine for the Jewish people at a time when a large portion of Jewry is so desperately in need of a friendly shelter and a home where a spiritual, cultural center may be developed in accordance with Jewish ideals. The time has now come for all Jews, irrespective of ideological differences, to unite in the activities leading to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and we urge our constituency to give their financial and moral support to the work of rebuilding Palestine.³¹

In 1937 the UAHC also elected the active Zionist Robert P. Goldman as its head.

The Columbus platform had strong Zionist leanings, but the Reform Jewish establishment had not really discussed the option of a re-instituted Jewish state in Palestine. But, in 1942 under the leadership of James Heller the CCAR supported the formation of Jewish military force in Palestine with its own flag. The resolution read, "The CCAR is in complete sympathy with the demand of the Jews of Palestine that they be given the opportunity to fight in defense of their homeland on the side of the democracies."³²

³⁰ Greenstein, p. 30.

³¹ Meyer, p. 330.

³² Greenstein, p. 36.

The UAHC was displeased with the CCAR because it was worried about being accused of dual-loyalties during wartime, so it passed a resolution on Jewish loyalty to America. This resolution also infuriated the non-Zionists within the Conference. They saw it as a break with the CCAR's 1935 resolution on neutrality and that they were being pushed out of the debates in the Conference. In June of 1942 Rabbi Louis Wolsey gathered with forty-five (almost 10% of the CCAR) like minded rabbis in Atlantic City to form the American Council for Judaism. Their statement of principles called for support of the Jews of Palestine, but "[we] cannot support the political emphasis in the Zionist program which diverts attention from the historical Jewish role as a religious community and which confuses people as to the nature of Judaism."³³ The ACJ had many congregations give their support, but by 1943 most of the rabbis had dropped out because the organization started to focus more on anti-Zionism, including testifying to Congress, and less on strengthening religion within Reform Judaism.

In addition to the American Council for Judaism, many other lay people were uneasy with the Reform Movement's outright turn to Zionism. The Beth Israel congregation in Houston decided to create a set of seven principles similar to the Pittsburgh Platform that divorced Judaism from nationalism. To be a full voting member of the temple, one had to agree with all of the principles. If one did not agree with them that person could be an associate member who did not have voting rights or be able to hold office. The UAHC and the CCAR came out against Beth Israel for making a two-tiered membership in the congregation, but several synagogues around the country came out in support. Many people were determined not to let the Zionist debate come to an end within the Movement.

³³ Ibid., p. 43.

1943-1947

When the utter horror of the Holocaust was more widely known to the Jewish public, groups like the ACJ started to fizzle out (It does still exist today, but it doesn't have anywhere near the influence it once had.). Not supporting Jewish Statehood was seen as being immoral. By the time the United Nations voted on partition in Palestine, the Zionist question in the Reform Movement became a moot point. Julian Morgenstern in 1947 said, "We are all Zionists of a kind and to a degree . . ."³⁴ Complete support was given to the Jewish community in Palestine to establish their state out of the ashes of disaster.

Throughout the years of the pre-State of Israel debate surrounding Reform vs. Zionism in the Reform Movement, the debate was often centered on ideology. Most Reform Jews supported Jewish colonization efforts in Palestine on humanitarian grounds, but the Reform Jews that were against Zionism were against it because of its ideology of negating the Diaspora. Reform Judaism did not believe the Jews in America were in *galut*, Exile. America was their Homeland, not the Land of Israel. Michael Meyer points out that the Zionists discussed in this chapter started to show their movement the difference "between 'official Reform Judaism' and Reform Judaism at its essence."³⁵ "Official Reform Judaism" was against Zionism because it saw Jews as a religious community at home in the country in which they lived, but the Reform Zionists saw the "essence of Reform Judaism" as the notion that Judaism develops and evolves. This can

³⁴ Polish, p. 234.

³⁵ Michael A. Meyer, "American Reform Judaism and Zionism: Early Efforts at Ideological Rapprochement," *Studies in Zionism*, No. 7 (Spring 1983): p. 62.

encompass Zionism in many different ways since Zionism was a new development in Judaism, part of the Mission of the Jews. The Reform Zionists showed that Reform needed Zionism for its national pride and Zionism needed Reform for its religious mission.

Chapter 2

Zionism After the Fact

In the 1950's, according to Jonathan Sarna, American Jews' preoccupation with Israel started to wane. Jews, especially Reform Jews, were turning their attention to universal movements like the civil rights movement, plus in McCarthy-era America, there was a great fear of being labeled as having dual loyalties. One survey showed that only forty-eight out of one thousand religious school teachers taught Israel as a subject.¹ Even Zionist leaders had lost their steam. Melvin Urofsky writes, "American Zionists . . . had been so wrapped up in the fight to build the *Yishuv* and establish the State that they had given scant thought to just what an American Zionist movement would be once such monumental tasks had been accomplished." By the late 50's, American Zionism, as a movement, was a "pale shadow of its once powerful self."² But, Sarna points out, many synagogues had prayers for Israel, and it was common to see Israeli flags at gatherings and Israeli products in synagogue gift shops. Israeli dancing and Israeli pronunciation of Hebrew were becoming popular.³

The situation began to change in the 1960's. The hugely popular movie "Exodus" showed heroic Jews fighting off sinister Arabs like a Western with the cowboys versus the Indians. The movie showed Israel as sharing American values of freedom and democracy. Also, in the 60's, with a rise in Holocaust awareness, came a rise in Israel awareness.⁴ "Exodus" showed this linkage between the Holocaust and the State.

¹ Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT, 2005), p. 335.

² Melvin I. Urofsky, "A Cause in Search of Itself: American Zionism After the State," *American Jewish History*, 69, 1 (1979): p. 451.

³ Sarna, p. 335.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

Things changed drastically in May and June of 1967. Rabbi Richard Hirsch writes, "In its own way, the Six Day War of 1967 had a greater impact on the relationship of world Jewry to Israel than the creation of the State itself."⁵ In 1967 \$430 million was raised by Jews for Israel. That was more than double what was raised in 1966. After the war, tourism doubled and people making *aliyah* rose five hundred percent.⁶ American Jews took pride in what they saw as a miraculous Israeli victory over what could have been a second Holocaust. This pride also manifested itself in an outward way as Jews became more comfortable in proclaiming their ethnicity. Jewish pride was very concerned with the survival of the Jewish people and how the State of Israeli is the center. Urofsky says that this fits in with Mordecai Kaplan's idea of a "new Zionism." "The survival of the Jewish people universally, with Israel as its living center, would be the essence of the new Zionist movement, and all efforts had to be directed toward that goal."⁷ Kaplan's twist on Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism was formulated in the 50's, but in the 60's and 70's, as the *American Jewish Year Book* of 1969 said, "Israel . . . became the religion of American Jews . . ."⁸

Reform Zionist Developments

Part of the October 1958 issue of the Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal was dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the founding of Israel. There were two articles on "Israel After Ten Years" and two on "Liberal Judaism in Israel." The first one, called "Israel and American Jewry," by Leon I. Feuer, a veteran American Zionist

⁵ Richard G. Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount* (Jerusalem, 2000), p. 49.

⁶ Sarna, p. 316.

⁷ Urofsky, p. 461.

⁸ Sarna, p. 316.

leader, speaks about the tensions between American Jews and Israelis. He does not appreciate that Israeli leaders continue to degrade the Diaspora. He writes, "American Jews are definitely becoming resentful at being assigned to this second class category."⁹ He acknowledges that Zionism has been responsible for Jewish intensification in America and that the establishment of Israel was the "most miraculous event in modern history," but there needs to be a better relationship of cultural sharing between the two Jewries. Feuer asks, "Will it be mere coexistence or cooperation?"¹⁰ His thoughts seem to be very much in line with Kaplan's "New Zionism."

In the article "The Prospects of Liberal Judaism in Israel" the founder of the Leo Baeck School in Haifa, Max Elk writes, "A Liberal Judaism in Israel will be realized if Liberal Judaism the world over recognizes the vital importance of a religious revival and dedicates its strengths and power to this task . . ."¹¹ He wants resources to help create a native Israeli movement rather than an American import. The Conference and the Union over the next twenty years talk about supporting the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, but it is mainly talk. No huge amounts of money ever made it to Israel to specifically help Reform Jews.

There were, though, positive steps over the years in the direction of a connection between Progressive Jews in both communities. In 1962 the Committee on the Relation of Reform Judaism and the State of Israel of the CCAR, founded in 1949 as the Committee on Projects in Israel¹², created a statement defining the relationship. The six

⁹ Leon I. Feuer, "Israel and American Jewry," *CCAR Journal*, 23 (Oct. 1958): p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹ Max Elk, "The Prospects of Liberal Judaism in Israel," *CCAR Journal*, 23 (Oct. 1958): p. 21.

¹² At the 1949 CCAR Convention the committee was recommending, among other things, that the CCAR work with Israeli authorities to establish equal rights for all religious groups in Israel, that the *Union Prayer Book* be translated into Hebrew so as to help foster an Israeli progressive movement, and that all American

point statement doesn't mention the State until the fourth point. It says, "We share the joy, gratitude, and pride felt by Jews everywhere over the growth and progress of the State of Israel . . . As we acknowledge our responsibilities toward all Jews everywhere, we affirm our special obligation to provide the fullest measure of brotherly support and assistance—material and moral—for the people of the State of Israel. We note with deep gratification the establishment of Liberal Jewish congregations in the land of Israel. This new religious movement requires our wholehearted encouragement and support."¹³ The UAHC did not create a commission on Israel until after the Six Day War.

In September of 1967 Rabbi Richard Hirsch, the head of the Religious Action Center in Washington, went to the executive staff of the UAHC to propose creating a commission on Israel and Israel committees in every congregation. He stressed the urgency of building the movement in Israel. He even volunteered to be the head of it and find the funds when the heads of the other departments didn't want their budgets cut because of a new department. At the November 1967 Union Biennial a resolution was passed that called for a National Committee on Israel to advance the cause of Progressive Judaism in Israel. The final resolution did not mention *aliyah* or "stays of extended duration in Israel," as the first and second drafts did. It was decided that congregants could give a dollar per family member to the committee.¹⁴ In 1970 the CCAR and UAHC committees along with Israel committees from HUC-JIR and WUPJ were combined to form the Joint Commission on Israel.

rabbinical students should study at Israeli institutions. See Isaac E. Marcuson, ed., *CCAR Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1949), pp. 85-87.

¹³ Sidney L. Regner, ed., *CCAR Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 114.

¹⁴ Hirsch, p. 55.

With the presidency of Alexander Schindler at the UAHC, Zionism was very much pushed to the forefront. Three weeks after the United Nations declared Zionism a form of racism, Schindler proclaimed in his 1975 Biennial sermon:

It is a canard, a libel, not just of Israel but of the Jewish people as a whole. It is as though Hitler and Goebbels and Streicher had returned to earth to mock the pitiful remnant of those who survived the holocaust! . . . But we will not forget, even as we do not forget Amalek, those 70 nations who resurrected the Big Lie and are ready once again to poison this earth for the Jews. Nor will we be so foolish as to let ourselves be beguiled by the assertion that these attacks are leveled against a political ideology and not against a people!

We are all of us Jews and whether we use the small z or the large Z, we are all of us Zionists. The land of Israel which is Zion, and the children of Israel who constitute the Jewish people, and the God of Israel are all bound together in a triple covenant. At no time in our history have we ever stopped praying or longing or working for Zion.¹⁵

With Schindler as President of the Union, the time was right for Zionism to be asserted as a movement-wide Reform Zionism.

A Zionist Affiliate

By early 1977 the president of the UAHC, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, and the director of youth activities for the Union, Rabbi Stephen Schafer, felt that it was time that the American Reform Movement join the Zionist movement in an official way.¹⁶ Rabbi Ira Youdovin gives three reasons why the time was right. The first one was that Schindler had recently become the Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. He wanted to show that the Reform Movement was part of the mainstream Jewish world by being officially Zionist. The second is that Stephen Schafer wanted World Zionist Organization subsidies for the growing Reform youth programs in

¹⁵ Alexander M. Schindler, UAHC Presidential Sermon, November 7, 1975, Dallas, TX, p.11.

¹⁶ In April of 1977 the Executive Board of the CCAR also decided to explore becoming part of the WZO, but when they found out what the Union was doing, they decided to give their full support.

Israel. And the third is because of the issue of Jewish pluralism in Israel. In 1973 the Orthodox parties in Israel wanted to amend the Law of Return to say that one making *aliyah* had to be a Jew according to *halakhah*, or they the person was a convert, he or she had to be converted under Orthodox auspices. Youdovin thinks, though, it was Dr. Michael Langer (now Livni) who pushed the Union to do it.¹⁷

Langer was brought to New York from Kibbutz Gesher Haziv in 1975 to be the *shaliach* from the Kibbutz movement in Israel to the Reform youth division. Schafer was very interested in involving American Reform youth in starting a Reform kibbutz. Langer was brought in to be the ideologue and be in charge of the *Aliyah* Desk. In 1976 Kibbutz Yahel was founded in the Arava. This was probably also a big factor in the push for joining the WZO. Livni says that the movement was ready, especially after Schindler's "We are all Zionists" sermon.¹⁸

Another great influence on Schindler and Schafer might have been the decision of the World Union of Progressive Judaism to join the WZO in 1974 that was formalized in 1976. Because the WUPJ was not an organization with individual members, it could not have full voting rights in the WZO. For Reform Jews to really wield power in the WZO, they needed an affiliate organization with individual members.

Schindler and Schafer pushed the Executive Committee of the Union to adopt this resolution:

Whereas there have been grass-roots requests from members and groups of members of various Reform congregations to participate as Reform Jews as part of the World Zionist Organization, under the aegis of the UAHC, and/or otherwise more fully implement their commitment to Israel.

Now Therefore Be it Resolved that:

¹⁷ Personal interview with Ira Youdovin, April 25, 2006.

¹⁸ Personal interview with Dr. Michael Livni, December 15, 2005.

The Executive Committee looks with favor upon the idea of providing a structure under the aegis of the UAHC by which Reform Jews who are so minded may achieve this purpose.¹⁹

An ad hoc committee on Zionist Affiliation was then assembled with Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn as the chairman. The members of this ad hoc committee, appointed by the Chairman of the Board of the UAHC, were Ben Chernov, Donald Day, Tracy Ferguson, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Rabbi Samuel Karff, Rabbi Charles Kroloff, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, Norma Levitt, Earl Morse, Ruth Nussbaum, Rabbi David Polish, Rabbi Ronald Sobel, and Gilbert Tilles. The ex-officio members were Theodore Broido, Rabbi Joseph Glaser, Rabbi Uri Herscher, Matthew Ross, and Rabbi Alexander Schindler. The two staff members of the committee was Rabbi Ira Youdovin and Dr. Michael Langer.²⁰ The committee comprised members of the Joint Commission on Israel, rabbis, lay people, Zionists, and non-Zionists. No anti-Zionists were included. Gittelsohn comments, "Their exclusion was both deliberate and legitimate. The debate on Zionism within Reform Judaism had long since concluded; while there were (and still are) critically differing interpretations of Zionism within our ranks, by 1977 outright opposition to Zionism had been reduced to a numerically insignificant minority."²¹ Rabbi Ira Youdovin adds that the people on the ad hoc committee who might have opposed the creation of a Zionist affiliate were strong believers in internal Reform pluralism, so if a group were formed, they would just not join.²²

Before the two-day meeting began May 3 in New York, papers by Rabbis Youdovin and Polish were given to the members of the ad hoc committee to be the basis

¹⁹ Roland B. Gittelsohn, *ARZA—From Birth to Bar/Bat Mitzvah* (New York, 1991), p. 5.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p6.

²² Personal interview, April 25, 2006.

for discussions at the meeting. Youdovin's paper was on the history of the relationship between the Reform Movement and Zionism and on the organizational structure of the World Zionist Organization. Polish's was a Reform interpretation of the Jerusalem Program of the 1968 World Zionist Congress. Each member of an organization that was part of the WZO had to subscribe to the platform, but it was intentionally written vaguely so that it could be interpreted by each organization. The platform reads:

The aims of Zionism are:

- The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life;
- The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel, through Aliyah from all countries;
- The strengthening of the State of Israel which is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace;
- The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values;
- The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.²³

Polish's commentary was very extensive and important in creating a Reform Zionist ideology for the soon to be created ARZA. Gittelson said to the UAHC Board of Trustees, "... it will live, I can virtually guarantee, along with the Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform, the Borowitz Centenary Statement and other historic documents we will never forget ..."²⁴

On the first plank of the Jerusalem Program about the centrality of Israel in Jewish life Polish spiritualizes the meaning of the State. He reads the founding of the State as part of the sacred history of the Jewish People. He writes:

²³ www.jewishagency.org/NR/rdonlyres/4D16250C-1E45-4854-A7AE-567388EC328C/24044/JP1968EN.doc

²⁴ Gittelson, p. 6.

The Land of Israel was traditionally perceived as the place where Israel's Covenant with God could most fully be realized through the inspiration of the Torah . . . In the perspective of our encounter with history, confined to time and space alone, Israel is the central event of current Jewish life, as one might have said before the event at Sinai that the Exodus with its promise of the Land was the central moment in the People's experience . . . In that context, the State does occupy a special central place in Jewish life . . . Israel has stirred the hopes, the devotion and the covenantal sense of Jews everywhere as the critical saving factor in contemporary Jewish life.

The State of Israel is seen to be where the Covenant can be enacted, and Israel itself covenants Jews to one another. The term "saving factor" is interesting. It seems to imply that Israel is what is keeping the Jews alive as a people. This fits in very much with the "ideology of survival" found in the 1976 CCAR Platform.

The second plank of the Jerusalem Program, which could have been controversial, was about *aliyah*. Polish's commentary reads:

For many centuries Jews have made Aliyah out of profound religious conviction. Today, the State of Israel also requires Aliyah for its survival and security. For this reason, Aliyah to Israel cannot be equated with Jewish migration to any other land . . . Aliyah is also necessary for North American Jewry. In order to retain strong bonds of kinship between both great communities, numbers of American Olim, exercising freedom of choice, are required . . . Aliyah is needed from within the Reform community in order to strengthen our own Movement in Israel and in order to bring the social orientation of Reform Judaism to Israel . . . "The ingathering of the Jewish people" . . . does not preclude the continuation of viable Diasporas, especially North American Jewry . . . (which) stands in a special collaborative relationship to Israel . . . Israel and North American Jewry are indispensable for on another's existence, and they can serve as correctives to one another.

