

HOUSE OF JACOB, COME AND LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF ADONAI

THE AMERICAN REFORM RABBINATE, ZIONISM AND
THE STATE OF ISRAEL

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Introduction

A requirement for every rabbinical student of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, the primary rabbinical school of the Reform movement, since 1970 has been to spend the first year of seminary training in Jerusalem. My year in Israel was the academic year of 2010-2011. It was a shock to discover that among my classmates, the views on Israel were widespread, from those who refused to denounce any action of the State of Israel to others who openly proclaimed their hatred of the government of the Jewish State. There were students who spoke of Israel's establishment as one of the most miraculous moments in Jewish history, while others did not see why Jews in America should be so concerned with a country on the other side of the world, let alone, why their future leaders should have to spend a year living there. As the students expressed mixed reactions to living in Israel and their relationship with Israel as a People, Land and State, Israelis at the same time greeted us with different responses. There were Israelis who treated the Reform students as parasites, who had come to Israel as Jewish imposters, set on destroying the Jewish religion and country. Rabbinical students, who were leaders of their Diasporic communities, were harassed verbally and physically for their beliefs, many for the first times in their lives. At the same time, other Israelis greeted us with open arms. They told us that Israel needs more religious pluralism, that the Orthodox stranglehold on religion was unbearable, and that it was our duty to improve Israel while getting our future congregants to visit and love the Jewish State. It was clear that the relationship between Israel and the Reform movement was and remains complex and is often a topic of division and debate.

The division and debate heightened during this year that I spent in Israel over three notable issues. First, a bill, known as the Rotem Bill, was proposed in the Knesset that would disqualify non-Orthodox converts to Judaism from being allowed to move to Israel under the Law of Return. The Diaspora community was outraged at this attack on the authenticity of the largest streams of Judaism outside of Israel, and through pressure, defeated the bill. Secondly, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was nearing the end of a ten month settlement freeze where building permits had not been allowed in West Bank settlements. Netanyahu was under intense pressure from his own government to resume issuing building permits, while also being pressured by the international community to extend the freeze and engage with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas in peace negotiations. Finally, an American Conservative rabbi who had made *aliyah*, immigration to Israel, Daniel Gordis wrote a scathing article, titled “Of Sermons and Strategies” in the *Jerusalem Post*. In the article, Gordis, the founding dean of American Jewish University’s Ziegler Rabbinical School (Conservative), wrote of anti-Israel sentiment of American rabbinical students. Gordis gave the following examples in his piece: a student who refuses to buy a tallit made in Israel, a student who goes to Ramallah for his birthday and has drinks underneath posters promoting terrorism against Israel, a school banning email debates about Israel, and a student suggesting that the *Nakba* (Palestinian holiday of mourning meaning “Catastrophe” referring to the creation of Israel) be observed by the Jewish people. In his article, Gordis explains:

A new battleground is emerging.... This battleground, strange as it may sound, is the world of rabbinic training in America.... The impact of (rabbinical students) – most of them bright, decent, thoughtful and deeply Jewishly committed – is exponential. Each one of them influences hundreds of others, and the best and the brightest ultimately have enormous national influence.... Often, a few students ask to meet privately (with me)... what they want to discuss is the

profound loneliness they feel as unabashedly Zionist and pro-Israel rabbis-in-the-making.¹

The Gordis piece created a firestorm of controversy within the Diaspora Jewish community. Whereas Gordis never stated which seminaries or movements the students belonged to in his examples, many assumed, falsely as it were, that he was writing about students from the Hebrew Union College (HUC). Some students and leaders of the Reform movement decried Gordis' article as slander, while others stated that it accurately reflected their experience of rabbinical school. There were communities that decided to end their affiliation with HUC over Gordis' claims, while others poured money into programs that were aimed at helping rabbinical students grow in their love for the State of Israel. Gordis brought to light what many felt was a first; strong disagreement within the rabbinate of attitudes and views towards the State of Israel. However, when looking at the history of Israel, American Judaism and the Reform rabbinate in America, it is clear that the only consistency is the lack of a unified voice by Reform rabbis on the Jewish State.

Though faculty and students at HUC took exception with Gordis' claim that there was anti-Israel, anti-Zionist sentiment at American rabbinical schools, a century earlier, the College may have taken Gordis' article as a badge of honor. In fact, the founder of HUC, Isaac Mayer Wise, stated on the first day of class of 1897, "Talmud Torah is the curriculum of this college. We want teachers of Judaism. Judaism, we say, and not nationalism, Judaism and not Zionism...."² Wise was clear in his anti-Zionism, his belief was firm that Judaism was a religion and not a nation. Should Zionism be taught to the students of HUC, he feared that Jews would

¹ Daniel Gordis, "Guest Columnist: Of Sermons and Strategies," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Guest-Columnist-Of-sermons-and-strategies>

² Naomi Weiner Cohen, "The Reaction of Reform Judaism in America to Political Zionism (1897-1922)," in *American Zionism: Mission and Politics*, vol. 8 of *American Jewish History*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Routledge, 1998), 40.

appear disloyal to the United States and the non-Jewish community. This rhetoric had been the voice of the Reform movement in America since the founding of the first Reform synagogue in the United States, Kahel Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina. At the synagogue's 1841 dedication, the rabbi, Gustav Poznanski, declared, "This country is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, the house of God our Temple."³ Furthermore, Reform Judaism was not focused on the past, when the Jews used to live in Palestine, but rather on the present and future. The present, of course, was that these Reform Jews were living emancipated lives as citizens of the United States, and the future was a world where people would not have distinctive religions such as "Muslim", "Jew", or Christian, but rather, all would be living in harmony and following the morals of God.

The view of creating a society in line with the visions of the prophets was stated at the 1869 Philadelphia Conference of Reform Rabbis, "the Messianic goal of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a descendant of David, involving a second separation from the nations of the earth, but the union of all men as the children of God."⁴ The goal of Reform Judaism at that time was not to be a separate people, but instead bring all people together. As opposed to the Orthodox ideology, these early American Reform rabbis did not see living in the Diaspora as a punishment but instead an important part of God's covenant with Abraham to spread Judaism throughout the world and to become a light unto the nations. The 1869 statement and the words of Rabbi Poznanski were reiterated by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the lay body of the Reform movement, which unanimously passed a resolution in 1898, stating:

³ Robert Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem: American Jews and the State of Israel* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970), 57.

⁴ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, NH: Bradeis University Press, 1998), 188.

We are opposed to political Zionism. The Jews are not a nation, but a religious community. Zion was a precious possession of the past, the early home of our faith, their world enchanting hymns. As such it is a holy memory, but it is not our hope for the future. America is our Zion. Here in the home of religious liberty, we have aided in the founding this new Zion, the fruition of the beginning laid in the old. The mission of Judaism is spiritual, not political. Its aim is not to establish a state, but to spread the truths of religion and humanity throughout the world.⁵

Though the statement passed unanimously, it was included, as were prior statements, because there was a growing minority of Zionists within the Reform movement. As the voices supporting the establishment of a country for the Jewish people in Palestine grew louder, the College and Wise became increasingly vocal in their opposition to Zionism. Students at the end of the 19th century reported that, “The entire trend of our work at College is such as to lead us away from Zionism.”⁶

The tone of the College and the Reform movement of the late 19th century stands in stark contrast to the attitude of the College today. Whereas, students a century ago were led away from Zionism, today applicants to HUC must agree to the following statement:

Since 1970 we have required our students to study at our Jerusalem campus. This gives powerful expression to our belief that leadership in the Jewish community requires engagement with and commitment to the well-being of the Land, People and State of Israel, as well as the entire global Jewish community. Through the variety of experiences provided by the Year in Israel program, we trust that different students will adopt different attitudes regarding Israel, yet grow in the ability to dialogue in a respectful and pluralistic manner.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 189.

⁶ Michael Meyer, “In the Days of Isaac Mayer Wise,” in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 45.

⁷ Admissions: HUC-JIR Rabbinical, Cantorial and Education Programs: Our Policies and Expectations; K'lal Yisrael: Israel and the Global Jewish Community, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://huc.edu/admissions/policies-and-expectations>.

The College today is proud of its relationship with the State of Israel and Zionism. For nearly fifty years since the 1892, the *Union Prayer Book* (based on Wise's *Minhag America*), the primary prayer book of the Reform movement, had eliminated any reference to the notion of a restoration of Palestine. Today, the rabbinical students of the Los Angeles campus of HUC lead services with the flags of both the United States and Israel standing behind them. Whereas Isaac Mayer Wise once said, "Those Zionists came to whip us again into the dark corners of isolation.... No normal man can believe that we Jews leave the great nations of culture, power, and abundant prosperity in which we form an integral element, to form a ridiculous miniature State in dried-up Palestine.... We can never identify ourselves with Zionism,"⁸ today, every rabbinical student spends a year living in Israel and takes an Israel seminar course. The course meets once per week for an entire day and includes trips around Israel, and exploring different aspects and perspectives within Israeli society. The campus is built overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem on one end, and the new city, right on the divide between East and West Jerusalem. The College, built to be a permanent fixture in one of the world's oldest cities, symbolizes in its location and architecture the joining of heavenly and earthly Jerusalem. Its presence literally cements the Reform rabbinate of America into the soil of the biblical land.

The Reform movement in America and the Zionist movement both gained traction in America in the late 19th century. They both came from neo-messianism, and were on a collision course in ideology. Reform Judaism was based on hope for Jews thriving in a gentile world, while political Zionism was a reaction to the hopelessness of surviving in a gentile world. The early 20th century HUC professor David Philipson, an ardent anti-Zionist, explained that Reform Judaism and Zionism were incompatible, "Reform Judaism is spiritual, Zionism is political;

⁸ Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), 10.

Reform Judaism is universal, Zionism is particularistic; Reform Judaism looks to the future, Zionism to the past; the outlook of Reform Judaism is the world, the outlook of Zionism is a corner of Western Asia.”⁹ Ironically, for two movements being incompatible, Reform rabbis would become the leaders of the Zionist movement in America during the 20th century, and the movement as a whole would identify itself as Zionistic and be the first Jewish movement to have its own party in the World Zionist Organization.¹⁰ HUC was an institution that declared by posting the following address on every bulletin board at the School during World War I:

The Hebrew Union College was founded to have the young men whom it educates for the ministry preach and teach Reform Judaism and promulgate American ideas and ideals. Loyalty and patriotism have characterized the institution since its establishment. THIS IS OUR COUNTRY. We know no other fatherland than the land in which we live and no other flag than the flag which floats over it. Our country is at war and all of its citizens must be not passively, but actively loyal and patriotic. No one who does not subscribe to these sentiments is welcome within the walls of the College.¹¹

The College was an American institution and the only form of nationalism that it would tolerate, according to its board of governors with thirty anti-Zionists and only one Zionist,¹² was love of the United States. However, fifty years later, in the midst of the Six-Day War, HUC students and faculty not only spoke of their loyalty to Israel, but also the need for Reform Judaism to be further invested within the Jewish State. HUC became an institution that saw that it must go to Israel to spread the message of Reform Judaism worldwide, and also to potentially save the Diaspora.

⁹ Naomi Wiener Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1947* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 44-45.

¹⁰ Richard G. Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism, A Personal Mission* (New York: URJ Press, 2011), 214.

¹¹ Michael Meyer, “A Theological School for Reform Judaism,” in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 80-81.

¹² Ibid.

American Jews turn often to their rabbis as the people to learn more information about Israel, and they base their opinions on matters related to Israel off of the views and sermons of their rabbis. For this reason, HUC saw it as essential that their rabbis have as much exposure as possible to the challenges and beauty of the Land, People and State of Israel. However, the Reform movement recognizes that not just the American Jewish community must benefit from their rabbis' knowledge of Israel, but also, that Israel stands to benefit from its exposure to Reform Judaism. The December 2013 Pew Research Center's "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" showed that 35% of American Jews identify as Reform and 18% identify as Conservative, whereas 10% identify as Orthodox.¹³ A majority of Jewish Americans, by far the largest of the Diasporic communities with a population of 5.5 million, identify with a progressive stream of Judaism. However, in Israel, which in 2013 was declared to have the world's largest population of Jews, surpassing the United States with approximately 6 million,¹⁴ a minority of the Jewish population, 26.5%,¹⁵ identifies itself as Orthodox. Approximately 3.9% of Israeli Jews identify as Reform, while 3.2% identify as Conservative.¹⁶ However, these numbers do not reflect the true nature of Judaism as a religion within Israel, as 44% of Israelis claim to be "somewhat" observant, while 90% have a Passover seder, 80% believe in God, 70% refrain from eating non-kosher food, 69% have weekly Shabbat dinners, and 68% fast on Yom Kippur.¹⁷ It is clear that

¹³ Infographic: Survey of Jewish Americans, Pew Research Center, last modified December 3, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/03/infographic-survey-of-jewish-americans/>.

¹⁴ "Israel overtakes America as the world's largest Jewish population centre for the first time," *Daily Mail*, March 29, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2301391/Israel-worlds-largest-Jewish-population-centre-time-overtaking-America.html>.

¹⁵ Yair Ettinger, "Poll: 7.1 percent of Israeli Jews define themselves as Reform or Conservative," *Haaretz*, June 11, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/.premium-1.528994>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Asher Arian and Ayala Keissar-Sugarman, "A Portrait of Israeli Jews; Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009," The Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute and for the AVI CHAI – Israel Foundation, last modified 2009, <http://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/A-Portrait-of-Israeli-Jews-Abstract.pdf>, 11-17.

the number of Israeli Jews who identify as Reform or Conservative should be higher, however, the question of “What is Judaism?” has different answers in the Diaspora and in Israel.

In the United States, many respondents would identify themselves as a Jew religiously, typically based on synagogue affiliation. They would respond that the opposite of a Jew is a Christian, Muslim, atheist, etc. However, in Israel, Judaism is often seen as an ethnic identity. Many Israelis would respond that the opposite of a Jew is an Arab, a Chinese person, a black African, etc. As only a small, but growing, minority of Israeli Jews identify as Reform or Conservative, it has been longstanding that only the Orthodox rabbinate is recognized as authentic for performing life cycle ceremonies. It is problematic that the Diaspora community’s largest Jewish movements are not recognized on an equal plain with Orthodoxy, the smallest of the three main Jewish streams, and that the leaders of these movements are not considered by the Jewish State, with the world’s largest Jewish population, to be legitimate. Therefore, in order for Israel to truly be the Jewish State, it must recognize Reform Judaism, and in order for Reform rabbis to be authentic leaders of Jewish people, they must be engrained in Israel and build a movement there. Without coming to a common ground, Israeli Jews and American Jews will become two distinctive groups, and not one people.

As this relationship between the world’s two largest Jewish communities has had high points and low points, it is important to examine how the leadership of Israel and the leadership of the Reform movement have evolved from the founding of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the body of American Reform rabbis, to present. With the CCAR’s creation in 1885, the rabbis wrote in Pittsburgh their platform of what they stand for as Jewish leaders. The least debated topic was that of Zionism and peoplehood, for which they wrote, “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.”¹⁸ For these rabbis, the Jews were not a people, but a community, and Palestine was a relic of the past, not a place for the future. In the same year, they wrote “A sober student of Jewish history and a genuine lover of his co-religionists sees that the Zionist agitation contradicts everything that is typical of Jews and Judaism.”¹⁹ However, in 1999, 114 years later, the CCAR would reconvene in Pittsburgh, and write:

The restoration of Am Yisrael (People of Israel) to its ancestral homeland after nearly two thousand years of statelessness and powerlessness represents an historic triumph of the Jewish people.... Even as Medinat Yisrael (State of Israel) 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.... (Our obligation to Israel is) to help promote the security of Medinat Yisrael and ensure the welfare of its citizens, we pledge continued political support and financial assistance.... 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....²⁰

¹⁸ Rabbinic Voice, “1885 Pittsburgh Platform,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/>.

¹⁹ Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 20.

²⁰ Ibid.