Aliyah is compared to the actions of the Rabbis of the Talmud who would travel between the academies in Babylonia and Palestine. *Aliyah* will strengthen the two communities rather than weaken the American community. Also, there seems to be a bit of "cultural colonialism" in the statement "in order to bring the social orientation of Reform Judaism to Israel." It seems to say that American Reform Jews need to show Israelis how to be

Reform Jews. Rabbi Ira Youdovin, in an interview, said that these first two planks were not really that controversial, and in fact were already a “done deal” because they had been discussed two years earlier by the WUPJ. They showed that the Centrality of Israel could mean that Israel is *a* focus of Jewish concern, and *aliyah* is a hope, not a mandate.²⁵

The third plank fits in well with the Reform stress on social justice. Polish writes:

Reform can augment the Zionist vision of the just society by calling for the same kind of concern with moral and social issues in Israel that we have advanced in America . . . For Reform to make a distinctive contribution to Israel, it must not be content with issues of rights, status, and liturgy alone, vital as these issues are. We must avoid patronizing, but we must not desist from discussing, in an appropriate forum, those issues which threaten the social order in Israel and perhaps, as a result, in American Jewry as well.

This comment is saying that Reform Zionism is more than just advocating for specific Reform rights in Israel. Classically, Zionism has been concerned with creating a new society, and this comment says that the Reform Movement has much to add to the discussion on how to create a just society.

On the fourth plank about education and values Polish writes:

We are happy for the reference to “spiritual values.” Together with Jewish and Hebraic education in which we have special proficiency, Jewish spiritual values do indeed have a place in Zionism. Moreover, they have been our special concern and we feel that we can make unique contributions . . . We perceive Zionism to be committed to the preservation of the People together with its cultural, moral and spiritual heritage in its rich diversity.

On the last plank about the protection of Jewish rights, Polish writes: “Israel has demonstrated its capacity to do this. American Jewry and our Movement have demonstrated our capacity to work together with Israel toward this end.”²⁶

The ad hoc committee concluded their meetings with five unanimous recommendations for the UAHC Board:

²⁵ Personal interview, April 25, 2006.

²⁶ All quotes from Polish’s commentary to the Jerusalem Program come from Gittelsohn, pp. 7-8.

1. *Reform Judaism and Zionism.* Reform Judaism today is imbued with a deep love for Zion. Ideologically and programmatically, we Reform Jews . . . have manifested our commitment to the Covenant which binds the Jewish People to God, through devotion to Israel's Torah and Land."
2. *The Zionist Process . . .* The World Zionist Organization is today the one forum in which broad segments of Israeli and Diaspora Jewry seek constructive dialogue. In the committee's view, the time has come for American Reform Judaism to join in this dialogue, sharing our vision of Jewish life.
3. *Diversity . . .* We affirm that Reform Judaism is and must remain the spiritual home of those for whom Zionist affiliation is an integral part of their commitment, and of those for whom it is not.
4. *Mechanism . . .* We propose the creation of an affiliate, under the aegis of the UAHC, through which Reform Jews could identify as Zionists. Membership in the new affiliate . . . would be voluntary. As one of its first tasks, [it] would endeavor to formulate an ideological expression of Reform Zionism.
5. . . . the new affiliate would enable us to communicate more effectively our concerns regarding Israel and the Jewish future, such as the status of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, and to demand a more equitable distribution of funds allocated in Israel and throughout the world for educational and cultural projects. Within our own ranks, [it] would provide a long-awaited vehicle for those who have been frustrated in seeking a channel for their Zionist commitment.²⁷

The Union Board approved these recommendations unanimously. As Gittelsohn points out, there were some concerns from the Board but they were pacified by the ad hoc committee. Some members were concerned that encouraging *aliyah* might create a brain drain in the Movement. Gittelsohn writes, "It was recognized that at best (or worst?) only a small number of American Reform youth was likely to make *aliyah*." Also, the 1976 Platform of the CCAR "encourage[s] *aliyah*," and the May 23, 1976 meeting of the Board declared that it is "our special duty to assist Reform Jews who individually or in groups wish [to make] *aliyah* . . ." Other concerns included that affirming the "centrality of Israel" would imply a rejection of the Diaspora, a Reform Zionist affiliate might

²⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

alienate Reform Jews who belong to other Zionist organizations, and creating another Reform affiliate might weaken other Reform affiliates.²⁸

Because time was running out to join the American Zionist Federation in order to then become eligible for membership in the World Zionist Organization in time for the 1978 Congress, the affiliate, now called ARZA,²⁹ went around a vote of the Union Biennial and went right to the AZF. Avraham Schenker of the left-wing Mapam and Faye Schenk, Past President of Hadassah, widow of Reform Rabbi Max Schenk, and the President of the AZF really helped ARZA win acceptance. Several groups were against ARZA's admission, and the Zionist Organization of America abstained. Hadassah suggested that ARZA affiliate with them, but ARZA declined.³⁰ The ZOA and Hadassah were probably worried that ARZA might take members from them since many prominent Reform Jews were members of these two organizations.

Between June and November of 1977 the ad hoc Committee's report was sent to every Union congregation to be studied before the November Biennial in San Francisco. There was much study and discussion, and rabbis gave sermons about ARZA. Ira Youdovin also traveled to many congregations to lobby in favor of ARZA. By the time of the Biennial where ARZA would be officially recognized by the Union, the new group had almost eight thousand members.³¹

Israel happened to be on every delegate's mind the weekend of the Biennial for it was the same weekend that Anwar Sadat traveled to Jerusalem to meet with Menachem

²⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁹ An acronym for Association of Reform Zionists of America and "To the Land" in Hebrew. Gittelsohn reminisces that the original working name of the group was the Organization of Reform Zionists. Judith Diesendruk, a Labor Zionist leader, suggested the name ARZA to David Polish. Gittelsohn, p. 9.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³¹ Ibid., p. 12. ARZA needed members to make the deadline to participate in the World Zionist Congress.

Begin for the first time. The historic handshake was seen on TV during the conference. The next day was the debate on ARZA. When asked about the atmosphere of the debate, Ira Youdovin laughed, "Debate? There wasn't a debate . . . by 1977 anti-Zionism was dead." He notes that for the debate they couldn't find three people who were opposed to ARZA because of the "Classical line" that Reform Judaism and Zionism were incompatible.³² They could only get people to speak who were against ARZA for pragmatic reasons.

The debate was organized by having speakers for the resolution in favor of creating ARZA and the Canadian equivalent Kadima³³ and speakers in favor of a substitute resolution against the creation of a Zionist affiliate of the UAHC. Speaking for ARZA were Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, who introduced the resolution, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, Ruth Nussbaum, and Rabbi Charles Kroloff. The speakers for a substitute resolution against ARZA were Judge Morey L. Sear, who introduced the substitute, Rabbi Alvan Rubin, Rabbi Murray Blackman (both of whom, according to Youdovin were members of the Zionist Organization of America), and Paul Uhlmann, Jr., a Classical Reform Jew. After everybody gave their speech, delegates on the floor were allowed to speak. The resolution in favor of ARZA and Kadima reads:

We Reform Jews, ideologically and programmatically, as individuals, as congregations and as a movement, have manifested our commitment to the State of Israel and its future.

Despite this commitment, Reform Judaism has remained outside the organizational framework of Zionism . . . Until this day, the only voices in that worldwide Zionist forum affecting programs, funding, quality of Jewish life and education have been those of Orthodoxy and secularism. The time has come for Reform Judaism to join in this dialogue. The UAHC Board of Trustees has created an opportunity for such dialogue by establishing, subject to ratification by

³² Personal interview, April 25, 2006.

³³ Since the WZO is organized by country federations, ARZA cannot also represent Canada.

this biennial, national affiliates of the Union to be known in the United States as ARZA (Association of Reform Zionists of America) and in Canada as Kadima. The purpose of these affiliates would be "to seek individual members from amongst our congregations and to seek full voting membership in the World Zionist Organization through its territorial bodies, the American Zionist Federation and the Canadian Zionist Federation."

By giving Reform Judaism a full voice in the councils of the World Zionist Organization, the proposed new affiliates will enable us as Reform Jews to communicate more effectively our concerns regarding Israel and the Jewish future, in particular the status of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism . . .

Within our own ranks, ARZA and Kadima will provide the long awaited vehicles for those who have been frustrated in seeking a channel for their Zionist commitment.

The Board recognizes that there are members of our Union who may not wish to seek affiliation with ARZA or Kadima. As is the case with all UAHC affiliates, membership in either is voluntary. Since diversity is an essential strength of Reform Judaism, non-membership in these affiliates will in no way reflect upon any UAHC member's commitment to our Union.

THEREFORE, this Biennial Assembly ratifies the action of the UAHC Board of Trustees which established ARZA and Kadima. In so doing, we reaffirm the essential freedom of choice of our individual members to join the new affiliates.

We call upon the 54th General Assembly to add the strength of Reform Judaism to the organized councils of world Zionism in order to implement one of the primary purposes of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as set forth in Article II, paragraph D of our Constitution which reads "to enrich and strengthen the State of Israel as a vibrant exemplar of eternal Jewish values."³⁴

The substitute resolution against the creation of ARZA and Kadima reads:

WHEREAS, Reform Judaism as a movement and Reform Jews as individuals have assumed leadership roles in support of the State of Israel, and

WHEREAS, our commitment as Reform Jews includes as a goal "the enrichment and strengthening of the State of Israel as a vibrant exemplar of Jewish values," and

WHEREAS, it is necessary for the Reform Jewish movement to more effectively communicate its concerns "in such matters as the status of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel" and to seek "a more forceful expression of our liberal, religious point of

³⁴ ARZA/Kadima, (New York, 1977), pp. 2-3. Mimeographed dictation of the debate.

view" in the State of Israel to the end of securing full rights for Reform Jews in the State of Israel.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations through its Israel Commission and the World Union for Progressive Judaism as an associate member of the World Zionist Organization, more forcefully assert its role of leadership to secure full rights for Reform Jews in the State of Israel;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these efforts be pursued within the framework of the basic ideological, theological and philosophical precepts of Reform Judaism without subverting these principles to the principle of any organization.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Union not participate in the World Zionist Organization through an affiliate.³⁵

Rabbi Gittelsohn opened his remarks by stating, "Ladies and Gentlemen: I have been privileged through the years to speak at plenary sessions of the Biennial Assemblies on a wide variety of topics, none of them, I assure you, however, as important or certainly any more important than the one on which I address you briefly this morning, important for our movement, important for the State of Israel, important for World Jewry as a whole."³⁶ He went on to say that the Reform Movement needs an affiliate because even though the World Union for Progressive Judaism is a member of the WZO, only being an associate member, it cannot wield that much power. The UAHC needs to create a party with members so they can vote in the World Zionist Congresses and be on boards of the World Zionist Organization. Gittelsohn points out that this party should not be independent of the UAHC so that the Union can have control over it and it also won't claim to speak for American Reform Jews.³⁷ He then went through some of the issues of the Jerusalem Program and how David Polish's commentary clears them up. He assured

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 256-258.

the delegates that the Jerusalem Program does not mean a negation of the Diaspora. "Aliyah—certainly our interpretation of Aliyah does not mean the negation of the Diaspora; does not mean that every Jew or Reform Jew must obligate himself to leave the Diaspora and settle in Israel. As a matter of fact, Aliyah is not even a live issue for us any more because it is already a part of the Union policy now, for about a year and one-half . . ."³⁸

Judge Sear from New Orleans introduced the substitute resolution by saying, "The creation of a Zionist affiliate with membership in the World Zionist Organization is divisive of that Union. It requires that we embrace an alien ideology and philosophy which so many of us cannot do. It requires that we accept the Jerusalem Platform . . . despite any effort on our part to ascribe a different meaning to those words, we cannot change their meaning. It is basic that clear and unambiguous terms are not susceptible to interpretation but more important, they are not our words and they are not for us to interpret."³⁹ His argument that the Jerusalem Program cannot be interpreted in Reform terms might have hurt his case since Reform Judaism is fond of reinterpreting texts and it borders on saying that Reform Judaism and Zionism are not compatible. The other speakers for his side tended to focus more on how the WZO is not a great organization, prone to corruption and cronyism, and that they don't want the Reform movement to get tied down in its politics.

Rabbi Alvan Rubin said, "The reason that Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and others were not known as Reform Jews was because they were subsumed within the Zionist Organization. The fact of the matter is the World Zionist Organization . . . is a factor

³⁸ Ibid., p. 263.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 283-284

which inhibits constructive dialogue.” He was also against the Jerusalem Program: “I can acknowledge the centrality of religion on Jewish life . . . the centrality of Torah . . . but I cannot share the philosophy which tells me that there is a centrality of Israel.”⁴⁰ Paul Uhlmann, Jr. of Kansas City did not want money from the World Zionist Organization. He said, “. . . to join in part for cash seems to me undignified and beneath us.”⁴¹ Rabbi Murray Blackman of New Orleans added that he doesn’t want the UAHC to have to sign on to political decisions of the WZO. By this he was obliquely referring to the settlements in the occupied territories. He hurt his argument, though, by saying that he would vote for ARZA, he just would rather it be independent of the UAHC. He said, “I endorse the creation of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. We need it. The time has come. What disturbs me are misgivings and apprehension about whether or not we through our necessary affiliation with the World Zionist Organization, are thereby subjecting the UAHC to decisions which are quasi-political in nature and with which we as American Jews many not be in agreement.”⁴²

Speaking in favor of ARZA, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld proclaimed, “What I learned at Hebrew Union College was the Zionism of the Prophets of Israel which limned the Messianic vision that did not rest on the dissolution of the Jewish people in an amalgam of all the nations . . . We saw the Jewish State reborn as the means of fulfilling that Messianic hope. It would be . . . a light to the nations, a covenant people building a bridge—a shalom covenant of peace for all mankind.” He then added that Reform Jews are not completely comfortable in other Zionist organizations⁴³ because if the

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 290-291.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 297.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 303-304.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 294.

organization is secular, Reform Jews cannot express their religiosity, and if the organization is religious it is Orthodox. Ruth Nussbaum, the only woman to speak, echoed this by saying that even though she is a life-long member of the Zionist Organization of America and Hadassah, these organizations cannot represent herself fully.⁴⁴ Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff of Westfield, NJ said that delegates don't have to worry about ARZA taking stands against the positions of the Union because the UAHC Constitution binds affiliates to its positions. He asked the delegates, "What will be the message that we convey to them [Reform Jews in Israel] if we do not ratify ARZA?"⁴⁵

The floor was then open for a short debate. Gittelsohn recounts, "My heart skipped a beat when I saw my beloved friend Rabbi Richard Stern at a pro microphone. I knew him to be an honest, eloquent spokesman for classical Reform, including its discomfort with Zionism. If anyone could reverse the pro-ARZA trend of this convention, it would be he." Stern said:

I am standing at a pro microphone and that is exactly where I want to be. I speak for a generation that is not here, a generation of people who opposed the Zionist movement with all their hearts . . . I shall probably never be a Zionist, I shall probably never be a member of ARZA . . . I do want to say for that generation that I represent that we do not subscribe to the Jerusalem Platform . . .

Even though Stern could not claim to be a Zionist, he felt that long gone were the days when Zionism and Reform Judaism were thought to be incompatible. One could be a Zionist in the Reform Movement, and one could not be. Stern continued:

. . . there is room in this [Union] for every shade of opinion, for the Zionist Movement if it must express itself. I cannot be of the last generation at my age of eighty-seven; I move to the twenty-first century.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 299.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁶ Gittelsohn, p. 13.

After all the speakers from the floor there was a vote and ARZA and Kadima were adopted overwhelmingly. There was then an announcement from Gittelsohn that there would be membership applications at that night's plenary session on everybody's seats.

Forty years after the Reform Movement affirmed Zionism in the Columbus Platform, the Movement decided to act on its Zionism collectively rather than through individual Reform Jews who happened to be Zionists. With the creation of ARZA, a specific Reform Zionist identity began to be created.

Chapter 3

The Culturalist, the Universalist, and the Institution Builder

There were many people that were instrumental in the founding of ARZA. This chapter will focus on three rabbis who had long Zionist resumés before ARZA came into being. Their Zionist thought and actions helped develop ARZA's ideology and laid the groundwork for its involvement in the World Zionist Organization and the State of Israel. Each had a different approach to Zionism, and each of these approaches found its way into the mission of ARZA.

Roland Gittelsohn (1910-1995): Kaplanian Zionism or Reform Zionism?

Roland Bertram Gittelsohn was born in Cleveland, OH in 1910, the child of Russian immigrant physician father, mother from Missoula, MT, and the grandson of a prominent Orthodox rabbi in town. He grew up both at the Reform Euclid Avenue Temple, with the anti-Zionist Rabbi Louis Wolsey, and at his grandfather's shul. Gittelsohn writes, "At age fourteen I was nearly thrown out of the confirmation class at Cleveland's Euclid Avenue Temple . . . Because then, as now, I was given to vehement argumentation. Alone among my fellow-students, I disputed Rabbi Louis Wolsey's views on Zionism." Gittelsohn's response to Wolsey's Classical Reform teachings that Jews were to spread their ethics throughout the world in every country in which they lived, was that Zionism does not demand that every Jew in the world emigrate to the Land of Israel, and "a people scattered and despised everywhere is not likely to command the respect required for effective teaching." Gittelsohn believed that his father was the only pronounced Zionist at the Temple.¹ He writes, "My sister and I were weaned on

¹ Roland B. Gittelsohn, *Here Am I—Harnessed to Hope* (New York, 1988), pp. 147-148.

Zionism. *Palestine* was a sacred word in our household . . . Every birthday and graduation was marked by planting trees or purchasing land for others in Palestine; we could have papered our walls with Jewish National Fund certificates." Before he began rabbinical school in Cincinnati at Hebrew Union College, "Father charged me 'to spread the holy gospel of Jewish nationalism.' He saw Zionism as the ultimate culmination of our people's history."²

Gittelson was ordained by HUC in 1936 and began serving as rabbi at the Central Synagogue of Nassau County on Long Island, a post he held until 1953 when he took the pulpit of Temple Israel in Boston where he stayed until his retirement in 1977. He was President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1969-1971. Under his presidency the Conference had its first convention in Jerusalem in 1970. From 1943 to 1946 Gittelson served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. He was present at the Battle of Iwo Jima, and his sermon over the dead was widely distributed throughout the United States by soldiers sending copies home and in the print media. Gittelson eulogized:

Here lie men who loved America because their ancestors generations ago helped in her founding. And other men who loved her with equal passion because they themselves or their own fathers escaped from oppression to her blessed shores. Here lie officers and men, Negroes and Whites, rich men and poor, together. Here are Protestants, Catholics, and Jews together. Here no man prefers another because of his faith or despises him because of his color. Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men there is no discrimination. No prejudices. No hatred. Theirs is the highest and purest democracy . . . Whosoever of us lifts his hand in hate against a brother, or who thinks himself superior to those who happen to be in the minority, makes of this ceremony and the bloody sacrifice it commemorates, an empty, hollow mockery. To this then, as our solemn sacred duty, do we the living now dedicate ourselves: To the right of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, of White men and Negroes alike, to enjoy the democracy for which all of them have here paid the price . . . We here solemnly swear this shall not be in vain. Out of this and from the suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this, will come, we promise, the birth of a new

² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

freedom for the sons of men everywhere.³

As Evan Moffic writes, "Gittelsohn's ideal is a world of religious and social pluralism, in which each group is encouraged to achieve its individual destiny and maintain its patterns of behavior in cooperation with other groups and respectful of their rights to a fulfilling particularism."⁴ As a Zionist, Gittelsohn believed that the Jewish people's individual destiny could best be fulfilled in the State of Israel. "It is the fertile soil out of which tomorrow's Judaism is most likely to grow."⁵

Gittelsohn's views about Judaism were very much influenced by Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionism. He held Kaplan's view that Judaism is a religious civilization, and therefore its religion and culture is ever evolving. He also followed Kaplan's view of a naturalistic God, on which he expanded in his theological work *Man's Best Hope* from 1961. Because he was a follower of Kaplanian thought, he believed that Zionism's greatest potential was the renewal of Jewish culture (similar to the thought of Ahad Ha'am, although he did not necessarily believe that there had to be a Jewish state for there to be a cultural center.). The Jewish State would be a Jewish cultural laboratory that would spread culture to the Jewish people in the Diaspora, mainly American Jews.⁶ This way the State of Israel and Zionism ensures the survival of the Jewish people against assimilation.