The centerpiece to the platform of American Reform rabbis had become identity with Judaism as a people and a religion, and support for the State of Israel and the Zionist movement. Likewise, the anti-Zionist rabbi, David Philipson, stated in 1929, “Palestine represents for us an outgrown phase of Jewish historical experience. Back to Palestine is not our rallying cry.... To those who are Jews in religion and Americans in nationality, political Zionism is anathema.” Whereas, in 1970 the president of the CCAR, Ronald B. Gittelsohn stated the opposite, “We (Reform Jews) shall use our influence, wherever and whenever we can to persuade the world that its own survival and integrity are irrevocably linked with those in Israel. We shall do all this not as a gesture of philanthropy, but because we know how imperative the survival of Israel is for the enhancement and vitality of our own Judaism.”²¹ The religious movement that once feared being seen as traitors if they stood in solidarity with any country other than the United States was now encouraging its members to immigrate to Israel, enhance their understanding of Jewish peoplehood, and use their power to help Israel, which benefits the world and American Jews. Reform Judaism had reformed itself with such a radical change, as it is a movement that focuses on adaptability with the challenges of today rather than remaining fixed to past beliefs.

This thesis explores how historically and ideologically the Reform movement changed its views so radically regarding Zionism and peoplehood. To understand this transformation, the movement must be examined in different periods, which are laid out as such; Rejection of Peoplehood and Statehood (1885-1917), From Balfour to Ford to Hitler: the Need for Nationalism (1917-1937), Changing of Perspectives and Building of the Jewish State (1937-1948), Unbreakable Solidarity (1948-1973), Voices of Dissent (1973-1995), and The Quest for Peace and Equality (1995-Present), with a conclusion of The Prophetic Vision: The Future of the

²¹ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 6.

Reform Rabbinate-Israeli Relationship. The title for this thesis is “House of Jacob, Come and Let Us Walk in the Light of Adonai: the American Reform Rabbinate, Zionism and the State of Israel.” The first part of the title is a quote from *Isaiah* 2:5. Founded in the mid-1880’s, the first Jewish pioneers to settle from Europe in Palestine called themselves BILU, which was an acronym for the first letter of the Hebrew “House of Jacob, come and let us walk.” They cut off the ending part of the verse, “in the light of Adonai” because for them, the Jews were solely a people, not a religion. At the same time, out of complete coincidence, the CCAR chose in 1885 their motto to be “come and let us walk in the light of Adonai,” the exact same verse of the Bible, except with the “House of Jacob” omitted.²² For the Reform rabbis, the Jews were a religion and not a people. In order to make the relationship between Zionism and the Reform rabbinate, religion and peoplehood needed to come together for Jewish unity, and the verse “House of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of Adonai” had to remain whole.

²² Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 274.

Chapter One:
Rejection of Peoplehood and Statehood
(1885-1917)

To understand the early incompatibility between Zionism and Reform Judaism in America, it is essential to look at the roots of Judaism in the United States and also where Reform Judaism was founded, Germany and Western Europe. Jews played an important role in America since before its founding as a country. Aaron Lopez was the wealthiest man in Newport, Rhode Island and the head of the important town's shipping industry during the Revolutionary War, as Haym Solomon in Philadelphia was the main financier of the Revolutionary Army. During the Civil War, Jews fought for both the North and the South, with Judah P. Benjamin, a former senator from Louisiana, becoming the Secretary of War and State for the Confederate Army and being featured on the Confederate States of America's \$2 bill. Levi Strauss, a German Jewish immigrant, invented blue jeans in 1873 and would go on to become one of the wealthiest men in the country. Since the birth of the United States, Jews were determined to contribute to its advancement, achieve success, and show loyalty and support in their gentile surrounding. In turn, though there were occasional instances of anti-Semitism, the Jews were treated well in the new country. Article VI of the Constitution stated that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States," and the First Amendment followed, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The following year, 1790, the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, wrote a letter to George Washington proclaiming their high opinions of him and asking that the United States protect them from persecution. Washington responded with a letter of his own saying:

All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.... May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one [sic] shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.¹

The Jews and Washington were explicit; the Jews would be loyal to the United States, and the United States would give equal rights and protection to the Jews on account of their loyalty. The next twenty years would see emancipation of Jews sweep across Western Europe; ghettos fell and Jews were given citizenship. Famously, in 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte, through Count Molé, asked the Jews questions about their role in French society, including: “In the eyes of Jews, are Frenchmen considered as their brethren? Or are they considered as strangers? In either case, what line of conduct does their law prescribe towards Frenchmen not of their religion? Do Jews born in France, and treated by the laws as French citizens, consider France their country? Are they bound to defend it?” The Jewish community replied:

... France is our country, all Frenchmen are our brethren, and this glorious title, by raising us our own esteem, becomes a sure pledge that we shall never cease to be worthy of it.... At the present time... Jews no longer form a separate people, but enjoy the advantage of being incorporated with the Great Nation.... The love of the country is in the heart of Jews a sentiment so natural, so powerful, and so consonant to their religious opinions, that a French Jew considers himself in England, as among strangers, although he may be among Jews.... To such a pitch in this sentiment carried among them, that during the last war, French Jews have been seen fighting desperately against other Jews, the subjects of countries then at war with France.²

¹ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, ed., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 363.

² Ibid., 118-119.

For the Jews of the United States and of Western Europe, in order to make better lives for themselves as equal citizens, it was a necessity to define Judaism solely as a religion. French Jews and American Jews may have shared a common religion, but they were by no means brethren. The relationship between Jews of that time was similar to that of Protestant Christians today. A Protestant from Alabama reads the same texts and prays to the same God as a Protestant in Kenya, a Protestant in South Korea and a Protestant in Sweden; however, they speak different languages, have different ethnicities, and pledge allegiance to different flags. They share a religious faith, but these different Protestants from around the world do not claim to belong to the same ethnic group.

The early leaders of the Reform movement in America, such as Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler were born in Germany and under the mindset of emancipated Jews. As the founders of the first main national Jewish religious body in the United States, they incorporated the values of the Enlightenment society, which they had been raised in into the movement. The moral laws of the Torah were relevant to them, but archaic practices that set them apart from others, such as wearing yarmulkes, eating kosher, and praying in Hebrew, showed Jews as separate people clinging to the memory of days gone past. Prominently, of old practices that should be abandoned was the desire to return to Palestine. A desire to create a new country just for Jews on the other side of the world indicated that the Jews were dissatisfied with their lives in the United States. Likewise, the idea of Zionism suggested that Jews would rather live with other Jews from all over the world than with their Christian neighbors. The threat of losing citizenship and being persecuted in countries where they had finally achieved rights after over a thousand years of Diasporic persecution was too great a loss to even entertain the thought of Zionism and peoplehood by Western European Jews. To make his allegiance to the United States known,

Kohler proclaimed that the 4th of July was the modern equivalent of the 6th of Sivan when God gave the Torah to Israel.³ Americanism was at the core of Reform Jewish identity in the United States, and the leadership of the Reform movement hoped that Jewish immigrants would abandon ideals of nationalism, and embrace the American way of life.

Eastern European Jews, a minority at the time in the United States, had a much different experience in their countries of origin. Instead of living in large cities, many lived in small villages surrounded only by other Jews. They did not have citizenship and were not protected by their governments, making them frequently attacked. These Jews had their own dress and even language, Yiddish, and were an exclusionary group, partly from their own desire and partly by force. Understandably, as a persecuted group, they yearned for a day when they could return to Palestine and establish the Third Jewish Commonwealth, thereby being free from religious persecution. In every sense of the way, these Jews were set aside as not just a separate religion, but also a separate people. Even the secular Jews of Eastern Europe were still denied equal rights on the basis of their Jewish ethnicity. These Jews were the ones who became the early Zionists and pioneers to establish settlement in Palestine. The Reform leadership sought to distance itself from the Zionist movement. Wise called Zionism “the new messianic movement over the ocean” and Rabbis Samuel Sale and Henry Berkowitz stated in 1897 that Zionism is, “the besetting sin and evil of this age.”⁴ At the CCAR conference in Montreal that year, Wise sponsored a resolution stating, “We totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish

³ Naomi Wiener Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1947* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 46.

⁴ Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1975), 95.