On the other side of total assimilation, without the Jewish cultural enrichment that Zionism and Israel brings to the American Jewish community, American Judaism is in danger of becoming only a system of beliefs. For example, without the revival of

³ The Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/sermon.html>

⁴ Evan Moffic, *Debating Traditions: Reform Jewish Thought from 1945 to 1967*, unpublished rabbinical thesis, p. 105.

⁵ Roland Gittelsohn, *The Meaning of Judaism* (New York, 1970), p. 182.

⁶ Gittelsohn, *Here Am I*, pp. 148-149.

Hebrew as a spoken language in Israel, it might have been lost as a cultural treasure to Jews in America, especially Reform Jews whom Gittelsohn sees as often being too parochial by seeing themselves as only a denomination and not as part of the Jewish people.⁷ Israel acts as a balance by bringing nationalism into an American Jewish identity that is mainly dominated by religion. As will be shown later, American Jewry in cultural dialogue with Israel will help balance Israeli Judaism by showing them that religion is an important part of Jewishness and not just nationalism.

Gittelsohn also saw Israel as a safe haven for persecuted Jews and a "cure for the virus of anti-Semitism,"⁸ but it is the cultural aspects of Israel and Zionism that are most important for American Jews now that the State is established. Israel's culture will not only contribute to American Jews, but Israel will spread it to the world culture as well as the Prophetic ideas about justice and peace. Like Louis Brandeis, Gittelsohn thinks, "The stronger [the American Jew's] devotion to Israel, the richer becomes his dedication to the very best in America."⁹

Gittelsohn sees Judaism as an inherently religious movement, rooted in theology. As he writes, "Even Zionist parties and sects which are generally considered to be secular are in fact responding also to the religious imperatives of Jewish tradition."¹⁰ These are imperatives like justice (especially economic, when it comes to the Labor Zionists) and the perpetuation of the Jewish people. This view is similar to that of Rav Kook without the cosmic Messianic significance, but Gittelsohn would probably say that Zionism is a path to redemption for the Jewish people and then the world, in an evolutionary sense

⁷Roland B. Gittelsohn, *Fire In My Bones: Essays on Judaism in a Time of Crisis* (New York, 1969), pp. 223-225.

⁸Gittelsohn, *Here Am I*, p. 149.

⁹Gittelsohn, *The Meaning of Judaism*, p. 183.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 179.

seeing redemption as the end of humanity's evolution towards perfection. He, by no means, sees the State as redemption, but only as an instrument to an end. "Its end is the liberation and continued creativity of the whole Jewish people . . ." ¹¹

It is because Judaism is a religious civilization and the Israelis are doing religious work that Gittelson is dismayed that for the majority of Israelis traditional forms of Jewish religion, or even modernized interpretations of Jewish religion, have little or no meaning. There are though, in Gittelson's opinion, many Israelis that are searching for some sort of spirituality that falls somewhere between the secular/Orthodox dichotomy. A liberalized Jewish religion has the potential to be attractive to these searchers, but *American Reform Judaism* is doomed to fail in Israel. There needs to be a native movement that adapts to the Israeli situation. Plus, the word "Reform" has anti-Zionist associations for many Israelis. ¹² Gittelson writes, "The war for Liberal Judaism in Israel will have to be fought on two fronts." These fronts are against the state-Orthodoxy and against those who have no use for religion. ¹³ American Jews, and Reform Jews especially, need to show the non-Orthodox Israelis that the Jewish religion is not outdated and that Israeli nationalism is not a substitute for it. While American Reform Jews cannot transplant their movement there, through cultural exchange, they can help Israelis understand Reform. "Our aim is to encourage them by example, and to help them release the restrictions that have thus far shackled them. Increasing the *quantity* of Jewish religious interpretations in Israel is only part of our purpose; of even greater importance, we are determined to improve the *quality* of religion." ¹⁴

¹¹ Gittelson, *Here Am I*, p. 150.

¹² Gittelson, *Fire In My Bones*, p. 235.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁴ Gittelson, *Here Am I*, p. 164.

Gittelson envisions the interactions between Jews in America and Jews in Israel as "two way traffic."¹⁵ These continual cultural meetings enrich each community. Israelis have a lot to teach American Jews about the national aspects of Judaism like art, music, and Hebrew, and American Jews have a lot to teach Israelis about the vibrancy of liberal religion and religious pluralism. Gittelson brought these ideas about Zionism with him to the presidency of ARZA in 1977. He writes, "Everything I had said or done about Zionism prior to 1977 culminated in my election as Founding President of ARZA."¹⁶ ARZA's mission, according to Gittelson, is to bring Jewish religious values (through Reform's focus on social justice) into Israeli society:

We in ARZA are determined that in Israel, as here in the United States, Judaism must challenge us to confront compelling moral issues. On the maldistribution of wealth, on discrimination and slums, on ethics in government and business, on sexism and abortion—on these and all similar issues involving equity and justice, we insist that the voice of religion be heard. If not, our emphasis on ritual degenerates into empty pretense.¹⁷

He also believes that religious insights and tradition "must be brought to bear on the nagging problem of relations with the Arabs."¹⁸ But for the most part, Gittelson focuses on the cultural and not the political. His colleague David Polish, on the other hand, sees Zionism and Israel in a political-Messianic light.

David Polish (1910-1995): Zionism, Universalism, and the Covenant

A childhood friend of Roland Gittelson, David Polish was also born in Cleveland in 1910. He was ordained from HUC in 1934. Also like Gittelson, Polish

¹⁵ Gittelson, *The Meaning of Judaism*, p. 183.

¹⁶ Gittelson, *Here Am I*, p. 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

was President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, directly after him from 1971-1973. He spent most of his career in the Chicago area and founded Beth Emet The Free Synagogue in Evanston in 1950 where he was the senior rabbi until his retirement in 1980. As one of the early "Covenant Theologians" of the Reform Movement, David Polish was a theist who saw the Jewish people's covenant with God at Sinai as the paradigmatic event of Jewish life. His Zionism cannot be separated from his theology. It is in Israel where Jews can best live up to the demands of the Covenant, and it is there that they must create the just society to spread their insights of universalism learned from the Prophets.

Polish sees Jewish nationalism as an inseparable element of the Jewish religion. In his 1943 speech to the CCAR during a debate about whether Zionism and Reform were compatible he wrote, "Throughout Jewish history, every Jewish principle and dogma, including the very nature of God and human resurrection, was scrutinized and debated, but not the principle of the restoration of the Palestinian Jewish state."¹⁹ The argument, according to him, that modern Zionism is not religious is defining religion with Christian concepts.²⁰ Like Gittelsohn, Polish believes that all Zionists, including the "secular" Zionists, are fulfilling a religious mission. His idea of their mission is slightly different than Gittelsohn's idea of the core mission of Zionism.

Polish agrees with Gittelsohn that Zionism brings new energy to Jewish culture in America, which helps the Jewish people survive, but, "What is there about the Jewish people as an ethnic group that impels us to adhere to Judaism?" Against someone like Gittelsohn or Kaplan, he sees stressing peoplehood as most essential is not enough. Also,

¹⁹ David Polish, *Israel—Nation and People* (New York, 1975), p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

even though the State of Israel's mission of saving Jews around the world is very important, Israel's existence actually endangers many Jewish lives, i.e., the Jews of the Soviet Union and Muslim countries. Therefore Israel, the protector of world Jewry, also should not be the main focus of Zionism.²¹ The Covenant, "our awareness of Israel's commitment to eternal and ultimate goals from whose consummation we are not released,"²² is the essential meaning of Zionism for Polish.

The covenant between God and Israel called on the Jews to be a holy people and a kingdom of priests. This idea can be found in all Zionist writing even if it is not in specifically religious terms. Polish writes, "Implicit in [Zionism] is the sense of destiny, the sense of commitment to a higher society through [the People of] Israel and a higher existence for Israel through its restoration to its own land. All this is implicit in the covenant idea."²³ He also sees the founding of the State as a kind of renewing of the Covenant—a new revelation, but it is up to us to interpret it:

In this light, the death and rebirth of twentieth-century Jewry contains the elements of a startling inner revelation which it is not yet given to us to fathom. Like our ancestors at Sinai, we were overwhelmed not only by the storm and the fire, but the death, the horror and also the consummation in May, 1948, and there is still no telling what this means. Only a point of light pierces the darkness of our incomprehension.²⁴

One interpretation Polish gives of the revelation of 1948 is that it can be seen as the beginning of a Messianic process. "Jewish tradition occupies firm ground when it stresses the sequence between Israel's restoration to Palestine and the coming of the Messiah."²⁵ But, he stresses, the State in itself is not the Messianic fulfillment.²⁶ "The

²¹ David Polish, *The Eternal Dissent: A Search for Meaning in Jewish History* (New York, 1960), p. 189.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

messianic hope of Israel has attained a degree of fulfillment. A whole people has been resurrected from the dead."²⁷

In his political theology, *The Higher Freedom: A New Turning Point in Jewish History*, Polish expands on his views about the Covenant and Zionism and how they are linked with the Messianic future. A thesis of the book is that the world is now in a post-nationalistic phase. This erosion of the faith in the state as the "ultimate source of human good"²⁸ is a positive direction. It means that the world is moving closer to the unity of all humanity as seen in the United Nations and other trans-national organizations. Now that the people Israel has freedom, thanks to Zionism and the State of Israel, the State needs to lead the world towards working for true freedom—a united world. Israel should be the first state calling for a world government. This is Israel's universal mission according to its covenant with God. Polish writes:

Now there is for Israel the higher freedom to be gained, the freedom from that kind of nationalism which threatens to destroy us all. To gain this freedom, each nation must diminish itself so that all mankind may be aggrandized. And in this collective aggrandizement, each nation may be magnified.

He who calls upon others to surrender a cherished way of life must himself undergo abnegation, not under coercion but by choice. As long as Israel remained exiled and shattered, any call to the world to enter into an exile of its own, namely the diminution of national sovereignty, would be suspect. But Israel restored has now won its right to prophesy to the world. And the world has reached the point where it must listen.²⁹

But, the State of Israel is not living up to its mission. "The establishment of Israel has not fulfilled the dream for humanity. It has not even fulfilled it for the Jews."³⁰ The dream is nothing less than redemption of the world—the Messianic Age, but Israel is often too

²⁶ Ibid., p. 200.

²⁷ David Polish, *Israel*, p. 30.

²⁸ David Polish, *The Higher Freedom: A New Turning Point in Jewish History* (Chicago, 1965) p. 31.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

focused on nationalistic aspirations, even though it is often justified in its hostile neighborhood. Redemption starts with the particular, the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and it then goes to the universal, all of humanity. This way Messianism in Jewish thought "proved to be a system of checks and balances regulating both of these forces [particularism and universalism]."³¹ The Days of the Messiah are both national and universal. The State is just the prerequisite, not the end in itself.

Since the State of Israel is not living up to the Covenant, the Diaspora has the obligation to criticize. Polish comments, "It is a tragedy that virtually the only Jewish critics of Israel are its avowed enemies whose open and bitter hatred discredits their criticism."³² Diaspora Jews have a "brotherly covenant" with Jews in Israel and therefore need to support them, but also see to it that Israel's mission is being enacted. "Perhaps we have asserted ourselves only as physical supporters of Israel and have absolved ourselves in its moral struggle . . . If there is to be an enduring relationship between Israel and the diaspora, it will have to be more profound than paternalism and 'foreign aid' on our part, and living 'the full Jewish life' in our behalf by Israel."³³ This covenant between the two communities must be renewed on these terms according to Polish.

Polish writes, "Israeli and American Jewry must be related, not as the sun is to the stars, but as one eye to the other."³⁴ Israel and the Diaspora balance each other out between nationalism and land on the one hand and religion on the other, but all are needed. The triad of God-Torah-Israel is essential. "If this balance is not restored, a new phenomenon might well be in the making, a deviant from the authentic triangle of

³¹ Ibid., p. 50.

³² Ibid., p. 36.

³³ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³⁴ David Polish, *Israel*, p. 26.

Judaism.”³⁵ Israel can easily divorce itself from the Jewish people by just focusing on nationalist issues and likewise the Diaspora can easily become purely a religious sect. This would be a break with the Covenant and Israel’s national and universal mission.

Richard Hirsch: The Zionist Builder

Like Gittelsohn and Polish, Rabbi Richard Hirsch was born in Cleveland, but he was born in the next generation. As a rabbi he has had a long career that has consisted of being a pulpit rabbi in Chicago and Denver, an activist for civil rights and social justice during his tenure as the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, D.C., and as a leader of the worldwide Progressive Jewish movement as the head of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Hirsch recalls that his Zionist involvement really began at the age of thirteen when he was a member of the Young Judea Zionist youth movement at his Conservative synagogue. He entered their local oratorical contest, which he won, and he continued on to win the national contest with his speech about Zionism. Cleveland Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver even asked him to give the speech at the Cleveland Zionist Federation.³⁶ Hirsch recalls humorously that the local papers even said “Student Wants to be Like Abba Hillel Silver.”³⁷

When Hirsch entered the Hebrew Union College in 1944 he was “astounded that the trauma of the Holocaust had not transformed the entire faculty, or for that matter the entire student body, into Zionists.”³⁸ In an interview he added, “The lack of intense

³⁵ David Polish, *The Higher Freedom*, p. 204.

³⁶ Richard G. Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount: A Reform Zionist Quest* (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 17-18.

³⁷ Personal interview with Richard Hirsch, December 12, 2005.

³⁸ Richard Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount*, p. 20.

Zionism bothered the heck out of me!"³⁹ In 1949 Hirsch decided to take a leave of absence from HUC and study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Many faculty members including his academic advisor, Samuel Cohon, and Nelson Glueck tried to dissuade him from going. They felt that anything that he can learn there, he could learn in Cincinnati.⁴⁰ In Israel Hirsch became fluent in Hebrew, and began to think how a progressive Jewish movement could take roots:

I contended, to no avail at the time, that if the socialist founders would have viewed their movement as a *reform* of Jewish tradition rather than a *rebellion against* Jewish tradition, they would have adopted a more constructive attitude toward Judaism. Even in those early days, I advocated that the kibbutz's communal structure provided an ideal setting for creative and innovative experiences in observance of the Sabbath and holidays and the Jewish life cycle.⁴¹

After his year in Jerusalem Hirsch gave his senior sermon in the HUC chapel in Cincinnati on November 18, 1950. What he preached was seen as controversial by many who attended. In the sermon he claimed that Jews need to see Zionism not as a separate movement within the Jewish world, but as part of the whole package. "In the American Jewish community today, the phenomena of anti-Zionism, non-Zionism, and pro-Zionism can no longer exist. Today there is only Judaism."⁴² He then adds that the Reform Movement must take leadership within the Zionist world so that its unique message will be heard in Israel:

If Reform Judaism wants to influence Israel, and we have every privilege and duty to do so, then let us as a religious movement not only give moral support to Zionist undertakings. Let us enter actively into the work of revitalizing the Jewish state. Let us include as part of our general Jewish education program what today is know as Zionist education. Let us inspire our members with the need for American aliyah and *halutziut* (immigration and pioneering).

³⁹ Personal interview.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Richard Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount*, p. 22.

⁴² Ibid., p. 27.

Once Reform Judaism articulates in deeds the close relationship between Israel and American Jewry, then it will find that what was originally intended as service to Israel has in turn, increased the strength and significance of Reform Judaism in America. The difficult burdens of family responsibility will bring the rich blessings of family love.⁴³

After the sermon Leo Baeck, the great leader of German Jewry who had been interned in a Nazi concentration camp, sat Hirsch down and told him that he was wrong. Zionism and Reform Judaism were separable. "I was shocked. How can Leo Baeck not be a Zionist?"⁴⁴ This just showed Hirsch that the Reform movement still had a long way to go to total integration between religion and nationalism, but he may have jumped to the wrong conclusion since separability does not mean contradiction. Separate philosophies may complement one another, but Hirsch saw Zionism and Jewish religion as two heads of the same coin.

In Chapter 2 it was shown how Hirsch worked to get his ideas about Zionism as facts on the ground starting in 1967 when he got the ball rolling on the creating of the Joint Commission on Israel. 1967 was a pivotal year because he became disillusioned with the lack of Christian support for Israel in the Six Day War from the clergy people he worked with while at the Religious Action Center. He criticized them for that. "A distinguished Protestant clergyman, with whom I had worked closely, was evidently quite astounded by the sharpness of my criticism. He responded in kind, 'Dick, I always thought you Jews were the prototype of the universal man. Now I see you are only tribal particularists.'"⁴⁵ He realized that American Jews might be alone in fighting for Israel, and Reform Jews have to be leaders in that fight. "My criticism of the Christian world

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁴⁴ Personal interview.

⁴⁵ Richard Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount*, p. 50.

led to criticism of Reform Judaism. If I demanded recognition of the State by Christians, did I not have an even greater obligation to demand full recognition of the State by Reform Jews?"⁴⁶

The greatest effect on Zionism in the Reform Movement that Hirsch caused was while he was the executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. He became the head in order to strengthen Progressive Judaism in Israel. "The challenge was to root Reform Judaism in Israel. This could only be done by a dramatic symbolic act . . ."⁴⁷ In November of 1971 it was announced that the WUPJ was moving its world headquarters to Jerusalem. The titular body of world Reform was now centered in Zion.

Before he made aliyah, Hirsch was already a member of the World Zionist Organization Executive on an *ad personam* basis. In 1974 the World Union decided to affiliate with the WZO (it officially did in 1976), and Hirsch was also calling for the American Reform Movement to do the same. At the CCAR convention of 1973 he said, "If Klal Yisrael is to be more than a slogan, then we cannot be Jewish 'American-Firsters.' We must participate fully in the organizations and programs of Klal Yisrael, and that includes not only the World Jewish Congress but also the World Zionist Organization . . . A Reform Judaism which limits its institutional horizons to an American environment sooner or later reduces itself to a religious expression of American nationalism."⁴⁸ In the same speech he mentioned that the WUPJ was establishing a Progressive Kibbutz. He said, "They will be Chalutzim not only of the land, but of the spirit. Through them we shall uncover new creative way of establishing

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁸ Richard G. Hirsch, "New Directions in Liberal Judaism in the World Today," in *A Reform Zionist Perspective: Judaism & Community in the Modern Age*, Michael Langer, ed. (New York, 1977), p. 275.

normative ritual and moral patterns."⁴⁹ The ideas Hirsch had about Jewish life in Israel while visiting there as a student, he was now seeing to fruition as real institutions.

At a celebration for the tenth anniversary of the World Union's move to Jerusalem, Hirsch said in a speech, "A movement, like an individual, is judged not by ideological formulation, but by life commitments; not by resolutions, but by resolute actions; not by promises, but by performances reflected in the achievement of its adherents and institutions."⁵⁰ Hirsch's Zionist thought may not have been as profound as Polish's or even Gittelsohn's, but in action, Hirsch created facts on the ground in Israel that paved the way for a more fully integrated Zionism in Reform Judaism.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 278.

⁵⁰ Richard Hirsch, *From the Hill to the Mount*, p. 241.

Chapter 4 ARZA—The First Decade

The Build Up to the 29th World Zionist Congress

After the establishment of ARZA at the November 1977 UAHC Biennial, Roland Gittelsohn, Acting Director Rabbi Ira Youdovin, and the members of the ARZA Steering Committee stepped up their activities to get ready for the 29th World Zionist Congress to be held at the end of February and beginning of March of 1978. A November 28, 1977 letter from Gittelsohn to ARZA members tells them to vote for ARZA when they get their ballot in the mail. The letter says that a vote for ARZA is a vote for the "principles of equality and freedom for which we stand . . . Perhaps you might urge your friends to consider ARZA's platform and slate."¹ The first *ARZA Newsletter* of the same month reiterates the plea for votes in the upcoming elections that begin in December of 1977. The newsletter states:

ARZA enters the Zionist movement at a time of transition for Israel, Zionism and the Jewish People. Long before Mr. Begin's victory underscored this fact, it was clear that the time had come for taking a serious look at the nature of Jewish life in Israel and throughout the world.

The size of ARZA's representation at the Congress will determine the strength of our position on such issues as Jewish pluralism and the rights of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel . . .

While the Congress has no direct bearing on Israel's legislative and judicial process, its deliberations are regarded with extreme sensitivity by those who shape Israeli policy. During the many years when there was no voice demanding equal rights and recognition, Israeli leaders could assume that we were not disturbed by the *status quo*. The time has come to forever dispel this impression.

At no time in Israel's history has there been a more opportune time for constructive change. A strong ARZA presence can help make this happen.²

Right away ARZA states that its main aim in the World Zionist Congress will be to push the pluralism issue and begin to change the *status quo* of the Orthodox monopoly over religious rights. The feeling of urgency is highlighted by the inclusion of an article about

¹ Roland B. Gittelsohn letter to members of ARZA, November 28, 1977, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

² *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November, 1977, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

the Orthodox parties in Israel wanting to amend the Law of Return with a clause that converts wishing to make *aliyah* have to have been converted "according to the halacha." The article ends: "But the controversy is not over. The Orthodox will again seek to amend the Law of Return at earliest possible moment, as they will fight to maintain their monopolistic control over Jewish life in Israel . . . The experience of these past five months will certainly guide ARZA as we approach our first Zionist Congress."³

The newsletter also has non-alarmist elements like an article about the Reform Kibbutz Yahel being one year old and the three goals for building up ARZA. These are: national organization, organizing an Israel mission, and building congregational chapters with membership list and activities. It says that ARZA is planning a speakers and film bureau, activities manual and program guidelines for the chapters.⁴

The next *ARZA Newsletter* came out in January of 1978. The title of the newsletter is "Peace Negotiation Special Up-Date" because, as the newsletter exclaims, "One of ARZA's primary commitments to its members is keeping them abreast of Middle East developments."⁵ What follows is an in-depth analysis of the peace process between Israel and Egypt, with Begin's plan and Sadat's counter-plan written by Ira Youdovin. The article is very wary of the P.L.O. taking control of the Territories with the talks of autonomy for the Palestinians, but Youdovin predicts, "As Palestinian autonomy emerges, P.L.O. loyalties will subside." The issue ends on a somewhat cautious note: "Both Sadat and Begin have invested too much politically to permit failure. If the U.S. facilitates the face-to-face negotiations, avoiding imposition of

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1978, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

excessive mixed signals, the prospects are still bright, although instant peace is not in the cards. Hard, honest negotiating among equals is now underway, and that in itself is unprecedented in Mideast history—and three months ago could not even be dreamed about in our wildest fantasies.”⁶

After the votes were counted for the American delegation to the 1978 World Zionist Congress, the headline at the top of the February 1978 newsletter proclaims that “ARZA Scores Congress Election Victory.” ARZA received 11,373 votes, which was about 2000 more votes than they had members when registration closed in October of 1977. The following article assumed that many of the votes came from members of other Zionist organizations. But, for all the self-congratulation, ARZA actually won only nine seats out of the 152-member American delegation.⁷ As Ira Youdovin points out, “We started learning words we had never heard before . . . we needed a *siah* (minimum delegation), having nine seats was irrelevant . . . we needed a minimum of twelve seats . . . What do you do with nine seats? You just sit there as spectators. We had to learn a new language, new procedures, new rules—which kept on changing.”⁸ It would not be until the actual Congress that the ARZA leaders learned this. According to the newsletter, the ARZA delegation to the Congress, including non-voting members, consisted of twenty-one people, nine of them rabbis. Of the lay people, at least five of them were women.⁹

The newsletter has an overview of how the Zionist Congress works, but the majority of the space is dedicated to an article called “The Religious Rights Issue.” It gives a brief background on the religious establishment in Israel and the Mizrahi

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1978, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

⁸ Personal interview with Rabbi Ira Youdovin April 25, 2006.

⁹ *Newsletter*, February 1978.

Movement within Zionism, but the tone of the article seems to be to "rile up the troops." It says, "The 29th Zionist Congress which convenes on February 20 in Jerusalem marks the first time that the Orthodox hegemony will be challenged within the councils of world Zionism. This charge will be led by ARZA . . ."¹⁰ The article makes it clear that the charge will be against Mizrahi and its National Religious Party. ARZA will do this by presenting a resolution at the Congress for religious pluralism within the World Zionist Organization and in the State of Israel.

The 29th World Zionist Congress: Victory and Chaos

Even though the organization projected confidence in their newsletters, by the time of the Congress in February 1978, Youdovin recalls, "[Our] delegation went over not knowing what to do and how we were going to do it."¹¹ Before the Congress, different factions were courting ARZA to join with them, but ARZA felt that they can best accomplish their goals without compromise as an independent entity. As commented on previously, ARZA did not realize that they needed to join with these parties so that they could gain more delegates in order to have a minimum of twelve delegates to vote and have a representative on the Zionist Executive.¹² The Labor Party gave them three of their delegates, but now ARZA was part of their block. This gave the Labor Party a good ally after their demoralizing defeat in the past Israeli election, and it gave ARZA a powerful ally to help them accomplish their number one goal—a resolution on pluralism.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Personal interview.

¹² Youdovin remembers fondly that at the convention center he went to get the ARZA delegation credentials, but the person handing them out did not want to give them to him because they did not have twelve.

Zionist Congresses commence with the leader of every faction given the opportunity to address all of the delegates present on their group's interpretation on the Congress theme. As president of ARZA, Roland Gittelsohn gave his speech late in the evening. After a short introduction explaining who this new party is, he moved right on to a little bragging: "I am advised that for the first time in the history of the Zionist movement a party in the WZO legitimately pulled considerably more votes in the American Zionist election than it had registered members of its own, more than 11,000 such votes."¹³ He then went on to give the Reform Movement's Zionist credentials:

I believe that it is one of the scandals of Jewish education in this nation that your children in Israel do not know that Judah Magnes, Stephen Samuel Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, Alexander M. Schindler all were or are Reform rabbis. It is time for the children of Israel to know this. It is time for them and for you to know that the Reform Jews of the United States today are overwhelmingly Zionist. That the Board of our national body last June approved the organization of ARZA—and this is a body of some 200 leading men and women, Jewish leaders of our movement—approved this unanimously.¹⁴

The bulk of Gittelsohn's speech was the four main things that ARZA offers to the Zionist Movement:

1. Countless new Zionists . . . We offer to the Zionist movement every bit of energy and strength we have in aiding those who seek religious rights and religious pluralism in Israel . . . We shall strive to fulfill one of the noblest paragraphs in Israel's Declaration of Independence, the paragraph which guarantees free religious rights to everyone. A paragraph which today is actually implemented for every person of every religious faith in this State except for non-Orthodox religious Jews. We of ARZA are opposed to no one . . . We respect Orthodox Jews, though in some ways we disagree with them. We respect Jews who have no religious convictions, though we disagree with them. But we shall demand no less rights for non-Orthodox religious Jews in Israel than for the others.
2. We offer to the Zionist movement if not the largest, one of the two largest and most active youth groups in the United States . . . We offer our help to those

¹³ Roland B. Gittelsohn *Address to the 29th World Zionist Congress*, February 21, 1978, Roland B. Gittelsohn Papers, 704/34/5, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁴ Ibid.

who seek to reform internally this World Zionist Organization, not only its election procedures but its Congress procedures . . .

3. We offer you, finally, Reform Judaism's unique emphasis on the social ethics of Judaism. You must remember that our tradition bids us construct the windows of the synagogue in such physical dimensions that the light will shine from the synagogue out into the world. We believe that ritual is important, prayer is important, mitzvot are important; but the Jewish ethics in every area of life are even more important. And even as we in Reform Judaism have sought to apply the social ethics of our heritage in the United States to business, to industry, to government, to *every* area of life, so we shall seek to apply those ethics in the State of Israel also.¹⁵

Gittelson's second point is what ARZA wanted to concentrate on by proposing a resolution on religious pluralism. Gittelson later writes, "Not even the most optimistic among us thought for an instant that such a resolution could pass the first time around. Our more limited, realistic hope was to sound a first alert, to initiate a first thrust that could be pressed further at succeeding Congresses."¹⁶ Alexander Schindler noted, "And if it doesn't pass there . . . we'll bring it up again and again until, it is approved . . . If our money is good enough for Israel, then we should be good enough."¹⁷

According to Congress rules, to reach the plenary, a resolution had to be recommended by a committee. Youdovin recalls, "We huddled and decided to use some American style diplomacy, which had never been done there before."¹⁸ ARZA went to several committee chairs, but they were not interested in such a controversial measure. Gittelson writes, "By sheer coincidence, one evening at a cocktail party hosted by Richard Scheuer [a Reform leader] we mentioned our plans to Esther Herlitz, Chairperson of the Education Committee [and a Labor Knesset member]. She urged us to channel our effort through her committee, promising full and enthusiastic cooperation.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Roland B. Gittelson, *ARZA—From Birth to Bar/Bat Mitzvah* (New York, 1991), p. 16.

¹⁷ Judy Siegel, "'Religious Pluralism' Sought," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 23, 1978, p. 3.

¹⁸ Personal interview.

After full discussion in which several of us participated, the Education Committee agreed: our resolution would come before the plenary."¹⁹

When the resolution came before the Congress, pandemonium broke loose. As the *Jerusalem Post* reported, "The tedium of the 29th Zionist Congress was shattered twice yesterday by shouting, pushing, singing and booing in a confrontation over 'religious pluralism' in the World Zionist Organization. The hubbub ended with approval by a majority of the plenum of a resolution calling for Jewish education programmes in the Diaspora based on the principle of equality for all trends, including the Conservative and Reform movements."²⁰ When the resolution was proposed from the floor by Former Education Minister and Laborite Aharon Yadlin, "some young Mizrahi and Herut delegates rushed to the stage to take control of the microphone."²¹ Chairman of the Zionist Executive Arye Dulzin called for a second vote to be held in the afternoon since sixty delegates demanded it. When the afternoon session started, and Dulzin called for a second vote, he was booed by supporters of the resolution (ARZA, the WUPJ, the Conservative Movement's World Union of Synagogues, Hadassah, Labor, DMC, Mapam, and others). A majority approved the resolution, and delegates from Mizrahi and Herut "stormed out of the hall for consultations, and returned in a snake-dance, singing 'Utzu etza ve'tufar . . .' (the biblical phrase meaning 'Your counsel shall be voided'). The proponents of the resolution drowned out the opponents with a rendition of 'Hinei ma tov u'ma na'im . . .' (How good it is for brothers to dwell together')." A

¹⁹ Gittelsohn, *ARZA—From Birth to Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, p. 16.

²⁰ Judy Siegel, "Shoving-match at Zionist Congress over 'religious pluralism' issue," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 28, 1978, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

shoving match between the dancers and security guards ensued. As the Post reported, "The ceiling-to-floor portrait of Theodor Herzl teetered precariously in the fray."²²

The resolution, written by Reform and Conservative leaders, that passed, reads:

This 29th Congress affirms that, in order to encourage Aliyah from all segments of World Jewry, all World Zionist Organization departments, instrumentalities and programs shall be administered in accord with the principle of equal treatment for every religious movement within its ranks and for every Jew, regardless of origins or of the religious and ideological movement with which he identifies. Programs of a religious and educational character should reflect the pluralism of Jewish life throughout the world.

This Congress calls on the State of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people to implement fully the principle of guaranteed religious rights for all its citizens, including equality of opportunity, equality of recognition and equality of governmental aid to all religious movements within Judaism.²³

While the resolution calls for pluralism and equality in the WZO and in the State of Israel, it only has power over the WZO. Any change in Israel would have to come through the Knesset, and the Reform Movement did not have power in the Knesset. Even though Labor supported them in the Congress, their issues in the Knesset are very separate. Since there is no Reform Jewish party in the Knesset to ally with Labor, Labor does not have to push pluralism in the Knesset. Youdovin comments, "A totally meaningless resolution, but it passed."²⁴ "Meaningless" because it would not be enforced, but it was symbolically important.

The ARZA delegation returned to States from the 29th World Zionist Congress claiming victory. The April 1978 *Newsletter* has a copy of the pluralism resolution filling the whole cover page. In the edition there is a large article that talks about the lead up and passing of the resolution. It also praises the speeches delivered by Reform Jews

²² Ibid.

²³ *Resolution of the 29th World Zionist Congress*, World Zionist Congress 1978 file, 16/G6/2, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁴ Personal interview.

David Polish and Dr. Ezra Spicehandler. While mainly focusing on the resolution, the article does give one paragraph to another project that ARZA supports:

Perhaps the most cogent perspective was found not within the halls of the Congress, but at Kibbutz Yahel, our new settlement in the Arava. The ARZA-WUPJ delegation paid a visit to Kibbutz Yahel, to participate in the groundbreaking for an International Seminary-Learning Center NFTS has pledged to build. After the brief ceremony, Howie Levin, a young man from Chicago, noted quietly: "I'm a product of American Reform Judaism. I went through Garin Arava and made aliyah to a Reform kibbutz. Someday, I hope to be married at Yahel and when I do, I want to be married by a Reform rabbi. Maybe we have now taken a first step in this direction."²⁵

The newsletter states that ARZA now needs to move forward with its other goals of increasing membership, organizing chapters, having Israel missions, and creating links between American Reform Jews and Israeli Reform Jews.

In an article entitled "Victory and Defeat at the Zionist Congress" in the Summer 1978 issue of *The Journal of Reform Judaism*, Michael Meyer gives a more sobering view of what transpired. He writes:

... There can be no question that in February 1978 Reform Judaism gained an important victory for its cause ...

If one were to look only at the issue of the standing gained for Progressive Judaism, it would be possible to look back upon the congress with undisturbed satisfaction. But, unfortunately, in a no less significant respect, the congress must be seen as a profound defeat for the Progressive cause. When the Mizrahi delegation decided to return to the congress after its walkout upon losing the re-vote on the Education Committee's resolution, it was prompted, I am certain, in no small measure by the desire to bring its decisive presence to bear on other resolutions yet to come before the congress. For if the Orthodox were determined to preserve their exclusive right to represent Jewish religion in the WZO and generally in Israel, they were no less determined to provide a united front with the Likud on those issues affecting territories and settlements.²⁶

²⁵ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 3, April 1978, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁶ Michael A. Meyer, "Victory and Defeat at the Zionist Congress," *The Journal of Reform Judaism*, Vol. XXV, No. 3 (Summer 1978): p. 2.

Meyer is dismayed because even though the Zionist public was warming to the idea that institutionally the Reform Movement should have equality, the Israeli political culture of the late Seventies was not willing to listen to its stances on morality, which Reform claims are from the Jewish religion. "Despite the manifestly far greater personal sacrifice involved in setting up a new kibbutz, like Yahel, in the barren and blistering Aravah, it is the relatively comfortable and well-financed settlement in areas of Arab population that appeals to the Israeli public as expressive of a Jewish religious determination to strengthen the bonds between land and people."²⁷ Organizational recognition is only the beginning. Reform needs to explain to the Israeli that their philosophy of nationalism and universalism is Jewish and is needed in their society.

ARZA Organizes

After the 29th Zionist Congress, ARZA finally started to build an organization that up until this point had not had the time to organize because of the rushed pace to get accepted into the AZF and WZO and then to get ready for the Congress. In Ira Youdovin's first-year report he notes that at ARZA's upcoming national assembly scheduled for September 15-17, 1978 in Washington, DC, "Delegates will work toward developing a more permanent structure to supersede the existing Steering Committee; set priorities for ARZA programming; discuss critical political, social, and religious issues; and formulate an ideological platform which will be the first official statement of Reform Zionism."²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁸ Association of Reform Zionists of America Report on the First Year (1977-1978), Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

According to the registration list, 216 delegates made the trip to Washington, DC for the ARZA first national assembly from all over the country.²⁹ There they heard presentations about topics like Zionism and Reform, politics and religion in Israel, Kibbutz Yahel, the status of women in Israel, Soviet Jewry, and other social issues. The delegates also broke into small groups to discuss the ins and outs of building local ARZA chapters. There was also the election of officers, the drafting of a constitution, and the acceptance of the *ARZA Platform*.