State.”⁵ Ironically, whereas Wise stated that Zionism was an overseas messianic movement, as opposed to the anti-messianic Reform movement, the resolution condemned Zionism as being secular and void of religious values.⁶

In an effort to explain to the American people and Jewish community the Reform ideology, Kohler stated, “Our Zion is humanity religionized, not Judaism nationalized.”⁷ Kohler’s explanation had been the position of his father-in-law and predecessor at Temple Beth El in Detroit, David Einhorn. Einhorn, also a German immigrant, is credited along with Wise as being the founder of Reform Judaism in America. While living in Germany, Einhorn and his mentors, Samuel Hirsch and Samuel Holdheim, passed a resolution in 1845 calling on Palestine and Jewish statehood to be removed from liturgy and ritual. The CCAR adopted this resolution as its own in 1890.⁸ In 1866 Einhorn, now living in the United States, proclaimed, “The messianic aim of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state... but the union of all children of God.”⁹ The Reform leaders saw the Diaspora as part of God’s intention for the Jews to spread the message of the prophets and Jewish morals throughout the world. It would be impossible to be a light unto the nations, as described throughout *Isaiah* as God’s mission for the believers of the Jewish faith, if the Jews were not spread throughout the world, interacting with gentiles.

⁵ Evyatar Friesel, “The Meaning of Zionism and its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements” in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Almog, Shmuel, Reinhartz, Jehuda, and Shapira, Anita. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 180.

⁶ Cohen, *The Americanization*, 42.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Naomi Weiner Cohen, “The Reaction of Reform Judaism in America to Political Zionism (1897-1922),” in *American Zionism: Mission and Politics*, vol. 8 of *American Jewish History*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Routledge, 1998), 32.

⁹ Urofsky, *American Zionism*, 64.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Reform movement and the CCAR was overwhelmingly anti-Zionist. At this time, a majority of congregations in the United States were part of the UAHC, meaning that a majority of American Jewish communities opposed Zionism.¹⁰ However, there was a growing and vocal group that began supporting the idea of Zionism. With Jewish immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe to the United States, social anti-Semitism was on the rise in America. These immigrants reported horrific pogroms in their countries of origins and persecution of the Jews. Even in Germany, racial anti-Semitism was on the rise, and the 1894 Dreyfus Affair targeting an assimilated Western European Jew indicated a decline in post-Enlightenment tolerance. At the same time, Christian groups began calling for the United States to become a Christian country, and were hopeful that the Reform Jews who engaged in interfaith dialogue with liberal Christians would convert to Christianity. One of the early American Reform Zionists was another cofounder of the Reform movement in America, Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal. In 1897, when the CCAR reaffirmed its anti-Zionist stance, Felsenthal wrote in the *American Hebrew* magazine:

I feel deeply with the sufferings of the larger majority of my Jewish brethren; with the Jews in Russia, Romania, Persia, Arabia, Morocco and elsewhere, and it is my decided conviction that the best method and the most rational way to help them would consist in aiding them to emigrate from their country in which they happen to live and to settle in Palestine and to colonize there and in the adjacent countries of Syria, etc. in America they are not wanted... Neither are the doors wide open for them in Austria, Germany, France, England, or elsewhere in Europe. Where then can the unfortunate people, of whom we speak here, find a quiet and undisturbed home?¹¹

Felsenthal's article created a stir as he appeared openly critical of the United States, Western European nations, and also promoted the idea of peoplehood. Other Reform Jews had hoped that

¹⁰ Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), 2.

¹¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 194.

persecuted Jews would immigrate to America, and that their movement could grow. The latter view was also a statement that in the eyes of the Reform leadership, the United States was the best place to live, a patriotic gesture. However, others began backing Felsenthal's opinions, including students at HUC. One, William Fineshriber, out of his concern from the growing anti-Semitism in the United States, wrote in the December 1898 *HUC Journal*, "We do not regard Washington with the same emotions with which we think of Jerusalem; the historical associations are lacking; the much-despised but necessary poetry is not there. Germany is for and of the Germans; France is for and of the French; why not a Judea for and of the Jews?"¹² Fineshriber, who would later become an anti-Zionist, continued, "We are strangers in a strange land. Like the negro, the Jew is an alien with a difference only of degree."¹³ Following Fineshriber's controversial article, the *HUC Journal* began routinely presenting articles with opposing views on Zionism in a debate-format. At this time, up to a dozen students at HUC had come to the realization that Zionism was the only practical solution to helping persecuted Jews around the world.¹⁴ One of these students was Judah Magnes, who would become the first chancellor of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which he cofounded with Chaim Weizmann and Albert Einstein. Magnes wrote as only a second year rabbinical student in 1896, "Palestine or Death," his statement on Zionism.¹⁵

Felsenthal reconciled his views on Zionism with his beliefs in Reform Judaism by stating that the two went hand-in-hand. Reform Judaism was a movement based on progressiveness, human rights, spreading the message of the prophets, and adapting to the challenges that faced

¹² Michael Meyer, "In the Days of Isaac Mayer Wise," in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 45.

¹³ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

Jews in contemporary times. To the Reform Jews who feared that political Zionism would create dual-loyalty among American Jews, Felsenthal replied, “There is no conflict between American patriotism and the endeavors to help poor people and to try to better their bitter lot.”¹⁶ Felsenthal presented Zionism as a philanthropic endeavor, and explained that the United States was exceptional; Jews in other countries could not live freely like Jews in America, therefore it was a fallacy to apply American scenarios of anti-Zionism to Jews living under persecution elsewhere. Along similar lines, if Jews were living in the Land of Israel, free from persecution, then they could carry out the mission of Israel, to spread the messages of the prophets. Though not everyone signed on to support political Zionism, the establishment of a Jewish independent country, many rabbis, on humanitarian grounds, agreed to support the right for persecuted Jews to settle in Palestine and live their lives freely. Even Kohler, who after the death of Wise would take his place as being the voice of anti-Zionism, signed a petition in 1891 to President Benjamin Harrison asking him to persuade European powers to allow Palestine to be a place of refuge for Jews.¹⁷

One of the followers of Felsenthal was a Prussian rabbi named Gustav Gottheil, who had come to the United States to serve as a rabbi at Temple Emanu-El of New York, the flagship synagogue of the Reform movement. Gottheil had stated in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religion that Palestine “is no longer our country... that title appertains to the land of our birth or adoption; and ‘our nation’ is that nation which we form a part and with the destinies of which we are identified, to the exclusion of all others.”¹⁸ However, as the Zionist movement gained momentum in the United States and abroad, Gottheil had a change of heart, and attended the

¹⁶ Ibid., 198.

¹⁷ Cohen, *The Reaction*, 31-32.

¹⁸ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 188.

First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, where he was the most prominent American in attendance. Gottheil was heavily criticized for attending the conference, and defended himself by embracing the notion of Jewish peoplehood. He stated, “There is no such thing as an anti-Zionist.... How can anyone in whose veins flows Jewish blood oppose the movement?”¹⁹ Afterward, Gottheil co-founded along with Felsenthal the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ), where he served as vice president, his son, Richard, served as president and became a leading voice for the Zionist movement in America for decades to come. Another cofounder of FAZ and leader of the Zionist movement was a young rabbi named Stephen S. Wise (from here known as S. Wise to avoid confusion with Isaac Mayer Wise), became the organization’s first secretary.

As Zionism became more present, Isaac Mayer Wise went on the attack. The American Jewish poetess Emma Lazarus expressed sympathy with Zionism in 1883, and Wise berated and degraded her, stating:

If Miss Emma Lazarus and others who handle a pen would lay aside their romantic notions of race, nation, Holy Land, Restoration, etc., and assist these practical heads in scratching out of their brains the pervert notions of distinctions between a man and a citizen who believes in Moses and the Prophets, and another who believes in Jesus and his Apostles, they could render good service to their coreligionists and to the cause of humanity, which is disgraced by the blind prejudices of those narrow-minded individuals who see in the Jew a stranger, an indefinite scarecrow of their bewildered imagination... We are citizens of the United States, an integral element of this nation, and of no other, with no earthly interests or aspirations different from those who believe in Jesus and his Apostles.²⁰

Wise’s wrath against Zionists continued, as took to the national press, writing an article for the *New York Times*, titled, “A Jewish State Impossible.” Wise had founded his own newspaper, *The*

¹⁹ Cohen, *The Americanization*, 55.

²⁰ Arthur Zeiger, “Emma Lazarus and Pre-Herzlian,” in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, ed. Mark A. Raider and Shulamit Reinharz (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 16.