The *ARZA Platform* is based on David Polish's commentary on the 1968 *Jerusalem Platform* discussed in Chapter 2. In his speech before the assembly, Polish said, "The main themes in our proposed Platform are Centrality, Aliyah, the Role of the American Diaspora, and Zionist Mitzvot.

. . . We stress the *religious* nature of our Zionism . . . We come to Zionism not with nationalism alone, but nationalism *with* religion, which is in the tradition of our people. And I might add that Jewish nationalism, as tempered by our religious calling, requires that Israel be a different kind of nation, not as a gifted but mistaken Israeli writer suggests, no more than another Albania. A second requirement of our religious Zionism should be that we are concerned not only with our rights in Israel. This alone would be only a partial achievement. In keeping with our Reform religious development, we are concerned with applying the ethical and prophetic principles of Jewish life to Zionism.³⁰

The most significant difference between the new Platform and the earlier commentary on the Jerusalem Platform is the section on how ARZA members will implement their religious Zionism. The section uses the language of religious Zionism and is called "ARZA Mitzvot." The five "*mitzvot*" are:

1. We call for a special ARZA program of encouraging aliyah and for continuous work in behalf of olim from our movement.

²⁹ Registration list for the First ARZA National Assembly, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁰ David Polish, "The ARZA Platform—Challenge and Opportunity," speech reprint, September 16, 1978.

2. We call for the development in Israel of an ARZA program of social concerns which will reflect our Torah's social ethic to which we are committed.
3. We are committed to fostering, under the aegis of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the further development of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, its synagogues and its programs of formal and informal education. We are committed to strengthening the work in Israel of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism.
4. In addition to aliyah, we urge the following:
 - a. Volunteer service in Israel by those who have special skills which can aid Israel in the social, cultural, scientific, and other fields. We call for the creation of a task force to achieve this objective.
 - b. Periodic visits to Israel by ARZA members as part of their Reform Zionist commitment.
 - c. The intensification of Hebrew and Israel-oriented programs in child, youth, college, and adult studies in our movement.
5. We view an Israel program sponsored by the Reform movement as an integral part of the education of every Reform Jew. We call upon our rabbis, congregations, and ARZA chapters to realize this goal.³¹

While at the World Zionist Congress ARZA focused more on their factional goal, at their first assembly the organization started to broaden its goals towards developing a more holistic approach to Zionism—a Reform Zionism.

ARZA and Israel Advocacy

One of the main tasks of ARZA has been to update members on the political situation in Israel and to advocate ARZA's special take on the situation. ARZA will often encourage action to be taken. For example, in September and October of 1978 ARZA's leadership sent out a letter with a petition to be signed and sent to President Carter calling for the U.S. government to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. During Camp David and the Lebanon War there were mailers and articles in the newsletters giving ARZA's interpretations of the events.

³¹ *The ARZA Platform*, Roland B. Gittelsohn Papers, 704/34/6, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

In the late Seventies and throughout the Eighties, ARZA took a very moderate approach (which would probably be considered right-wing today) in its commentary on Israeli foreign relation issues. In the December 1981 Newsletter Ira Youdovin writes an analysis of a Saudi peace proposal. The proposal calls for an independent Palestinian state, but Youdovin is very skeptical about this. He writes, "At this point in time, an 'independent Palestinian state' means a PLO state. Although there are West Bank moderates who reject terrorism, the present political constellation of the Arab world, coupled with the PLO's consistent tactic of assassinating Arabs who seek accommodation with Israel, lead inevitably to an entity that would become a base not only for Arab irredentism and terror, but for Soviet strategic and political expansion."³² For the time this would have been a very mainstream position in the Jewish community.

Another way that ARZA advocated and promoted Israel was through "leadership" missions. One such mission was called "Meet the Israel Progressive Movement" and took place March 2-17, 1985. The advertisement has a tentative itinerary:

- Meet with Lay and Rabbinic Leaders of the Israel Progressive Movement
- Meet new Sabra Rabbis
- Meet leaders of Reform Youth Movements
- Meet Orthodox Spokesmen
- Meet Officials of Hebrew Union College and World Union for Progressive Judaism
- Meet Members of Mitzpeh Har Chalutz (Reform free enterprise settlement in the Galilee)
- Meet members at Kibbutz Yahel and Kibbutz Lotan
- Meet experts on Religious Pluralism
- Meet officials of World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency³³

³² *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. V, No. 1, December 1981, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

³³ "ARZA Leadership Mission," Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

Like the theme of this trip, it seems from the documents that ARZA's main objective was to promote awareness of religious pluralism issues in Israel and to help the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. The *Newsletter* has many articles about Yahel and the second Reform Kibbutz Lotan, Har Halutz, the Reform settlement in the Galilee, newly ordained Israeli Reform rabbis, and any news of synagogue struggles to buy land in Israel. In June of 1983 the ARZA board decided to put money into what they had been promoting since 1977. They voted to increase membership dues (to \$18 for an individual, \$25 for a couple, and \$5 for a student) and allocate a portion of the dues income to the IMPJ—specifically to six programs: an Arab-Jewish camp, a legal defense fund to “pay attorney’s fees for our movement’s legal challenges to the status quo,” college scholarships for Yahel and Lotan, Garin Arava (“locates and prepares Americans to join the Reform kibbutzim”), Har Halutz, and Netzer Olami the Reform youth movement.³⁴

ARZA also periodically sent out mailers of educational material to its members and to UAHC synagogues about happenings in Israel and political analysis. For example, for the High Holy Days of 1981, ARZA compiled *Ten Days for ARZA*, a packet containing background on Israel’s position in the Middle East, the mood in Washington concerning Israel, analysis of the Israeli elections, and a “sample ARZA sermon,” presumably all to be used by rabbis and congregational leaders to include Israel into the congregation’s High Holy Day experience. The packet also gives ARZA’s position on different issues like Israel’s bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor.

The Boards of ARZA and the UAHC unanimously adopted a resolution commending Israel for “eliminating this grave threat to its people and to its

³⁴ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Fall 1983, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

survival as a nation . . .” and for “preventing a new, nuclear Holocaust.” The text affirmed that “the strike was made necessary by the world’s refusal to take seriously the explicit threat of the Iraqi government to use nuclear arms against what it calls ‘the Zionist entity,’” and endorsed Israel’s proposal “for an international treaty that would make the Middle East free of nuclear weapons.” Clearly, the raid was a justifiable act of self defense.³⁵

When commenting on the June 1981 elections in Israel, the packet is weary of the Likud coalition that gives a lot of power to the religious parties. It also has cautious commentary about Ariel Sharon’s appointment as Defense Minister. ARZA seems to be worried about his stance on the Territories.

The most interesting article in *Ten Days of ARZA* is the sample sermon. It begins with short anecdotes about three Israeli Reform rabbis (Moses Weiler, Tovia Ben-Chorin, and Ady Assabi) and how they cannot perform marriages, funerals, or serve as military chaplains. The sermon then explains how Orthodoxy continues to maintain its power over alternative expressions of Judaism because of Orthodoxy’s disproportional power in the Parliamentary system. But, the sermon explains, with membership in ARZA, the organization will have more seats and influence in the World Zionist Congress and will give more support to struggling Reform institutions in Israel. The sermon, though, does have one paragraph that is not only against the Orthodox position on religious pluralism. It is, ironically, about Jewish unity. “Your ARZA membership enables us to say to our own government that there is no erosion in American commitment to Israel . . . And I emphasize that when we act in the arena of American public opinion, the question of religious rights is forgotten entirely. We stand alongside the Orthodox and all others to present an unfailing façade of Jewish unity.” It is as if this line needed to be added so that Reform congregants don’t get so angry at Israel for not having religious pluralism

³⁵ *Ten Days of ARZA*, World Union of Progressive Judaism Records, 16/G6/9, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

that they stop supporting the Israeli state and support only the Israeli Reform movement.

The sermon ends with the original message:

What is the quintessential message of these Days of Awe?

That nothing is irreversible—not even the second-class status of Reform Judaism in Israel.

That no obstacle is insurmountable—not even the stubborn resistance of an entrenched Orthodox establishment.

That history can be overcome.

*Im tirzu, ayn zu agada.*³⁶

It is as if ARZA wanted every Reform rabbi to “toe the party line” in his or her stance on Israel.

The 30th World Zionist Congress—the Fight for Fair Representation

The lead up to the 1982 Congress was wrought with inter-Zionist controversy. According to Youdovin, this was the low-point of ARZA's affiliation with the WZO. Reeling from the votes ARZA took from their members in 1978 and fearful that it would happen again, Hadassah and the Zionist Organization of America tried to amend the WZO constitution that calls for elections to the American Zionist Federation. The two groups wanted to set the delegations for the 1982 Congress at the same proportions of the total U.S. delegation of the 1978 Congress. The only way to ratify the amendment in time was for the Zionist General Council to have a mail ballot. Gittelsohn writes, “Our appeal to the Zionist High Court that a mail ballot is an illegal method of amending the constitution resulted in the kind of Alice-in-Wonderland decision which makes a travesty of both legality and ethics.”³⁷ The court decided that even though the mail ballot procedure was questionable, it was done in good faith, and therefore could stand.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Gittelsohn, p. 24.

The constitutional amendment was defeated, though, by the Zionist General Council by one vote. Since there were no elections held during the controversy, the Zionist High Court decided the size of each delegation. "None of us who testified before the Court that day in Jerusalem will ever forget the Kafkaesque atmosphere and decision. The judges apparently approved of King Solomon's original proposal that the competing claims of two mothers be resolved by cutting the baby in half,"³⁸ recalls Gittelsohn. They took three of Hadassah's 1978 delegation of seventy-two, one of the ZOA's twenty-three, and one of Mizrahi's twenty, and gave them to ARZA on top of the nine from 1978. So, ARZA went into the Congress with fourteen delegates. That number was very disappointing because ARZA was hoping for forty delegates if elections were held. In a memo to the ARZA national board on September 23, 1982, Ira Youdovin writes that if the Zionist High Court refused to overturn the amendment, "we [will] plan an appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court. . . . One of our primary objectives in creating ARZA was revitalizing the WZO The outrageous tactics we have encountered are typical of everything that is wrong with the WZO. The battle we are fighting for our just representation at the 30th Congress is an essential element in our long-range campaign."³⁹

At the Congress ARZA was unsuccessful in proposing any new resolutions on pluralism. Gittelsohn writes about the Congress:

In terms of generating ideological discussion and significant resolutions, the Congress was, frankly, an embarrassment. The "quality" of the debate was distressingly low, with those speakers who might have had something to say being interrupted by heckling and even fisticuffs. The Congress machinery was entirely in the hands of those who refused to tolerate resolutions at variance with government policy . . . a vote breaking with West Bank settlement policy was ruled invalid. It was a dismal spectacle.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Letter from Rabbi Ira S. Youdovin to the ARZA National Board, September 23, 1982, Roland B. Gittelsohn Papers, 704/34/5, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.*

... Our participation in this Congress had some salutary effect. Because we had fought for elections, our delegation enjoyed a unique credibility. When we held a press conference to charge the WZO with shutting out the new elements it claimed to be welcoming into the fold, we received coverage nobody else would have received because we had demonstrated our commitment to the ideals we proclaim.⁴⁰

ARZA left the Congress without gaining chairs of any committees, or the chair of the Zionist General Council. ARZA went back to America to concentrate on its other programs. As Ira Youdovin said almost twenty-five years later, "The Zionist Congress means almost nothing."⁴¹

By the mid-Eighties ARZA continued to grow in membership and programs. There were also changes in the ARZA office in New York. In the summer of 1983, Ira Youdovin resigned as executive director of ARZA, a post he held first as an acting director, and after the first national assembly, as the official head. He was replaced by Rabbi Eric Yoffie who was formerly the UAHC Regional Director in St. Louis.

ARZA also grew in prestige in the WZO. When voting was reinstated for the 31st Congress in 1987, ARZA gained thirty-three seats. With the seats from the international Reform Zionists group Arzenu and the WUPJ seats, Reform representation was sixty seats. With a coalition of Hadassah, Labor and MERCAZ (the Conservative Movement's faction), ARZA was able to get a resolution calling for legal rights for non-Orthodox rabbis, and resolutions calling for a more liberal position on peace with the Arabs, an end to expansion of settlements in the territories, and support for settlements in the Aravah where Yahel and Lotan are located. Richard Hirsch became the powerful Chairman of

⁴⁰ Roland Gittelsohn *Letter to the ARZA National Board*, December 23, 1982, Roland B. Gittelsohn Papers, 704/34/5, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴¹ Personal interview.

the Zionist General Council, and Rabbi Hank Skirball was appointed chairman of the WZO Department of Education and Culture.

ARZA also began to really become activists for and give resources to their issues in Israel, particularly the "Who is a Jew?" question and support for the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. In regard to "Who is a Jew?" ARZA, through its Religious Rights Fund, paid for legal expenses for Shashanna Miller, an American Reform convert who was denied registration as a Jew by the Orthodox controlled Israeli Interior Ministry when she made *aliyah* in 1985. ARZA President Rabbi Charles Kroloff sent a letter to then Prime Minister Shimon Peres explaining that the Law of Return says that converts to Judaism have the right to make *aliyah*, not specifically Orthodox converts. The IMPJ and WUPJ, with ARZA's funding, retained prominent Israeli attorney Arnold Spaer to lead the legal battle on behalf of Miller and four other immigrants.⁴²

By the end of 1986, Shoshanna Miller was recognized as a Jew by Israel after Israel's High Court of Justice ordered the Ministry of the Interior to register her as one. Kroloff proclaimed, "... current religious tension in Israel can be alleviated if all parties will utilize the legal process and accept the judgment of Israel's highest court."⁴³ This is one of the main areas that ARZA focused on for the next decade, supporting court cases that fought for Reform rights in Israel. Reform Jews were often painted as second-class citizens, as Richard Hirsch said about the Miller case, "If the Minister of the Interior's decision had been allowed to stand, two classes of Jews would have been created."⁴⁴ But,

⁴² *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. X No. 3, Spring 1986, World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁴³ *ARZA New Release*, December 3, 1986, World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

as the eighties became the nineties, these issues garnered a lot of support for ARZA, and ARZA helped make changes to the status quo in Israel.

Chapter 5 The Second Decade

While still participating in the World Zionist Congresses and becoming more powerful and larger when voting was brought back to the process, in the late eighties and nineties ARZA began to concentrate more on establishing institutions in Israel and America to further its agenda of Progressive Judaism in Israel and Zionism in the American Reform Movement.

The Israel Religious Action Center

The amending of the Law of Return to limit Jewish converts immigrating to Israel to only those converted under Orthodox auspices has been something that ARZA has fought against since its founding. In 1985 this debate in Israel started to rage again with ARZA blaming the Lubavitch Movement for adding flames to the fire by claiming that the majority of Jews wanted the Law of Return to be amended. In the June 9, 1985 issue of the Israeli publication *Kefar Habad*, Rabbi Pinchas Lipner, a Lubavitch rabbi in San Francisco, slammed the Reform movement by saying that they have paid "huge sums of money" to Israeli parties to oppose an amendment to the Law of Return. Lipner also claimed, "The average Jew . . . even if he belongs to the Reform community, does not object in any way [to the amending of the Law of Return]."¹ ARZA's executive director Eric Yoffie replied, "I am sure that Rabbi Lipner knows that the rabbinic tradition views slanderous statements with the utmost seriousness . . . Yet in the absence of supportive evidence, Rabbi Lipner's remarks are surely slanderous. Therefore he is obligated to

¹ "Reform Zionist Movement Demands Apology from San Francisco Rabbi, May 29, 1985" World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, 16/G6/9, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

provide convincing proof of the charges that he has made, or he should make a public apology to the Reform community.”² A press release from ARZA points out, by paraphrasing ARZA president Charles Kroloff, that “the overwhelming majority of American Jews are against any change in the Law of Return . . . more than 25 national Jewish organizations and dozens of local Federations and Jewish community relations councils have passed resolutions opposing such changes.”³

In the same summer of 1985, ARZA voted to establish an organization in Israel to combat any changes to the Law of Return and the “Who is a Jew” question. Its press release states, “Diaspora Orthodox groups, and in particular the Lubavitch Hasidim, have played a critical role in encouraging the amendment of the law; Lubavitch maintains a full-time lobbyist in the Knesset who works primarily on this issue. Therefore, ARZA felt it important to provide the opposite view, which is supported by the great majority of Diaspora Jews.”⁴ The organization was called the Law of Return Action Center and was headed by lawyer, and at that time, Reform rabbinical student Uri Regev, in Jerusalem. Its projects, according to the Fall 1985 *ARZA Newsletter* was to “publish a quarterly newsletter on Reform Judaism and the Law of Return that will be distributed to Knesset members, government leaders, academics, and opinion makers. The Center will also commission polls to determine what Israelis really believe about the Law of Return and other issues on religious pluralism.”⁵

² “Reform Movement Accuses Lipner of ‘Slander,’” *Northern California Jewish Bulletin*, June 7, 1985, p. 30. See also, “Reform Zionist Movement Demands Apology from San Francisco Rabbi.”

³ “Reform Zionist Movement Demands Apology from San Francisco Rabbi.”

⁴ “ARZA Announces Creation of Law of Return Center,” World Union for Progressive Judaism Collection, 16/G6/9, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁵ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. X, No. 1, Fall 1985, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

On July 1, 1987 the Law of Return Action Center was expanded to become the Israel Religious Action Center. The *ARZA Newsletter* states, "ARZA leadership expects that in the near future the new center will play the same critical role in Israeli society that the Reform Religious Action Center in Washington plays in the United States."⁶ The mission of the new Center is similar to its predecessor, but as the *Newsletter* explains, the IRAC will also initiate

legal action on behalf of those who have suffered discrimination at the hands of the Orthodox establishment. The Center intends to file suit on behalf of Reform converts who have immigrated to Israel and cannot get registered as Jews under the Law of Return, on behalf of individuals converted *in Israel* by the Israeli Reform movement whose conversions are not recognized, on behalf of Israeli Reform institutions that have been unable to get funding from the government, and on behalf of individuals who are denied the right to have relatives buried in Israel under Reform auspices.⁷

Besides the lobbying and legal actions for the Reform Movement and Reform Jews, one of the goals of the Center is "working for women's rights and the rights of Israeli Arabs."⁸ In this way it was established to be an institution that helps the Reform Movement legally in the eyes of the State, but it is also an institution that helps promote the Reform agenda of social justice. The article in the *Newsletter* makes sure to state, because of an inter-organizational feud that will be expanded on later: "In addition to the Israel Movement and ARZA, the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the Hebrew Union College, and ARZENU are also cooperating in this endeavor."⁹

One of the first actions by the IRAC was to commission a poll of the Israeli public on their views of Orthodox rabbinical courts. It found that only twenty-nine percent of

⁶ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Fall 1987, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

Israelis believes that the rabbinical courts should retain their monopoly on matters of personal status. Fifty-seven percent believe that the power should be abolished or curtailed. The article also talks about protests that the new organization staged in front of the Israeli Ministry of Religion, and how they are working to make sure that the Orthodox parties don't close the movie theaters in Jerusalem on Friday night.