American Israelite, which became his propaganda outlet for preaching anti-Zionist rhetoric. Wise's attacks against Zionists, as seen in his rant against Lazarus, often crossed the line into hostility and disrespect. At one point, the *American Israelite* ran an article on March 10, 1898 charging, "The whole Zionistic movement in this country is a farce which is played by ignorant people to show their contempt for those who try to advise them. That a few educated men should be found among them is only another proof that education is not always productive of good judgment."²¹ Understandably, many feared voicing Zionist views given Wise's power and influence in American Jewish society. The National Council of Jewish Women, founded in 1893, was comprised mostly of Reform women, who were also Zionists. However, the group did not publicly support Zionism until the 1920's out of fear of isolation and exclusion.²² Isaac Mayer Wise died in 1900, but his replacement as HUC president, Kaufmann Kohler, strengthened the College's opposition to Zionism.

Upon becoming president of HUC, Kohler banned Zionism, which he viewed as solely a secular movement. Though Wise opposed Zionism, he allowed debate and conversation, even if he was at times less than respectful towards Zionists. Kohler, however, was intolerant of allowing Zionists to have any platform. He wanted worship God to be the primary focus of study at the College. Kohler worried as he saw many of his colleagues convert to Zionism after the devastating 1903 Kishinev pogrom, which killed 120 Jews. One colleague, Rabbi Adolph Radin, became a Zionist and said that there was no future without anti-Semitism and that universalism was a farce; "Men to whom all has been darkness, have through an electric spark, beheld the

²¹ Cohen, *The Reaction*, 55.

²² Mary McCune, "Formulating the 'Women's Interpretation of Zionism': Hadassah Recruitment of Non-Zionist American Women, 1914-1930," in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, ed. Mark A. Raider and Shulamit Reinharz (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 92.

light. What else but Zionism?”²³ Kohler wanted, with the growing number of American-born students, for the next generation of rabbis to build a truly American movement, in which loyalty to the United States was at the center. Wise’s newspaper, the *American Israelite*, published an article on July 7, 1904, that stated, “There is not one solitary prominent native Jewish-American who is an advocate of ‘Zionism.’ Aside from a very few young visionaries and impractical college professors, the Zionists in America are recruited entirely from the ranks of the newly arrived (Eastern European) immigrants and these know little of its political significance, and care less.”²⁴ Kohler began purging the College of Zionist instructors and ideology. Professor Henry Malter wrote six articles for the *HUC Journal* between October 1902 and June 1903, the first five of which he criticized the College’s view on Zionism. In the sixth article, he was to present the solution to the problem of anti-Semitism, but his article was censored and never published.²⁵ Judah Magnes became an instructor at the College in February 1903, but resigned in September of 1904, as it was made clear to him that his Zionist opinions were not welcomed at HUC. Another professor, a Talmudic grammarian, Caspar Levias, fell victim to Kohler’s anti-Zionist views. Levias published in the 1900 *CCAR Yearbook* an article titled “The Justification of Zionism” in a debate on the issue of Jewish nationalism. Levias pointed out that Irish Americans still take pride in Ireland and Scandinavian Americans take pride in Scandinavian countries, yet their patriotism is not questioned; therefore, why should Zionism be treated differently?²⁶ Kohler, feeling that Levias’ views reflected poorly upon the College, fired him in 1905.

Following Levias’ termination, Kohler hired his good friend and fellow anti-Zionist Max Margolis in his place, as well as Max Schloessinger. However, soon after their hiring,

²³ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 194.

²⁴ Cohen, *The Reaction*, 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 198.

Schloessinger became involved in Zionist activities and Margolis completely changed his views and became devoted to the Zionist cause. Schloessinger requested Kohler's permission to attend a banquet in New York for the Zionist leader Shmariah Levin, however, Kohler refused. Feeling that Kohler would have allowed him a leave of absence if it were not for a Zionist cause, Schloessinger went to the banquet anyways. Kohler was furious and charged him to the Board of Governors with insubordination. Around the same time, Margolis gave a Zionist sermon and was berated by Kohler in front of his students afterwards. Margolis claimed that Kohler stated he could not trust him to teach Bible given his Zionist views. Angry with their treatment, Malter, Margolis and Schloessinger challenged Kohler's leadership and complained to the Board of Governors in 1906. The trio planned to release papers promoting Zionist views in February of 1907, but before they could, the Board of Governors passed a resolution reaffirming that "America is our Zion." Right afterwards, all three either resigned or were terminated from the College.²⁷ Kohler claimed that none of the departures were related to Zionism, even though the professors felt differently; and he gave further reason for the leaving of Malter and Schloessinger, but the justification for the loss of Margolis was far more difficult. After the incident with Margolis' sermon, Kohler publicly criticized Margolis in the *HUC Journal*. Though Margolis never said the word "Zionism" in his classes, his teachings of the prophets often reinforced the views of Jewish nationalism, and Kohler stripped him of teaching Bible. Kohler justified this reaction to the Board of Governors by saying:

He infuses ideas subversive of the very fundamental principles of American Reform Judaism in his teachings of the Prophets and of the Pentateuch without characterizing them as Zionistic and this by far more pernicious than it would openly speak as a Zionist. It is the poison instilled in sugar-coated pills that is much more harmful than the one labeled as such. Against the latter we can be cautioned. We learn how to deal with Zionism

²⁷ Cohen, *The Reaction*, 43.

by hearing all its arguments and then refuting its premises by pointing out that it is un-Jewish, irreligious and un-American. But if it is taught under the guise of exegetical science, then it works insidiously, undermining the very foundations of Reform Judaism.... The whole teaching of Professor Margolis is nothing less than playing into the hands of the anti-Semitic professors of biblical exegesis in Germany and elsewhere. It is un-Jewish.²⁸

Kohler's vendetta against Margolis and Margolis' departure led to anger by many alumni and the resignations of two rabbinical students, as many of them adored their Bible professor. With the three professors gone, HUC had lost a third of its faculty,²⁹ and Kohler replaced them with the very non-Zionistic Julian Morgenstern, Jacob Marcus, and David Neumark, a cultural, but apolitical Zionist. Despite Kohler's efforts, *The Maccabean*, the FAZ's Zionist magazine, noted in March of 1907 that "Zionistic infection of the Hebrew Union College seems to be spreading" and that many Reform rabbis were "workers in the Zionist movement."³⁰

As mentioned, Neumark was a cultural Zionist, a stream of Zionism created by Asher Ginsberg, or as he was better known, Ahad Ha'am. Whereas Theodor Herzl and the political Zionists advocated for a secular state for the Jewish people, which the Reform rabbinate attacked as particularistic, nonreligious and degraded Judaism to an ethnicity, Ha'am advocated for a Jewish State, with Palestine as the spiritual center for the Jews. In his 1893 work "Priest and Prophet," Ha'am argues, like Reform Judaism, that the message of the prophets was the most important contribution of the Jews to civilization. The prophets, with their advocacy for social justice sought to create a utopian world. However, the prophets existed primarily when Israelites lived in the Land of Israel as free, self-governed people. The prophets would critique the kings and try to ensure that their country represented the values of the Torah and acted as a light unto

²⁸ Michael Meyer, "A Theological School for Reform Judaism," in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 67.

²⁹ Ibid., 68.

³⁰ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 188.

the nations of the world. In the following decade, Labor Zionism, which advocated agriculture and spiritual connection with the Land of Israel, and practical Zionism, which urged Jews to settle in Palestine as a place of refuge also came to the forefront. The leader of these two movements, A.D. Gordon, said, “We gave the world the idea of man in God’s image – now our task is to establish *Ereš Yisrael* a nation in God’s image.”³¹

The ideas espoused by Gordon and Ha’am did not contradict, but rather aligned with Reform ideology. In particular, Ha’am connected Zionism to religion, refuting Kohler’s main criticism. As a result, Zionism gained further steam within the College and movement, and one incoming student, Max Raisin, directly corresponded with Ha’am. Another rabbi who converted to Zionism was Max Heller of New Orleans, who had said in 1899 that Zionism was the product of despair and belonged overseas, yet became openly Zionist in 1903.³² Heller was elected president of the CCAR in 1909, showing a change in the mentality of the rabbinate. Traditionally, upon becoming president of the CCAR, HUC would award an honorary doctorate to the rabbi; however, Kohler refused to give Heller this distinction. Heller responded to the snub, “As a Zionist, you suppose you are an outlaw, and like the ex-professors, must be disciplined.”³³ As Reform rabbis and the incoming Eastern European immigrants became increasingly Zionist, the fervent anti-Zionism of Kohler and others turned them away from the Reform movement. Their Zionist views were not taken with any credibility as the Reform press every year stated that Zionism was a fad that would die with Herzl and Max Nordau.³⁴ Those

³¹ Michael Livni, "Reform Zionism and Its Implications." Union Progressiver Juden in Deutschland, Berlin, Germany, July 13 2006, address.

³² Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 188.

³³ Urofsky, *American Zionism*, 97.

³⁴ Cohen, *The Reaction*, 56.

who could not find a place in Reform Judaism began to turn to a new movement built up at that time by the Romanian-born scholar and rabbi, Solomon Schechter, the Conservative movement.

The Reform movement's leaders, born in Western Europe under emancipation, applied their personal experience to their views on anti-Zionism. Likewise, Eastern European Jews, now becoming a majority in the United States applied their experience of oppression, Jewish peoplehood from the shtetls, and feeling of statelessness, applied their personal experiences as to why they supported Zionism. A large amount of these immigrants were traditional, wanting to succeed and become assimilated within American society without losing their Jewish practices, beliefs or Zionist viewpoints. Ultra-Orthodoxy did not speak to them, but neither did Reform Judaism. Schechter was fearful that without a movement with which they could identify, these Jews would leave Judaism. In 1906, Schechter publicly stated, "After long hesitation and careful watching, Zionism recommended itself as the great bulwark against assimilation."³⁵ Schechter's views did come under criticism by many leaders in the Reform movement, such as Jacob Schiff, the prominent lay leader at Temple Emanu-El, who told Schechter, "Speaking as an American, I cannot concede for a moment that one can be, at the same time, a true American, and an honest adherent of the Zionist movement."³⁶ However, for the most part, Schechter found considerable support for American Jews, including by many leaders of the Reform movement. Even Kohler respected Schechter as he was able to justify his Zionism through a religious lens. The elderly Bernhard Felsenthal agreed with Schechter and wanted Reform Judaism to adopt Zionism in order to stay a part of the mainstream American Jewish society. Felsenthal had warned in 1875, "The very existence of Israel is greatly endangered in America.... Hundreds of individuals and of families are getting estranged, and are gradually melting away from Judaism... a great part of

³⁵ Friesel, *The Meaning of Zionism*, 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

the rising generation is growing up in total ignorance of the religion of their fathers.... In a time not very distant, very many of our descendants will not know whether they are Jews or not.”³⁷ Schechter presented Zionism as the cure for this problem. Max Schloessinger agreed, writing in 1907, “Reform Judaism will be Zionistic, or it will not be at all,” which would be echoed by Felix Levy in 1943 as the CCAR president.³⁸ Judah Magnes, after leaving HUC over Zionism, became the assistant rabbi of Temple Emanu-El and the secretary of the FAZ, but resigned from his position at Emanu-El in 1910 over criticisms of his Zionist sermons. Magnes turned to the Conservative movement, feeling his voice would be welcomed there, and founded New York Kehillah, an organization that aimed to bring unity between Eastern and Western European Jews in America.

As Zionism gained prominence and the center of American Judaism transferred from Cincinnati to New York due to the influx of immigrants, those who were anti-Zionist in the Reform leadership attempted to tighten their grip on power and censor those who disagreed with them. In 1905 Stephen S. Wise was considered a candidate for the rabbinic position at Temple Emanu-El, but was eliminated from the search after he insisted that he have freedom of speech from the pulpit, but was told that he could not speak about Zionism. In the Zionist *Maccabean*, Reform Jews wrote scathing attacks on their own movement over the lack of free speech and opposition to Zionism. They encouraged rabbis of the movement to join the Zionist cause. *The Maccabean* articles charged the Reform movement as being only present-minded and also claimed that as the Zionists advocated freedom of speech, that they were more in line with American values than their anti-Zionist counterparts. Kohler responded by banning people from speaking about Zionism in the HUC chapel and would censor sermons. When S. Wise was

³⁷ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 193.

³⁸ Friesel, *The Meaning of Zionism*, 181.

invited to speak as a prominent American rabbi, he was told that he could only speak on non-Zionist topics. Likewise, the literary society invited the secular Zionist and famous philosopher Horace M. Kallen to speak at the College, but Kohler rescinded the invitation. Angry, many students wrote a letter of apology to Kallen stating their embarrassment regarding their president's actions. The same year, 1914, Louis Brandeis, who along with S. Wise had become America's leading Zionist voice, came to speak at the College. The Friday prior to his arrival, Professor David Philipson gave a sermon blasting Zionism. When Brandeis arrived at the College, he was told that he was not allowed to speak about Zionism, to which he promptly canceled his speech and left the school. In 1915, Max Heller and S. Wise adopted a UAHC resolution allowing students to preach on Zionism elsewhere in the building and allowing them to give sermons on Zionism, if they were put into a religious context. Following the resolution, S. Wise and Julian Mack, a notable federal judge, came to speak at the college in 1915, and their speech was boycotted by Kohler and Philipson. The students were disgusted by the rudeness of the College's leadership and did not wish to be associated with Kohler and Philipson, making their actions counterproductive.

One student who stood out in particular as a Zionist leader was Max Heller's son, James (J. Heller here on out). Heller and S. Wise's resolution to the UAHC had been motivated by Kohler's refusal to allow J. Heller to give a sermon on Zionism in 1915, but nothing would stop him the following year. In his landmark student sermon in 1916, J. Heller proclaimed regarding Zionism, "What right have we, to accept the prophets' ideals of justice, righteousness and knowledge of God – and call them our superiors in spiritual insight – and refuse recognition of their belief in the mission of the Jewish nation?"³⁹ Kohler responded that he could not

³⁹ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 14.

understand the “perversity” and “degeneracy” of the younger generation. Angrily, Kohler attacked, “ignorance and irreligion are at the bottom of the whole movement of political Zionism.”⁴⁰ However, Kohler realized that he was fighting what appeared to be a losing battle. On April 25, 1915, Brandeis addressed the Eastern Council of the CCAR and stated that Zionism is the way to solve anti-Semitism. Though two decades earlier, more rabbis would be dismissive of Brandeis, anti-Semitism had come to the forefront of the minds of many rabbis. Aside from the pogroms in Eastern Europe, new incidents were coming to attention. The president of Atlanta’s B’nai B’rith, had been convicted of the murder of a 13-year-old girl in 1913, despite many doubts of his guilt. In August 1915, a few months after Brandeis’ speech, Frank was killed by a lynch mob. The plight of Jews during World War I and rising opposition to immigration also contributed to many rabbis changing their minds on Zionism. A 1915 informal survey by Heller showed that there were nearly an equal number of Zionists and anti-Zionists at that point in the Reform rabbinate, but most of the Zionists held their views for practical and cultural, rather than political, reasons.⁴¹ Primarily, the reasons that led Reform rabbis to change their views through 1916 were the following: a growing number of Eastern European Jews had changed the demographics of the American and Reform Jewish communities, there were new ideological arguments emphasizing that supporting Zionism went against neither American patriotism nor the prophetic message, a realization that there was rising anti-Semitism in America and that life in America was still far better than it was for Jews elsewhere in the world, and a realization by many that Conservative Judaism would make the Reform movement obsolete given its popularity through the acceptance of Zionism. Following 1916, the global rise

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 198.

of nationalism and the 1917 Balfour Declaration would change the tone on Zionism in the movement.

Chapter Two

From Balfour to Ford to Hitler: The Need for Nationalism (1917-1937)

In the course of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine came under the British mandate in 1917. Arthur James Balfour, the foreign secretary and the former prime minister of Britain, wrote a letter on November 2nd of that year to Lionel Walter Rothschild, the second Baron Rothschild, stating, “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”¹ The declaration was an unprecedented victory for political Zionism, and many viewed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be inevitable in the coming years. Prior to this moment, the topic of Zionism was more of an issue of debate within the rabbinate than it was among the lay people of the Reform movement, but now all engaged in discussion on Jewish nationalism.² Former anti-Zionists, such as Jacob Schiff, who had argued with Schechter a decade earlier of it being impossible to be a loyal American and a Zionist, publicly embraced Zionism. With the language of the Balfour Declaration demanding rights for the non-Jewish communities, as well as the demand that Zionism would not affect the liberties of Diaspora Jews in their countries (by forcing them to declare allegiance to the Jewish State), American Jews

¹ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, ed., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 458.