As a religious institution, the Center does not, of course, *advocate* movie attendance on Shabbat. In a recent public statement, however, the Center emphasized that in the view of the Reform movement, Shabbat observance in Jerusalem cannot be enforced by coercive legislation, but must flow from dialogue, personal example, and agreement among different elements of the city's population.¹⁰

Finally, the letter shows how IRAC is also concerned about equal rights for women. They paid for a newspaper advertisement congratulating Orthodox Knesset member Ovadiah Eli for the small step forward in supporting the right of women to be on local religious councils.¹¹

The fall 1990 ARZA Newsletter is devoted almost in its entirety to the Israel Religious Action Center. There are articles that show that IRAC has an expanded role from just fighting for the IMPJ. One is about IRAC uncovering corruption in the Knesset related to allocating money to bogus Orthodox institutions. Another is about helping newly arrived immigrants from the former Soviet Union navigate the Orthodox-controlled Ministry of Interior. A third article is about the IRAC's support of a movement in Israel to change the system of elections for "the governments of Israel have been racked with political crises over the last few years, with the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox parties holding the balance of power in the Knesset." But, the writer points

¹⁰ *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. XII, No. 2, Winter 1988, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

out, "It is not only because this is a prerequisite for ending the abuse of power by the Orthodox parties but more profoundly because the Center believes that the current system lacks accountability and militates against clean government and encourages corruption."¹² The issue also says that the IRAC is supporting two Reform rabbis' right to take their elected seat on a religious council, but they are blocked by Orthodox members, and that the IRAC is joining a coalition to fight against Orthodox pressure that limits the number of abortion clinics. It is clear from the articles that the IRAC does good work in Israel, but it is also clear who the bad guys are. Reform Jews are painted as David and the Orthodox are Goliath.

Just What is Reform Zionism?

In the 1980's ARZA leaders wanted to define what was specifically Reform about their Zionism. They wanted ideological statements for their situation—post Lebanon War, in the middle of the First Palestinian Intifada. Shira Koch Epstein writes, "The War in Lebanon in 1982 served as a turning point—the events of the war and the rhetoric behind the incursion led to a faltering of the 'liberal narrative.' By the late 1980's, Reform Jews found themselves unsure of how to relate to an Israel that was not in keeping with their American liberal ideals, nor seemed to accept their form of Judaism as authentic. As sociologists documented the faltering American Jewish relationship to Israel, Reform leaders recognized that the vacuum in Reform Zionist theology and ideology left Reform Jews without any grounding for their relationship to Israel."¹³

¹² *ARZA Newsletter*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Fall 1990, Association of Reform Zionists of America Nearprint File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³ Shira Koch Epstein, *Towards a Liberal Zionist Philosophy and its Implications for Israel Education*, unpublished rabbinical thesis, p. 92.

Therefore, ARZA board members Rabbis Stanley Davids and Leon Jick pushed the CCAR to adopt a resolution in 1989:

RESOLVED that the Central Conference of American Rabbis call for the establishment of a movement-wide think-tank to clarify and to articulate those values, traditions, commitments, and concerns of Reform Judaism which inextricably bind us to the State of Israel and to Zionism, and

FURTHER RESOLVED that such a think-tank provide for public discussion and evaluation of a series of statements defining the place of Zionism in the theology and ideology of Reform Judaism as it enters the 21st century.

(Note: This resolution has been referred to ARZA, KADIMA, and ARZENU for disposition.)¹⁴

Out of this resolution the ARZA Reform Zionist Think-Tank was established. It was the Think-Tank's goal to bring together top scholars and leaders in the Reform Movement to present papers and responses to the papers to discuss issues such as Reform relationship to the State of Israel, peoplehood, and Zionist theology. Each presenter was essentially trying to define Reform Zionism.

The first Think-Tank meeting took place in November of 1992 under the auspices of the new ARZA executive director, Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch who is the son of Rabbi Richard Hirsch. From these meetings, over a series of years, the Think-Tank published two journals, in 1993 and 1995, called *Journal of Reform Zionism*. Ammiel Hirsch surmises that the two issues of the Journal were read by "several hundred rabbis . . . students and some lay people,"¹⁵ but it cannot be ascertained just how influential the Think-Tank was in conveying its Reform Zionist message. They did accomplish one stated goal—a Reform Platform on Zionism. As Ammiel Hirsch wrote in Volume II of the *Journal*, "We mark the completion of the preliminary stage of the ARZA Think Tank.

¹⁴ *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, Vol. XCIX, ed. Elliot L. Stevens (New York: 1990), p. 221.

¹⁵ Personal interview with Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, October 16, 2006.

The CCAR has now appointed a special committee to draft a comprehensive Reform Zionist platform.”¹⁶

1997 Platform on Reform Zionism

The Reform Movement has been making statements about Zionism, against it and for it, since its inception in America. By the mid-nineties, ARZA felt that there needed to be a definitive statement by the Movement explaining its attitude towards Zionism. This would go further than the ARZA Platform of 1978 because it would be accepted by all of Reform Judaism,¹⁷ but it would necessarily be more broad because different Reform groups would have a hand in creating it and signing on to it. Ammiel Hirsch said, “We wanted to entirely usurp and overturn Reform’s historical record on Zionism.”¹⁸

The process for a new platform was a continuation of the Reform Zionist Think Tanks. In 1994 the “Tripartite Committee on Reform Zionism” was formed. Its makeup contained an equal number of people from the UAHC, the CCAR, and HUC-JIR (but no one from the American Conference of Cantors), and Ammiel Hirsch chaired the committee. The members were Rabbis Stanley Davids, Dow Marmur, and Sheldon Zimmerman representing the CCAR. Dr. Susan Einbinder, Rabbis Ezra Spicehandler, Gary Zola, and Dr. Michael Meyer (as an alternate) were from HUC-JIR. And representing the UAHC was Constance Kreshtool, Norman Schwartz, and the new President of the UAHC Rabbi Eric Yoffie. Dr. Leon Jick and Rabbi Norman Patz also

¹⁶ Ammiel Hirsch, “Forward,” *Journal of Reform Zionism*, Vol. II, (1995): p. 2.

¹⁷ Already in 1987, President of ARZA Rabbi Charles Kroloff asked David Polish to draft a new ARZA platform, the versions of which were sent around to different people involved in ARZA, but it does not seem that anything came of it.

¹⁸ Interview, October 16, 2006.

served as representatives. As Hirsch commented, "The committee was mostly *fabrenta* Zionists."¹⁹

In October of 1994 two different drafts of a possible platform were distributed to the committee members for their October 31st meeting. One of the proposals was written mainly as a historical narrative of the American Reform Movement's relationship with Zionism from the Pittsburgh Platform, to the Columbus Platform, through the Holocaust, the Centennial Perspective of 1976, and the founding of ARZA. It is only at the end of the document that the unknown writer starts to express what Reform's relationship to Zionism can be in contemporary times, but it falls short on a theological outlook of why Reform and Zionism need each other.²⁰ The other draft's format is more like what other Reform platforms have looked like—topic headings followed by writing on that topic. This format is what ultimately won out. The different topics were peoplehood, the Land of Israel, universalism and particularism, the State of Israel, Diaspora, commitments, aliyah, aliyat ha-regel (pilgrimage to Israel), education, Hebrew, liturgy, and supporting Reform Judaism in Israel. The preamble summed up the purpose of the platform:

Since 1885, the Reform rabbinate has produced three platforms asserting certain principles of Reform Judaism. Two of these, the Pittsburgh and Columbus Platforms, were drafted before Israel's creation. The Centenary Perspective did not describe extensively the relationship between Reform Judaism and the State of Israel. In anticipation of the centennial anniversary of the Zionist movement, the Central Conference of American Rabbis herein declares its beliefs on the religious significance of Zionism and the State of Israel. We seek not only to clarify where we stand, but also to establish basic principles that will guide Reform Judaism in the 21st century.²¹

¹⁹ Interview, October 16, 2006.

²⁰ "Draft One of Reform Zionist Platform," October 31, 1994, from the personal files of Dr. Michael Meyer.

²¹ "Draft Two of Reform Zionist Platform," October 31, 1994, from the personal files of Dr. Michael Meyer.

After these two drafts were discussed, it was decided that Rabbi Dow Marmur of Toronto would create a new draft. The proposal went through several versions with a wide range of rabbis and Reform leaders making comments on it and one version jointly written by Marmur and Dr. Ellen Umansky. Since the platform by nature had to be a consensus statement, Michael Meyer writes, "We are doomed to displease those who want a more definite position one way or the other and are bound to find a consensus statement insipid."²²

A final draft written by Ammiel Hirsch and edited by Aron Hirt-Manheimer, editor of *Reform Judaism* magazine, was sent to the rabbis before the June 1997 CCAR convention in Miami. At the convention Hirsch introduced the platform to the plenum. He said, "Colleagues, it is with great honor and considerable pleasure that we present to you "Reform Judaism and Zionism: A Centenary Platform." The title itself is significant. The members of the committee felt strongly from the outset that we were embarking upon an important theological journey."²³

After three years of dialogue I know that there are those who feel we could have gone even further in linking Zionist theory with principles of Reform Judaism. After three years of dialogue I also know that there are those who feel that we may have gone too far. After seeking counsel with so many of you, I am convinced that the platform before you is much bolder in style and substance than any previous statement, yet still within the mainstream of our movement's consensus. . .

While acknowledging the indisputable link between politics and ideology, nonetheless the Zionist platform before you is not intended to articulate our political opinion on current or past Israeli policies. It is not a manifesto on the peace process, nor is it a thesis about the conversion legislation. The relevant vehicles for these views are resolutions and position papers passed by this body . .

If anything, by passing this Zionist Platform we shall demonstrate that despite the obscenities of the day, we are undeterred in our love of Zion and our belief in Clal

²² Letter from Michael Meyer to Ammiel Hirsch, May 11, 1995, from the personal files of Michael Meyer.

²³ "Adoption of the Platform on Reform Religious Zionism," *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, Vol. CVII, eds. Judith Redlener and Elliot L. Stevens (New York: 1998), p. 45.

Yisrael. We will demonstrate that our pain, as distinct from the flag-burners and hate-mongers of the day, is *yissurei ahavah*—the chains of love. The deep disappointment we feel with the Israeli government is the product of deep love for the State of Israel, and deep commitment to the Zionist idea. This is what is contained in the Platform.²⁴

The platform passed overwhelmingly at the convention. A Hebrew translation, the first time for a CCAR platform, was included with it. The platform begins with a preamble that contains a short history of the Zionist question in the three previous CCAR platforms. It also recognizes that this platform was written in recognition of the centenary anniversary of the Zionist movement begun by Theodor Herzl. The main text of the platform is divided into six separate sections.

The first section, "Judaism: A Religion and a People," interestingly links Zionism with God's promise of land to Abraham. This gives it a religious tone, but also one that can be seen as almost fundamentalist. This statement is tempered, though, by linking the State of Israel to the People Israel's mission to attainment of the "highest moral ideals to be a *mamlechet kohanim* [a kingdom of priests], a *goy kadosh* [a holy nation], and *l'or goyim* [a light unto the nations]."²⁵

The second section entitled "From Degradation to Sovereignty" paints a lachrymose vision of Jewish history ("During the two millennia of dispersion and persecution . . . Centuries of Jewish persecution, culminating in the Shoah . . ."). The "miraculous rebirth" of the State of Israel is shown as the redemption from this persecution. Even though it is miraculous, it is "the Jewish people's supreme creation in our age." Trying not to be triumphalist, the platform states, "We, therefore, affirm Am Yisrael's reassertion of national sovereignty, but we urge that it be used to create the kind

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

of society in which full civil, human, and religious rights exist for all its citizens. Ultimately, Medinat Yisrael will be judged not on its military might but on its character.” This statement is followed by, “While we view Eretz Yisrael as sacred, the sanctity of Jewish life takes precedence over the sanctity of Jewish land.”²⁶ It does not say, “the sanctity of life,” only “Jewish life.”

Section III, “Our Relationship to the State of Israel,” calls the State the “spiritual and cultural focal point of world Jewry.” The writers state this Ahad Ha’am-ist position as a fact, rather than a goal. So as to not negate the Diaspora, the section says, “Israeli and Diaspora Jewry are inter-dependent, responsible for one another, and partners in the shaping of Jewish destiny.” When the communities work in partnership, Judaism will be revitalized worldwide.²⁷

Section IV, “Our Obligations to Israel,” is a list of practical things Reform Jews can do to have a relationship with Israel. These include political and financial support, learning Hebrew, visits to Israel, and *aliyah*. “While Jews can live Torah-centered lives in the Diaspora, only in Medinat Yisrael do they bear the primary responsibility for the governance of society, and thus may realize the full potential of their individual and communal religious strivings.” The section points out that Reform Jews need to support the Progressive Movement in Israel.

Confident that Reform Judaism’s synthesis of tradition and modernity and its historic commitment to *tikkun olam* [repairing the world], can make a unique and positive contribution to the Jewish state, we resolve to intensify our efforts to inform and educate Israelis about the values of Reform Judaism. We call upon Reform Jews everywhere to dedicate their energies and resources to the strengthening of an indigenous Progressive Judaism in Medinat Yisrael.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

The fifth section, called "Israel's Obligations to the Diaspora," is about religious pluralism. "Medinat Yisrael exists not only for the benefit of its citizens but also to defend the physical security and spiritual integrity of the Jewish people . . . the Jewish people will be best served when Medinat Yisrael is constituted as a pluralistic, democratic society. Therefore we seek a Jewish state in which no religious interpretation of Judaism takes legal precedence over another."²⁹

"Redemption," the sixth and last section, has a religious tone linking the State to the Messianic Redemption.

We believe that the renewal and perpetuation of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael is a necessary condition for the realization of the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people and all of humanity. While that day of redemption remains but a distant yearning, we express the fervent hope that Medinat Yisrael, living in peace with its neighbors, will hasten the redemption of Am Yisrael, and the fulfillment of our messianic dream of universal peace under the sovereignty of God.

The platform ends with the words of Psalm 126, "When God restores the fortunes of Zion we shall be like dreamers."³⁰

ARZA and the World Union for Progressive Judaism

From its inception, ARZA, by necessity, has had a relationship with the World Union of Progressive Judaism. Ira Youdovin, ARZA's first executive director, was also the director of WUPJ's North American office in New York, and he held both jobs simultaneously for a few years. The WUPJ's North American board was mainly a fund raising body for the WUPJ with its headquarters in Israel. One of its biggest tasks was to foster the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. ARZA was a Zionist body within

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

the Union of American Hebrew Congregations centered in New York. One of its main tasks was to advocate for the IMPJ. It was inevitable that the two groups would have to work together.

In the spring of 1979 ARZA and WUPJ were working together to plan a "Mini-Mission" to Israel. In March of that year, it was decided at a meeting that the two organizations would form a coordinating committee "comprised of a small number of individuals representing ARZA and the World Union . . ." Also, ARZA and the World Union would have an integrated office in New York with Youdovin as the director. But, "Each organization will retain an executive who will work primarily on his own projects and activities." Some ground rules were established to keep the independence of the two organizations:

Fund-Raising

1. Authority to raise funds primarily from private donors reside with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.
2. ARZA will collect membership dues (with gradation) and will share with the Israel Commission [of the UAHC] responsibility for the \$5 per Family Campaign.
3. Any ARZA fund-raising supplemental to the category described in #2 above, will be discussed by the Coordination Committee.
4. It is understood that funds received by ARZA/Israel Commission will also be made available to the World Union for Progressive Judaism for projects in Israel.
5. The Coordinating Committee will investigate the possibility of moving toward a "federated" approach to fund-raising for projects overseas.

Activities in Israel

1. The World Union for Progressive Judaism and/or its agency the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism have primary responsibility for all programs conducted in Israel by and for Israelis.
2. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and/or its affiliates and departments have primary responsibility for all programs conducted in Israel for Americans.
3. Programs which involve Israelis and non-Israelis are undertaken cooperatively with the respective institutions involved.

4. In order to assure coordination, new projects which affect existing programs or relationships are to be cleared with the respective bodies.³¹

Present at the meeting were Union, ARZA, and World Union leaders like Theodore Broido, Jane Evans, Roland Gittelsohn, Richard Hirsch, Alexander Schindler, and Ira Youdovin.

The relationship between the two groups was not always this cordial. For example, on October 4, 1985 the World Union board had a meeting to discuss their relationship with ARZA. As the minutes of the meeting show, the board was dismayed that ARZA seemed to take credit for all of the Reform projects happening in Israel in their newsletters, even though ARZA gives \$17,500 and the World Union gives \$400,000 to Israel programs. Richard Hirsch stated that all programs dealing with Israel would be "within the framework of the World Union" as stipulated in the ground rules of the coordinating committee of both organizations. The World Union wanted to get their name out more readily to American Reform Jews.³²

In an interview with *Reform Judaism* magazine in the spring of 1986, WUPJ president Gerard Daniel tried to show the World Union's position vis-à-vis ARZA. He replied to the question, "Does the World Union work closely with ARZA on Israel-related matters?" with this retort:

To a small extent. ARZA's current goal is to build a Zionist base within the American Reform movement. In the process it has adopted some projects that were initiated by the World Union, such as promoting immigration of American Jewish adults to Har Halutz . . . ARZA is involved in the "Who is a Jew?" issue, but the World Union Executive Director Rabbi Richard Hirsch, who also serves on

³¹ "Leadership meeting on World Union-ARZA-Israel Commission Relations," March 20, 1979, World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, 16/G5/39, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

³² Minutes of ARZA Discussion/Strategy Meeting, October 4, 1985, World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, 16/G8/16, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

the World Zionist Executive, leads this battle in Jerusalem. By and large, the World Union carries the overwhelming burden of Reform projects in Israel.³³

ARZA president Rabbi Charles Kroloff and former president Roland Gittelsohn sent Daniel letters trying to smooth out their respective organizations relationship.

By 1992 the leaders of the North American Board of the WUPJ were feeling even more threatened by ARZA encroaching on what they saw as their territory—namely fundraising for the Israel Movement. At a meeting of the WUPJ North American Board, President Dolores Wilkenfeld said:

Also to be considered seriously is our relationship with ARZA. There is no doubt that ARZA is now preparing to be a full fledged fund raising organization . . . The fact is that they are now real competition. That by itself is bad enough, but their focus on the programs in Israel of our IMPJ muddies the water and confuses the synagogue membership, while weakening our position.