² Evyatar Friesel, “The Meaning of Zionism and its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements” in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Almog, Shmuel, Reinharz, Jehuda, and Shapira, Anita. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 182.

found that supporting the creation of a Jewish state did not conflict with their American patriotism. The mainstream voice of the Reform rabbinate went from anti-Zionism to either Zionism or non-Zionism, which supported the rights of Jews to live in Palestine, but did not concern itself with Jewish statehood, but rather focused on Jewish life in America.

Even Kaufmann Kohler, who remained anti-Zionist, toned down his rhetoric, and with the rise of global nationalism and the popularity Moritz Lazarus' "psychology of nations" philosophy, began using terms like "Jewish race" and "national genius."³ Some, like David Philipson, still tried to combat Zionism, but were met with increasing difficulty. At the 1918 CCAR conference in Chicago, Philipson tried to form a committee to oppose Zionism, but he was dismissed by others and the committee was never able to get off of the ground. For the next decade, Philipson would be the leader of the anti-Zionist cause as Kohler retired in 1921 and died in 1926. Max Heller found in his 1918 survey on Zionism among 78 Reform rabbis in America that 20 were Zionists, 18 were anti-Zionists, 27 sympathized with Zionism, and 13 were non-Zionists.⁴ Perhaps most telling of all, the HUC ordained class of 1920, representing the new generation of rabbis, contained seven Zionists, two sympathizers, and only one anti-Zionist. One of those students was Harvey E. Wessel, who wrote an essay called "How I became a Zionist at Hebrew Union College." For Wessel, Zionism provided him with greater meaning, he saw increased excitement in the Jewish world around the topic, and he found deeper meaning in the Bible and liturgy by believing in a Jewish homeland and people.⁵ Another former anti-Zionist, Rabbi Joseph Silverman, the rabbi emeritus of Temple Emanu-El, had a change of heart.

³ Naomi Wiener Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1947* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 51.

⁴ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 199.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

Silverman, who had worded the 1897 anti-Zionist CCAR resolution, decided to visit Palestine in 1921 and fell in love with the Land of Israel and Labor Zionism. Silverman devoted the rest of his retirement to traveling to Palestine with young rabbis and teaching them about Zionist ideology.

Though the Reform rabbinate was becoming increasingly in favor of Zionism, much of the older, German-born lay population still opposed Zionism. In 1919, as they had in 1898, the UAHC released a statement sharply criticizing the Zionist movement. Though HUC produced the movement's rabbis, the college was largely funded by the UAHC, who would also eventually employ these rabbis. Heller noted that some HUC students in 1918 had gone from Zionists to anti-Zionists after negative encounters with lay people, who questioned them of how they could be Reform Jewish leaders and Zionists. That same year, Zionists were alienated by the powerful American Jewish Committee, which was predominately led by German-born or descended Jews, but created to protect Jews worldwide. As a result, S. Wise and Brandeis created the American Jewish Congress, which had a democratically elected leadership, and gave voice to the "poor, huddled masses" of Eastern European, Zionist Jews. The American Jewish Congress argued that as it looked after the poor, was democratic and promoted free speech, that unlike the popular American Jewish Committee, it was more in line with Jewish values. Therefore, there was still considerable tension regarding the Zionist movement within the rabbinate, the lay population, and the debate entered American foreign policy.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson announced his support for the Balfour Declaration and shook the hand of S. Wise, telling him, "Don't worry, Dr. Wise, Palestine is yours."⁶ Seeing

⁶ Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1975), 229-230.

the Zionist vision coming to fruition, the anti-Zionist party, mostly lay-lead, struck back. Congressman Julius Kahn, a Reform Jew, who was born in Germany and represented San Francisco, presented Wilson with a petition of 299 signatures, including many from anti-Zionist Reform rabbis, stating the opposition of the Jews to Zionism and the Balfour Declaration.⁷ Kahn also requested that the president share the petition at the post-war meetings in Versailles to give voice to the anti-Zionist position internationally. At the 1920 San Remo Conference, where the matter of discussion was how to divide former Ottoman territory, the proposal of creating a Jewish home in Palestine was endorsed. The year prior, the CCAR president Louis Grossman said that the Reform movement would assist when asked for the building of Jewish settlement in Palestine, without officially endorsing the idea of statehood. After the conference, the new CCAR president, Leo Franklin, who was invited but unable to attend San Remo, said that he was prepared to cooperate in making Palestine a spiritual refuge for the Jews. Despite this support for settlement in Palestine, the CCAR was cautious not to endorse statehood, as Zionism was the most divisive topic among its rabbis. That same year, the CCAR soundly defeated a resolution which would have applauded the mandate and urged aid to the powerful Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which was the FAZ under a new name. Following the San Remo Conference, the HUC Board of Governors, which was lay-lead of primarily Jews of German heritage, stated, “We declare that no one land, Palestine or any other, can be called ‘the national home for the Jews,’ as has been done by the Supreme Council. Each land, whereof Jews are loyal citizens is

⁷ Cohen, *The Americanization*, 67.

the national home for those Jews. Palestine is not our national home, since we are not now and never expect to be citizens of that land.”⁸

The same year as the San Remo Conference, Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motors and one of the richest men in the world, who wielded incredible power, published in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent* an article titled “The International Jew: A World Problem.” The publication turned into a four-volume series over the next two years that reiterated the positions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and claimed that Jews were taking over America and the world. Ford, who in many ways was an international symbol of American industrialism, sparked an increase in national anti-Semitism and a fear of increasing Jewish immigrants. The following year, 1921, the Emergency Quota Act was passed to restrict immigration and apply quotas to how many people of various ethnicities and nationalities would be allowed to enter the country. Despite the theology of the early Reform leaders, who said that their ethnicity was American and that the American people understood as such, the act treated Jews as their own race. Though Jews were not explicitly mentioned, the legislation was widely seen a measure to keep Jews out of the United States. The oppressed and impoverished Jews of post-war Europe no longer had refuge in America, and support for settlement in Palestine grew.

Seeing the urgency of Jews worldwide, the CCAR tells the ZOA that they want to be partners in Zionism, but from previous damaged relations, the ZOA does not respond. In 1922, at the urging of Zionist leaders and many Reform rabbis, Congressman Hamilton Fish introduced a resolution supporting the right for Jews to build a nation in Palestine. Rabbis David Philipson and Isaac Landman testified before the Foreign Affairs Committee to condemn the resolution.

⁸ Naomi Weiner Cohen, “The Reaction of Reform Judaism in America to Political Zionism (1897-1922),” in *American Zionism: Mission and Politics*, vol. 8 of *American Jewish History*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Routledge, 1998), 50.

Philipson told the committee that Reform Judaism opposes Zionism and cited outdated CCAR resolutions as evidence. Philipson declared, “I object to any country being called the national home of the Jewish people. America is my national home.”⁹ Philipson expressed a fear that the bill would further anti-Semitism, showing that Jews did not want to be loyal citizens of the United States. Landman concurred, adding that whereas he does not want a Jewish state, he does support Jews building and settling Palestine. The bill passed the House of Representatives and was signed by President Warren Harding near the time when the League of Nations confirms the British Mandate over Palestine. It seemed as though the future of a Jewish state was promising for the Zionist movement.

A devastating setback occurred the same year, 1922, when the British released the Churchill White Paper, “clarifying” the Balfour Declaration. In the White Paper, Churchill stated that the Balfour Declaration was unofficial, misunderstood and taken out of context. The British did not intend at that time to create a Jewish state, and certainly not in all of Palestine, where Jews were a minority to the Arab population, but that they supported Jewish settlement and the building of Palestine. While the Zionists were dealt a blow, Isaac Landman joyfully wrote in the *American Hebrew* publication, “Scrap Zionism and build Palestine!” an endorsement of the nullification of the Balfour Declaration.¹⁰ Zionists worldwide saw that with the challenges ahead that the Jewish people needed to become unified in their aim of political Zionism and reached out to influential non-Zionists and even anti-Zionists.