It is my recommendation that we, the World Union, from now on here in North America in all our fundraising, go out under the banner of WUPJ and IMPJ. At the same time, we should have an agreement with IMPJ that none of their members do any fund raising or publicity visits for ARZA, but only for WUPJ. This probably will not be easy to effect, but in my mind it is essential. We have enough competition from FRJ, CCAR, HUC, etc.; let's at least try to neutralize ARZA who rises on the back of all our previous work. If we expect rabbis to help us, the WUPJ/ARZA tangle must be cleared up.³⁴

By the mid-nineties this position of the World Union was no longer viable. With an expanding Israeli movement and the opening of opportunities in the Former Soviet Union, both organizations would be better served, it seemed, if they pooled their resources. So, in September of 1998 a merger of ARZA, ARZA Canada (formerly Kadima), and the North American Board of the WUPJ became official. Nine months earlier in December of 1997 the ball got rolling with a memorandum signed by the president of ARZA Philip Meltzer, the president of ARZA Canada Mark S. Anshan, the

³³ Aron Hirt-Manheimer, "RJ Interview of Gerard Daniel," *Reform Judaism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (Spring 1986): pp. 15-16.

³⁴ "Proposal for Restructuring North American Board," World Union for Progressive Judaism Records, 16/G/22/31, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

president of the WUPJ Austin C. Beutel and the chairman of the North American board of the WUPJ B.J. Tanenbaum, Jr. The memorandum is a framework on how the organizations will merge. It states, “. . . the parties hereto recognize that more efficient operations and support for the future growth of Progressive Judaism in Israel and throughout the world can best be served by eliminating the considerable overlapping of their respective activities and objectives through a restructuring set forth.”³⁵ The new organization was to be called ARZA/World Union, and it was to be an affiliate of the UAHC. The boards of the organizations were merged. In September of 1998 a new constitution for ARZA/World Union, North America was adopted. Its mission, as stated in the constitution, was:

1. To further the development of Progressive Judaism throughout the world.
2. To strengthen K'lal Yisrael by:
 - a. Encouraging the solidarity of the Jewish people (Am Yisrael) in all lands.
 - b. Promoting and strengthening Israel and Zionism
 - c. Encouraging the State of Israel to grant full civil, human and religious rights to all its citizens, thus enriching Medinat Yisrael as a vibrant exemplar of eternal Jewish values.
3. To promote the acceptance of religious pluralism in the State of Israel and in other parts of the world.
4. To strengthen the relationship of North American Reform and Reconstructionist Jews with Progressive communities throughout the world.
5. To educate and inform our constituency about the principals and programs of Reform/Progressive Judaism and on relevant matters of Jewish import.³⁶

This merger somewhat diluted ARZA's founding mission because now it was not just a Zionist affiliate of the Union, it was an organization with many goals. But, it also enhanced its fundraising potential to effect changes in Israel and Zionism.

³⁵ "Memorandum of Understanding, December 8, 1997" from personal files of Cantor Yvon Shore.

³⁶ "Constitution of ARZA/World Union, North America," from personal files of Cantor Yvon Shore.

In the late Eighties and throughout the Nineties ARZA concentrated on its core mission of fighting for Reform rights in Israel and developing a Zionist ideology for American Reform Jews. The organization seemed to be at the right place at the right time when it came to Israeli religious issues in the Nineties because with the momentum of the Oslo Peace Process, Israelis began to ask themselves questions about societal changes that in the past were brushed aside for security concerns. ARZA under Ammiel Hirsch even took part in promoting peace with some of the first rabbinical missions to Jordan. In regard to ideology, ARZA was definitely spreading its Zionist message when it promoted a movement-wide Zionist statement, but it is hard to tell just how influential this was. There were articles in *Reform Judaism* and the *CCAR Journal* written about it, and educational curricula written to teach it, but a platform does not necessarily make devoted Zionists. While the Reform Movement's leadership in the Nineties became unabashedly Zionist, the average Reform Jew's commitment to Israel began to falter. By 2001, according to the National Jewish Population Survey, only twenty-one percent of self-identified Reform Jews felt "very emotionally attached" to Israel.

Conclusion

Ammiel Hirsch felt that during his term as Executive Director of ARZA (1992-2004) the organization was very successful in the five goals that he set out to achieve. (1)Ideology: ARZA instituted a think-tank that discussed crucial issues involved in defining Reform Zionism, and out of the think-tank came a movement-wide platform on Reform Zionism. (2)Religious Pluralism: With the Israel Religious Action Center in Jerusalem fighting in the “who is a Jew” debate and ARZA’s new strength in the WZO, religious pluralism became an issue in Israel. (3)The Peace Process: ARZA got involved in the peace process by sending rabbinical delegations to places like Jordan. Also, because of a sense of normalcy felt by Israelis brought about by hopes of peace, issues that ARZA held dear like religious pluralism were talked about more. (4)Zionist Politics: ARZA, according to Hirsch, “changed the rules of the game” by forcing elections and becoming the largest party from the American Zionist Movement. From this strength the Reform Movement got people in senior positions on the Jewish Agency board, and “overnight our allocations doubled from the Jewish Agency,” said Hirsch, for Reform institutions in Israel. Finally, (5)Fundraising: ARZA began to raise millions of dollars, especially with the help of the merger with the World Union, for projects in Israel.³⁷

All of these goals were undoubtedly achieved, but the success of the achievement can be debated. For example, ARZA definitely raised more money from the merger with the World Union, but five years after that merger, in 2003, the two organizations split for a variety of reasons. Also, according to Ammiel Hirsch, the Reform Movement has

³⁷ Personal interviews with Ammiel Hirsch, September 5, 2006 and October 16, 2006.

failed to raise the amounts of money necessary for the IMPJ to be a powerful presence in Israel.³⁸

In the realm of Zionist politics, ARZA may now be the biggest American Zionist party, but the World Zionist Organization and its Congress are not what they used to be in former times. The WZO budget pales in comparison to what it once was, so there is not that much money behind their actions. Also, it doesn't really have that much influence on Israeli society.

The Reform Zionist Think-Tank and the Reform Zionist Platform were important for the Reform Movement, but it is difficult to establish just how influential they were on the Reform Jew. American Jews tend not to be that ideological with their Judaism. Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen argue in *The Jew Within* that American Jews make decisions about their Jewishness as a "Jewish Sovereign Self." The "sovereign self" is not necessarily motivated by group ideology, but by what is meaningful to their lives.³⁹ This may be a factor leading to ARZA having never gained more than 30-35,000 (according to Hirsch) paying members out of hundreds of thousands of adult Reform Jews. American Jews don't tend to join organizations because of the organization's ideology unless the Jew has had a personal experience that helps them identify with that ideology.

Throughout ARZA's history, more and more Reform Jews visited Israel, many with the ARZA affiliated ARZA World Travel, but a huge number of Reform Jews have never been to Israel (only about one third of all American Jews have⁴⁰), and therefore

³⁸ Personal interview, September 6, 2006.

³⁹ Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. (Bloomington, IN: 2000).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

may not ever create a relationship with the Israel. It is hard to have an ideology about a place, when that place has never affected one's life. Add to that the constant reminder from ARZA that Reform Jews "don't have equal rights" in Israel, which may even create resentment from American Reform Jews. While fighting the "Who is a Jew" battle is very important and needs to be fought, making that the number one issue written about in ARZA's materials may have been detrimental to ARZA's goal of raising Reform Jews' Israel connection. One non-Orthodox Jew, quoted by Cohen and Eisen, explains, "What I have become much more aware of is how, despite being a somewhat observant Jew, Israel is the one place where I would have the most trouble practicing my brand of Judaism because it is not recognized by the state of Israel."⁴¹

Jews in America today create connections and ideology through experiences, not platforms and think-tanks. In its first two decades of existence ARZA did a lot of important work in bringing Zionism to the Reform Movement and helping Progressive Judaism flower in Israel. If it wants to foster the sense of Zionism that it already planted, it needs to create positive experiences of Israel for Reform Jews. This does not mean that the organization should not paint a realistic picture of all of Israel's problems, including issues of religious pluralism, but it should focus on the positive things that Reform Jews can do to create relationships with Israel and Israelis. ARZA should show the positive things that Progressive Judaism is doing to transform Israel like creating an environmentally sustainable community at Kibbutz Lotan, reaching out to secular Tel Avivians and Jerusalemites with serious Jewish studies at Beit Daniel and Beit Shmuel, or Mevasseret Tzion's work with Ethiopian immigrants. ARZA can encourage American Reform Jews to get involved in these projects through their home synagogues and set

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 148.

teleconferencing and trips to make one to one connections with Israelis that have a passion for Reform Judaism and social justice. Through these person-to-person connections American Jews can see how Progressive Judaism can and is working in a Jewish society, and it will give them more of an attachment to Israel and Zionism than an ideological platform can.

Zionism was a movement that was founded on action. Jews decided to take their messianic future into their own hands. When American Reform Jews act in partnership with their Israeli counterparts to create a just society in Israel, then they are creating a Reform Zionism.

PLATFORM
ASSOCIATION OF REFORM ZIONISTS OF AMERICA

I

JERUSALEM PROGRAM

In setting forth a Platform, we recognize that ARZA's membership in the World Zionist Organization and in the American Zionist Federation is predicated on the acceptance of the Jerusalem Program (Twenty-seventh Zionist Congress, 1968) which follows, and in reference to which we present our own Principles:

The aims of Zionism are:

- I. The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life;
- II. The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland Eretz Yisrael through aliyah from all countries;
- III. The strengthening of the State of Israel which is founded on the prophetic ideals of justice and peace;
- IV. The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values;
- V. The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

II

PREAMBLE

ARZA is a religious Zionist body, affiliated with the Reform movement in the United States (Union of American Hebrew Congregations). It has come into being after nearly fifty years of a growing identification by Reform Judaism, first with the national aspirations of the Jewish people, and then with the State of Israel. It was created out of the recognition that in our tradition there is no division between the religious domain and the polity of the Jewish people. The religious mandate of our prophetic and rabbinic traditions requires us to participate in issues and institutions which affect Jewish existence.

As a Reform body within Zionism, we bring certain convictions which distinguish our movement and which characterize our religious relationship to Zionism. They are:

Voluntarism by which personal decision has led to binding commitment

Pluralism in which diverse religious expressions flourish and reinforce Jewish unity

Social ethics together with ritual

Universal concern as an intrinsic element in our ethnic character

As an American organization, we are committed to retaining strong bonds with our Reform counterparts in Israel.

III

PRINCIPLES

Centrality

1. The State of Israel is the Jewish people's supreme creation in this age. At the same time, it has come into being not as an end in itself, but as the instrument for the creative survival of the Jewish people and of Judaism. Israel exists for the sake of the Jewish people.
2. In Judaism, no single component, isolated from other major components, is exclusively central. The central element in Jewish life has been the union of God, Torah, and the People Israel. The concept, Israel, has encompassed the people, the land, and national sovereignty. The Land of Israel, as the historic center of the Jewish people, was traditionally perceived as the place where Israel's Covenant with God could most fully be realized through the inspiration of the Torah. All efforts in the past to separate these components have led to disunity and the diminution of Judaism and the Jewish people. Isolation of religion from peoplehood, of ethnicity and nationalism from the essential foundations of our faith, of Jewish or Hebrew culture from Torah, proved to be detrimental. In the perspective of our people's encounter with the Eternal, the unity of the inseparable components has been indispensable. In the perspective of our encounter with history, confined to time and space alone, the central event in current Jewish life is Israel which contains far-reaching and profound implications for our faith, just as the return from the Babylonian Exile was a prelude to a new and creative period in our people's religious history.
3. In that context, the State does occupy a special central place in Jewish life. The land of Israel is and always was a necessary condition for the realization of the people's physical and spiritual redemption. In that context, the State of Israel has stirred the

hopes, the devotion and the covenantal sense of Jews everywhere as a critical saving factor in contemporary Jewish life. The State of Israel has bound us together, has helped bind the wounds of the Shoah (Holocaust), and embodies a society where many of our hopes for our people's destiny quicken us. Through this reality, the religious and cultural life of Jewry has been given new power. Through this reality, a renewed sense of identity, purpose, and commitment has informed Jewish life.

"Ingathering of the People"

1. For many centuries Jews, often driven by persecution, have made aliyah out of profound religious and idealistic conviction. Today, the State of Israel also requires aliyah for its survival and security. For these reasons, aliyah to Israel cannot be equated with Jewish migration to any other land.
2. Aliyah is also necessary for North American Jewry, and should be encouraged. In order to retain strong bonds of kinship between both great communities, numbers of American olim, exercising freedom of choice, are required. Without such a continuing physical link, the ties between both communities could be weakened and the danger of separation and alienation could set in.
3. Aliyah is needed from within the Reform community in order to strengthen our movement in Israel and to bring the societal orientation of Reform Judaism to Israel. For many others, there are also opportunities for personal fulfillment and for great service through work and study in Israel over varying periods of time.
4. At the same time, the continuation of a viable American Jewry is consistent with the principle of aliyah. It is futile to predict the ultimate survival or demise of any society, especially in these times. From the perspective of our time, American Jewry, despite assimilation, is a strong and creative community. We are committed to its viability. Israel and American Jewry are indispensable for one another's existence; each can take strength from the other, and serve as correctives to one another. Moral and structural directions must derive from this thesis.

The Nature of the Jewish State

1. A special contribution of our movement to recent and contemporary Jewish thought and action has been our insistence upon the ethical and moral requirements of our tradition. This has been our special religious vocation which we discard only at great risk. Reform can augment the Zionist vision of the just society by calling for the same kind of concern with moral and social issues in Israel that we have advanced in America.
2. We do not envision a Jewish nation like other nations. We envision a Jewish state that will be more than a haven of refuge, indispensable as it is, or a place of renewed

sovereignty, inspiring as it is. We hope it will continue to be nourished by the moral, social, and spiritual teachings of our tradition, reaching back to Sinai, to our biblical and rabbinic sources, to our Diaspora experience, to Israel's own social achievements.

3. For Reform to make a distinctive contribution to Israel, it must not be content with issues of rights, status, and liturgy alone, vital as these issues are. In the spirit of *ahavat Yisrael* (love of our fellow Jews), we claim the responsibility to pursue in an appropriate medium those issues which affect the social order in Israel and, as a result, in American Jewry as well. The Diaspora stands with Israel in a special collaborative relationship which requires consultation in all areas of common concern. There is need for the creation of a forum where issues can be discussed between representatives of the Diaspora and their counterparts in Israel.

Education and Jewish Values

1. Jewish and Hebrew education as well as Jewish spiritual and cultural values have been of deepest concern to us. Our movement has pioneered in teaching how to live Jewishly in modernity, and we pledge to extend this approach as unique contribution to Israel. We also pledge to extend our commitment to Hebrew education in our communities. We commit ourselves to the training, under our auspices, of rabbis, educators, and group workers in Israel and for Israelis, thereby giving rise to our own indigenous movement in Israel.
2. Our concern, however, is not only with preserving identity but an identity that will fully preserve the creative values of the Jewish people. We are united with our fellow Jews by common fate and destiny. Thus we perceive Zionism to be committed to the preservation both of the people and its cultural, moral, and spiritual heritage in all its rich diversity.

Jewish Rights and Jewish Interdependence

1. Israel has demonstrated its capacity to protect Jewish rights in other lands. American Jewry and our movement have demonstrated our capacity to work together with Israel toward this end, and we pledge to continue to work on this front.
2. The interdependence of Israel and the Diaspora makes danger to Jewish existence anywhere a danger to Jewish existence everywhere. At the same time, we must add that issues of Jewish fate and destiny affect all of humanity because the survival of a democratic civilization is bound up with the survival of Israel.

IV

ARZA MITZVOT

1. We call for a special ARZA program of encouraging aliyah and of continuous work in behalf of olim from our movement.
2. We call for the development in Israel of an ARZA program of social concerns which will reflect our Torah's social ethic to which we are committed.
3. We are committed to fostering, under the aegis of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the further development of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, its synagogues and its programs of formal and informal education. We are committed to strengthening the work in Israel of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism.
4. In addition to aliyah, we urge the following:
 - a. Volunteer service in Israel by those who have special skills which can aid Israel in the social, cultural, scientific, and other fields. We call for the creation of a task force to achieve this objective.
 - b. Periodic visits to Israel by ARZA members as part of their Reform Zionist commitment.
 - c. The intensification of Hebrew and Israel-oriented programs in child, youth, college, and adult studies in our movement.
5. We view an Israel program sponsored by the Reform movement as an integral part of the education of every Reform Jew. We call upon our rabbis, congregations, and ARZA chapters to realize this goal.

V

PLURALISM AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

We call upon the World Zionist Organization and the State of Israel to implement the following pronouncements by the 29th Zionist Congress which were adopted through the initiative of ARZA and its leaders:

"The continuity of Jewish life in the Diaspora is a reality, and Zionism seeks to strengthen Jewish life and Zionist self-realization. Dynamic Jewish communities in the Diaspora, committed to Zionist ideals and emotionally tied to Eretz Yisrael, help ensure the survival of Israel and of the Jewish people.

"... Zionism expects that Israel will be a state with Jewish character and content in all aspects of its life and culture.

"Zionism aims at a democratic, egalitarian, and pluralistic society in which all of its citizens will enjoy equal rights. Zionism expects that every Jewish community throughout the world will give expression to Jewish heritage, values and ideals." (From the Report on the Committee on Obligations of Members of the Zionist Organization, February 26, 1978, Jerusalem)

"This 29th Congress affirms that all World Zionist Organization departments, instrumentalities and programs shall be administered in accord with the principle of equal standing and equal treatment for every religious movement within its ranks and for every Jew, regardless of origins or of the religious and ideological movement with which the individual identifies. Programs of a religious and educational character should reflect the pluralism of Jewish life throughout the world.

"This Congress calls on the State of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people to implement fully the principle of guaranteed religious rights for all its citizens, including equality of opportunity, equality of recognition, and equality of governmental aid to all religious movements within Judaism." (Resolution on Jewish Pluralism, February 28, 1978, Jerusalem)

VI

CONCLUSION

In this trying time, we believe that ARZA can bring significant resources to Zionism, to Israel, to the Jewish people. This is in the tradition of our movement from whose midst great leaders emerged to show the way and to give aid during some of our people's most anguished periods. We and the Zionist movement need one another. We extend our hand in friendship and devotion to all who share our common vision that "Zion shall be redeemed through righteousness."

Adopted by ARZA's First National Assembly, Washington, DC

*14 Elul, 5738
September 16, 1978*

ACCEPTED BY THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

June 24, 1997

Miami, Florida

PREAMBLE:

In recognition of the centenary of the first World Zionist Congress (August 29, 1897), the Central Conference of American Rabbis hereby issues its first platform dedicated exclusively to the relationship between Reform Judaism and Zionism.

In 1885 the framers of the Pittsburgh Platform of Reform Judaism declared that they no longer expected Jews to return to a national homeland in Palestine. The Platform's authors proclaimed: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine...nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."

By 1937 the CCAR had reversed its stand on Jewish peoplehood, and declared in its "Columbus Platform" that "Judaism is the soul of which Israel [the people] is the body." The document further states: "We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its [Palestine's] up-building as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life." This affirmation of Jewish peoplehood was accompanied by a reaffirmation of Reform Judaism's universal message: "We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal."

The CCAR returned again to the question of Zionism in 1976, asserting in its "Centenary Perspective": "We are bound to...the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties....We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security and defining its Jewish character." The "Centenary Perspective" also affirmed the legitimacy of the Diaspora and the historic universalism of Reform Judaism: "The State of Israel and the diaspora, in fruitful dialogue, can show how a people transcends nationalism even as it affirms it, thereby setting an example for humanity, which remains largely concerned with dangerously parochial goals." Here again, the CCAR embraced Zionism as a means of fulfilling its universal vision and its opposition to narrow nationalism.

A century after Theodor Herzl called for the creation of a modern Jewish state and nearly fifty years since the State of Israel joined the family of modern nations, the fundamental issues addressed in the previous CCAR pronouncements continue to challenge us, making this a fitting time to re-examine and redefine the ideological and spiritual bonds that connect *Am Yisrael* [the People of Israel] to *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel] and to *Medinat Yisrael* [the State of Israel]. The CCAR affirms through this Platform those

principles which will guide Reform Judaism into the 21st century.

I. Judaism: A Religion and a People

The restoration of *Am Yisrael* to its ancestral homeland after nearly two thousand years of statelessness and powerlessness represents an historic triumph of the Jewish people, providing a physical refuge, the possibility of religious and cultural renewal on its own soil, and the realization of God's promise to Abraham: "to your offspring I assign this land" . From that distant moment until today, the intense love between *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* has not subsided.

We believe that the eternal covenant established at Sinai ordained a unique religious purpose for *Am Yisrael*. *Medinat Yisrael* , the Jewish State, is therefore unlike all other states. Its obligation is to strive towards the attainment of the Jewish people's highest moral ideals to be a *mamlechet kohanim* [a kingdom of priests], a *goy kadosh* [a holy people], and *l'or goyim* [a light unto the nations].

II. From Degradation to Sovereignty

During two millennia of dispersion and persecution, *Am Yisrael* never abandoned hope for the rebirth of a national home in *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Shoah* [Holocaust] intensified our resolve to affirm life and pursue the Zionist dream of a return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Even as we mourned for the loss of one-third of our people, we witnessed the miraculous rebirth of *Medinat Yisrael*, the Jewish people's supreme creation in our age.

Centuries of Jewish persecution, culminating in the *Shoah*, demonstrated the risks of powerlessness. We, therefore, affirm *Am Yisrael's* reassertion of national sovereignty, but we urge that it be used to create the kind of society in which full civil, human, and religious rights exist for all its citizens. Ultimately, *Medinat Yisrael* will be judged not on its military might but on its character.

While we view *Eretz Yisrael* as sacred, the sanctity of Jewish life takes precedence over the sanctity of Jewish land.

III. Our Relationship to the State of Israel

Even as *Medinat Yisrael* serves uniquely as the spiritual and cultural focal point of world Jewry, Israeli and Diaspora Jewry are inter-dependent, responsible for one another, and partners in the shaping of Jewish destiny. Each *kehilla* [Jewish community], though autonomous and self-regulating, shares responsibility for the fate of Jews everywhere. By deepening the social, spiritual, and intellectual relationship among the *kehillot* worldwide, we can revitalize Judaism both in Israel and the Diaspora.

IV. Our Obligations to Israel

To help promote the security of *Medinat Yisrael* and ensure the welfare of its citizens, we

pledge continued political support and financial assistance.

Recognizing that knowledge of Hebrew is indispensable both in the study of Judaism and in fostering solidarity between Israeli and Diaspora Jews, we commit ourselves to intensifying Hebrew instruction in all Reform institutions. Hebrew, the language of our sacred texts and prayers, is a symbol of the revitalization of *Am Yisrael*.

To enhance appreciation of Jewish peoplehood and promote a deeper understanding of Israel, we resolve to implement educational programs and religious practices that reflect and reinforce the bond between Reform Judaism and Zionism.

To deepen awareness of Israel and strengthen Jewish identity, we call upon all Reform Jews, adults and youths, to study in, and make regular visits to, Israel.

While affirming the authenticity and necessity of a creative and vibrant Diaspora Jewry, we encourage *aliyah* [immigration] to Israel in pursuance of the precept of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* [settling the Land of Israel]. While Jews can live Torah-centered lives in the Diaspora, only in *Medinat Yisrael* do they bear the primary responsibility for the governance of society, and thus may realize the full potential of their individual and communal religious strivings.

Confident that Reform Judaism's synthesis of tradition and modernity and its historic commitment to *tikkun olam* [repairing the world], can make a unique and positive contribution to the Jewish state, we resolve to intensify our efforts to inform and educate Israelis about the values of Reform Judaism. We call upon Reform Jews everywhere to dedicate their energies and resources to the strengthening of an indigenous Progressive Judaism in *Medinat Yisrael*.

V. Israel's Obligations to the Diaspora

Medinat Yisrael exists not only for the benefit of its citizens but also to defend the physical security and spiritual integrity of the Jewish people. Realizing that *Am Yisrael* consists of a coalition of different, sometimes conflicting, religious interpretations, the Jewish people will be best served when *Medinat Yisrael* is constituted as a pluralistic, democratic society. Therefore we seek a Jewish state in which no religious interpretation of Judaism takes legal precedence over another.

VI. Redemption

We believe that the renewal and perpetuation of Jewish national life in *Eretz Yisrael* is a necessary condition for the realization of the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people and of all humanity. While that day of redemption remains but a distant yearning, we express the fervent hope that *Medinat Yisrael*, living in peace with its neighbors, will hasten the redemption of *Am Yisrael*, and the fulfillment of our messianic dream of universal peace under the sovereignty of God.

The achievements of modern Zionism in the creation of the State of Israel, in reviving the Hebrew language, in absorbing millions of immigrants, in transforming desolate wastes into blooming forests and fields, in generating a thriving new economy and society, are an unparalleled triumph of the Jewish spirit.

We stand firm in our love of Zion. We resolve to work for the day when waves of Jewish pride and confidence will infuse every Jewish heart, in fulfillment of the promise: When God restores the fortunes of Zion we shall be like dreamers. Our mouths will fill with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy. Then shall they say among the nations God has done great things for them.

Submitted by CCAR Tripartite Zionist Platform Committee:

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch - Chair

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Rabbi Dow Marmur

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PLATFORM ON REFORM RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

ADOPTED BY THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN
RABBIS

June 24, 1997
Miami, Florida

היהדות הרפורמית והציונות -- מצע יעדים ודרך בתום מאה שנות ציונות

מבוא

לציון יובל המאה לעונג הציוני העולמי הראשון (נסער בל, ב-29 באוגוסט 1897). מתחם
בה על-ידי הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה מצע ראשון המוקדם באותה בלעדי לנשוא
היחס בין היהדות הרפורמית והציונות.

בשנת 1885 הצויזנו מנחם "מצע פיסטבונג של היהדות הרפורמית" שהם אנוסים את הציפייה
לשיבת יהודים אל מולדת לאומית בארץ ישראל. מתכני מצע פיסטבונג הכריזו: "איננו
רוצים עוד את עצמנו כעם. אלא כעדה דתית; ולפיכך איננו רוצים לעלונו שיבה לארץ-
ישראל... ואף לא מתן תוקף מפורש לכל חוק או הלכה בהקשר המדינה היהודית."

לקראת שנת 1937 חזרה בה הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה מסמכותה לגבי קיומו של עם
יהודי; וכי מצע קולומבוס שלח הכריז: "יהדות העם הנפש אשר ישראל (העם) הנו הגוף בו
היא מופיעה". באותו מצע נאמר עוד: "אנו גורסים שעל היהדות כולה מוטלת חובה לסייע
לבניינה (של ארץ ישראל) כמולדת יהודית, תוך מאמץ לעשותה לא רק מקום מקלט לנדבאים
אלא גם סדין של תרבות יהודית וחיי דת יהודיים". להצהרה זאת של הכרה בקיום עם
יהודי התלוותה חזרה על המסר הכלל עולמי של היהדות הרפורמית: "אנו רוצים תפקיד
היסטורי לעצמנו לשתף פעולה עם כל בני האדם בחקמת מלכות שדי, ובגיבוש מציאות של
אחוזה כלל עולמית, צדק, אמת ושלוש על-פני ארמנות זהו היעד המשיחי שלנו."

בשנת 1976 שבה הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה להתעסק בנושא הציונות, ובחשמן
חקרי "יחזות יובל המאה" קבעה: "אנו קשובים... אל מדינת ישראל, שנוצרה מחדש כי סימן.
בעבותות דתיות ואתניות רבים... אנו בעלי עניין בבניינה של מדינת ישראל, תגס נשואים
באחריות לבניינה, מבחינת הדאגה לביטחונה ולהגדלת אופייה היהודי". "יחזות יובל המאה"
הדגישה כמו כן את מעמדה המוכר של הפזורה זאת חזקה הכלל עולמית של היהדות
הרפורמית. "מדינת ישראל והפזורה, תוך דו-שיח פורה ביניהן, יכולות להתחמש התעלות של
עם על לאומיותו גם כאשר הוא מדגיש אותה, ובכך להוות מופת לאנושות המוסיפה להתרכז
כיעדים צרים עד כדי טכנה". גם בהקשר הזה "הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה" מאמצת
את הציונות כאמצעי לסימוש חזונה הכלל עולמי וקידום התנגדותה ללאומנות צרה.

נאח שנים אחרי קריאתו של תיאודור הרצל להקמת מדינה יהודית בנוסח הוסי, וכמעט חמישים שנה אחרי הצטרפות מדינת ישראל אל משפחת האומות הצועדות עם החזון, עודנו ניצבים. מול האתגרים שאיזונו בהצהרות הקדמות מסעם הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה; ולפיכך זאת היא השעה לבחון ולהגדיר מחדש את הזיקות התפיסותיות והרוחניות הקושרות את עם ישראל אל ארץ ישראל ואל מדינת ישראל. הוועידה המרכזית של רבני אמריקה נחנת ביטוי מוסמך במצע זה לעקרונות שינחו את היחידות הרפורמיות (כתחום שבו מדובר) מכאן ואל תוך המאה ה-21.

א. היחידות: אמונה דתית וגם עם

שיבת עם ישראל אל מולדתו ומכירתו אחרי כמעט אלפיים שנה של חייגור קיום לאומי עצמאי ועצמת לאומית עצמאית, מהוות ניצחון היסטורי רבני של העם היהודי. הוא המניק לעם מקום מקלט משל עצמו. אפשרות להתחדש בתחום הדתי והתרבותי על אדמתו הוא. ומימוש הבטחתו האל לאברהם אבינו. *"לרעה נעמי את הארץ הזאת".* מאותו רגע רחוק ועד היום. לא נחלשה האהבה והעזה בין עם ישראל וארץ ישראל.

אנו מאמינים שהברית הנצחית שנכרתה בתר סיני הכריזה לעם ישראל תכלית דתית ויחידית. לכן *מדינת ישראל*, המדינה היהודית, איננה ככל יתר המדינות. תובתה לחתור להגשמת האידאליס המוסריים והעליונים ביותר. להיות ממלכת כהנים, *גוי קדוש* ואור לעמים.

ב. מהשפלה לדיבנות

בתוך אלפיים שנות פחדה ורדיפות, לא זנה עם ישראל אי פעם את התקווה שייוולד מחדש בית לאומי עבירו בארץ ישראל. המאנה הישלה את נחישותנו לדבוק בחיים ובחזון הציתי לשוב לארץ ישראל. אפילו בהשבת האכל על אבן שליש מבני מסנו, חזו עינינו בפלא ליהנה מחדש של מדינת ישראל, יצירתו העילאית של העם היהודי בתקופתנו.

מאות שנות רדיפות יהודים, שהגיעו לשיאן במאה, המחישו היטב את הכנות תאורבות לעם נסול עצמת. לכן אנו מציינים לחיוב את הידוש הריבונות הלאומית של עם ישראל, אולם אנו קוראים להפעלתה בין היתר ליצירת דגם של תורה המקיימת בתוכה, במלוא המידה ועבור כל תושביה, זכויות אנושיות, זכויות אדם, חכיות דתיות. בסופו של דבר, *מדינת ישראל* תימדד לאו דווקא על פי כוחה הצבאי, אלא על פי אופייה.

ארץ ישראל קדושה בעינינו, אולם קדושת החיים קודמת לקדושתה של הארץ. אנו דוחים את גישתם של אלו מבני עמנו המעדיפים את שלמות ארץ ישראל על פני צורכיו של עם ישראל.

ג. זיקתנו למדינת ישראל

במקביל להיות מדינת ישראל מוסד רוחני ותרבותי ייחודי של יהדות העולם, קיימת תלות הדדית בין יהודי ישראל ויהודי התפוצות, והם ערבים זה לזה ושותפים בעיצוב הגורל היחודי. כל קהילה יהודית, אף שהנה אוטונומית ולפיכך עצמאית בניהול ענייניה, שותפה באחריות לגורל היהודים בכל מקום. על ידי העמקת הדיקה התבררית, הרוחנית והעיונית בין הקהילות היהודיות ברחבי העולם, נכלל להעניק ליהדות חיוניות מחודשת, כישראל ובפורה גם יחד.

ד. חובותינו כלפי ישראל

בתדמיה לחיזוק ביטחונה של מדינת ישראל ולקידום רווחת תושביה, אנו מתחייבים להמשיך להעניק לה תמיכה מדינית וסיוע כספי.

מתוך הכרה בחיוניות ירישת הלשון העברית הן לצורך לימוד היהדות והן לטיפוח התודעה והשותפות בין יהודי ישראל ויהודי התפוצות, אנו מתחייבים להגביר את הוראת העברית בכל מוסדות התנועה הרפורמית. שפת עבר, לשון תפילותינו וכתבי הקודש שלנו, הנה סמל לחיוניות המתחדשת של עם ישראל.

על מנת להגביר את ההכרה בערכו של סמל הלאום בתודעת הקיום היהודי, ולספק מבנה מעניקה יותר בכל הקשור בישראל, מני תגמול עמנו להפעיל חבניות חיטניות ודרכי ביטוי של הדת המשקפות ומחזקות את הקשר בין היהדות הרפורמית והציונות.

על מנת להעמיק את המודעות לנוכחות ישראל בעולם ולחזק את תודעת הזהות היהודית, אנו קוראים לכל היהודים המייכים לעמנו הרפורמי, מבוגרים וצעירים, לצאת ללמוד בישראל ולנקד בה לעתים מוסמנות.

בצד הדגשת האחריות והקיום הנחוץ של תפוצה יהודית יצירתית מבורכת בכוו חיות, אנו מעדידים יהודים רפורמיים לעלות לישראל ולעלא את מצוות יישוב ארץ ישראל. אמנם אין מכשול בפני יהודים לקיים חיי תורה בתפוצות, אך רק במדינת ישראל ניתן להם לשאת באחריות בלתי אמצעית לקיום ממלל מדיני, וכך לסמס במלואן את האפשרויות הנגזרות מתוך שאיפותיהם הדתיות, האישיות והקהילתיות.

חדורי הכרה שהתרכובת אשר היהדות הרפורמית יוצרת מתוך המסורת ומושגי הזמן, והמחויבות ההיסטורית של יחדות זאת לדעיון חיקון העולט, עשויות להצמיח תרומה ייחודית וחיונית לקידום המדינה היהודית, מנוי וגמור עמנו להגביר את מאמצינו להביא לידיעתם של ישראלים, ולהנחיל להם, את ערכי היחדות הרפורמית. אנו קוראים ליהודים הרפורמיים באשר הם, להקדיש מכוונת וממשאביהם לחיזוקה של יחדות מתקדמת ילידת מדינת ישראל.

ח. חובות ישראל כלפי התפוצות

מדינת ישראל קיימת לא רק למען תושביה, אלא גם לצורך הגנה על ביטחונה הפיסי של העם היהודי ועל שלמותו הרוחנית. לאור ההכרה שעם ישראל מהווה מערך של בעלי תפיסות ודתיות שונות, ולפעמים סנוגדות, טובתו של העם היהודי תקודם בצורה הטובה ביותר על ידי מדינת ישראל המגלמת חברה דמוקרטית רבת פנים. לכן מבוקשנו הוא מדינת יהודית אשר אין בתוכה תפיסה דתית של היחדות. תנוגית ממעמד משפטי עדיף על המעמד המשפטי הניתן לכל תפיסה אתורת ביהדות.

ו. גאולה

אנו מאמינים שהחזרת חיים יהודיים לאוטיים ונצחיים לארץ ישראל תנה תנאי בל יעבור למימוש רוחני וגשמי של גאולת העם היהודי והאנושות כולה. אף כי הגאולה הזאת ערונה כבחינת כמיתה ליום רחוק, אנו מביעים תקווה עזה שמדינת ישראל החיה בשלום עם שכנותיה תקרב את גאולת עם ישראל ואת הגשמת חלומנו המשיחי בדבר שלום עולמי בצל ריבונות אלוהים.

הישיגי הציונות בת זמננו, בהקמת מדינת ישראל, בהחייאת הלשון העברית, בקליטת מיליוני עולים, בהפיכת שממות לערים ושדות פורחים, בפיתוח כלכלה וגם חברת בני אדם חדשה ופודחת, מהווים ניצחון של רוח היהדות, אשר אין דומה לו.

אנו איתנים באהבת ציון. אנו נחושים ברצוננו לפעול לקירוב חיוס שבו גלי גאולה ותחושת ביטחון יהודית יציפו כל לב יהודי, ובכך תתמלא ההבטחה: כשוכ ה' את שיבת ציון היינו כחולמים; אז ימלא שחוק פינו ולשוננו רנה; אז יאמרו בגיטס חגדיל ה' לעשות עם אלה.

הסיומה מוגשת על-ידי ועדה "משולשת" לגיבוש חצע בנושא הציונות. במסגרת הוועידה
המרכזית של רבני אמריקה :

הרב עמיאל הירש - יושב-ראש הוועדה

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ד"ר ליאון גייס

הרב נורמן פץ

הוועדה מציינת בהוקרה את תרומותיהם הניכרות של:

ארון הירש-מאנהיימר - מנכ"ל ועוד

הרב חרודי פילדס - מנכ"ל

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