Rabbi Abram Simon, president of the CCAR from 1923-1925, was an anti-Zionist and refused to cooperate with the Zionist movement. The leader of the political Zionist movement,

⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., 62.

Chaim Weizmann, reached out to Simon and invited him to attend a conference on Zionism for American Jews in February of 1924. The invitation read, “The time has come, when we firmly believe that the duty rests upon the Jews of this country who are not members of or affiliated with the Zionist Organization (ZOA), to consider seriously their relations to the economic problems of Palestine and to its culture and industrial upbuilding.”¹¹ Simon attended the conference and softened his views on Zionism. In the same spirit of cooperation, the Palestine Development Council (PDC), dedicated to the building and settlement of Palestine, reorganized its council to give half of the seats to non-Zionists. Through this gesture, the CCAR agrees to work with the PDC in the name of helping world Jewry. Even the UAHC went against its resolutions committee and made a lukewarm statement endorsing Jewish settlement in Palestine, but not political Zionism. Four years later, the UAHC resolutions committee did publicly proclaim that they stood in solidarity with their Eastern European Jewish brethren, and that they encourage spiritual, educational, humanitarian and agricultural development by Jews in Palestine (they added Russia and Poland to the resolution too, in order not to appear Zionist).¹²

The leadership of the Reform seminary in America also showed that it was prepared to change with the times. The Hebrew Union College was no longer the sole rabbinical school for progressive Judaism. Solomon Schechter’s Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) for the Conservative movement had quickly gained prominence in the American public. Like JTS, another school was founded in the new center for Jewish life, New York City. After being rejected for the position on account of Zionism and demand for free speech at Temple Emanu-El, Stephen S. Wise had moved to Portland, Oregon, where he served a congregation, before leaving also over issues of Zionism and free speech. Though other rabbis had converted to Zionism later

¹¹ Urofsky, *American Zionism*, 318-19.

¹² Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 22.

on, S. Wise was born into a Zionist family, and his grandfather had settled and died in Palestine. He had met Herzl as a young man and was a cofounder of the FAZ. S. Wise controversially proclaimed that “Zionism is my religion” on a visit to HUC in 1915.¹³ In his vision for the rabbinate, Zionism and free speech were paramount. S. Wise returned to New York and founded his own synagogue, called the Free Synagogue, which had freedom of speech as its most important principle. S. Wise noticed that a majority of HUC graduates in recent years supported Zionism, despite Kohler’s wrath. As Kohler retired and the anti-Zionist board appointed the non-Zionist Julian Morgenstern as its president, S. Wise decided that it was time for him to start his own rival rabbinical school. The Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) was in the new center of Judaism, while HUC was stuck in the old center. JIR taught Modern Hebrew, connected the texts with the Land of Israel, and encouraged discussions about Zionism, while HUC remained focused on Americanism. JIR was open to recruiting the new Eastern European immigrants and their children, while HUC wanted to preserve its German identity. Most of all, JIR promoted free speech for its students during the sermons; in Cincinnati, the presence of Kohler and Philipson still intimidated HUC students from openly speaking their minds. While HUC was still tainted from the “purge of 1907” when Zionist professors were fired, S. Wise awarded two honorary doctorates from JIR in 1926; one to Chaim Bialik, for his work on the Hebrew Renaissance, and the other was to Claude Montefiore, the leader of Liberal Judaism in Britain, but an unapologetic anti-Zionist. With Montefiore’s doctorate, S. Wise showed open-mindedness to differences of opinion that was lacking at HUC.

Morgenstern was initially committed to following Kohler’s legacy. His first hire as president in 1921 was Israel Bettan, an anti-Zionist professor who was committed to

¹³ Sarna, *Converts to Zionism*, 190.

Americanism. However, seeing that JIR and JTS represented the direction that American Jewish life was heading in, Morgenstern became more open. Rather than anti-Zionism, Morgenstern declares himself and the institution to be non-Zionist. He stated that though he was indifferent to the issue of Jewish statehood, he supported settlement in Palestine. Morgenstern also listened to, rather than berate, his students in 1929 when they protested not having enough knowledge to serve as Jewish leaders, their little intellectual connection with the Land of Israel and Jewish traditions, and their desire for more traditional liturgy. Though Morgenstern did not adhere to their requests of courses on Zionism, he did integrate Modern Hebrew into the curriculum, but, as he made clear, for educational purposes only and not to promote Zionism. Morgenstern even went to the extent of hiring Zevi Diesendruck following the death of David Neumark; Diesendruck was an open Zionist and wildly popular with his students.¹⁴ However, the greatest display of change from Kohler, who had banned Zionism, was when Morgenstern awarded Chaim Weizmann an honorary doctorate from HUC in 1928. That year, Morgenstern spoke at the ZOA convention and said, “Zionists and non-Zionists, and even anti-Zionists, have in general not been nearly as far apart as they have themselves generally imagined.”¹⁵ It appeared that the movement was healing.

Morgenstern’s reforms to HUC were greeted by the student body and the lay community of the Reform movement. Whereas in 1900, a survey from HUC Professor Max Eichhorn showed that students held a largely negative attitude towards Eastern European Jews, who were seen as primitive and un-American, there was a greater appreciation for this group by students in 1930. Most had parents who were Eastern European, and they valued the contributions made by

¹⁴ Michael Meyer, “American Rabbis for American Israel,” in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 45

¹⁵ Urofsky, *American Zionism*, 332.

Eastern European Jews to Hebrew and Zionist culture in America. Many students even credited these immigrants with saving American Jews from spiritual extinction.¹⁶ Similarly, a 1931 survey found that approximately half of Reform congregants in the United States were of Western European background and half were of Eastern European heritage.¹⁷ Eichhorn's survey of HUC students in 1900 and in 1930 yielded some of the following results:¹⁸

Question	HUC Student Body in 1900	HUC Student Body in 1930
Birthplace	50% US, 29% Eastern European, 21% Western European	79% US, 8% Eastern Europe, 8% Western Europe
Parentage Place Of Origin	9% US, 48% Eastern Europe, 39% Western Europe, 4% mixed	8% US, 56% Eastern Europe, 14% Western Europe, 21% Mixed, 1% Canada
Religious Background	52% Orthodox, 0% Conservative, 48% Reform	43% Orthodox, 27% Conservative, 30% Reform
Languages Spoken	Hebrew 4% Yiddish 21%	Hebrew 28% Yiddish 32%
Languages Read	Hebrew 46% Yiddish 21%	Hebrew 69% Yiddish 39%
Partake In Zionist Extracurricular Activity	8%	39%
All Jews Are Brothers	8% Agree	63% Agree
Attitudes on Zionism	4% Unknown, 17% Favorable, 33% Neutral, 46% Opposed	0% Unknown, 69% Favorable, 22% Neutral, 9% Opposed
Mission of Israel	4% Non-Existent, 13% Undecided, 4% Self-Preservation and Inner-Development, 79% Teacher of Religion to the World	38% Non-Existent, 4% Undecided, 36% Self-Preservation and Inner-Development, 22% Teacher of Religion to the World
Ceremonialism	0% We Need More, 65% Favorable, 31% Opposed	12% We Need More, 82% Favorable, 5% Opposed
Most Important Quality in an Ideal Rabbi	1. Eloquent Speaker 2. Good Pedagogue (Same group responded in 1930 that 1. is now Defender of Jewish Interests and 2. is Good Pedagogue)	1. Jewish Scholar 2. Lover of All Types of Jewry and Jewish Problems

¹⁶ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 173-176.

The Eichhorn survey sheds incredible insight into the turning of Reform Judaism from anti-Zionism, to non-Zionism, and later to Zionism. The statistics show that whereas no rabbinical students were brought up in the Conservative movement (which was not yet in existence) in 1900, that 27% grew up in that movement, while the percentage of those who were raised in Reform Judaism dramatically decreased by 1930. The Conservative movement, since its inception was a Zionist religious stream, while the students in 1900 had largely grown up and studied under the leadership of Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler. This fact is representative of as to why a full 31% more students were involved in Zionist extracurricular activities, and why in 1930 69% supported Zionism, compared to 17% in 1900, and a mere 9% identified as anti-Zionists, compared to 46% thirty years prior. A majority of students could now read Hebrew, while spoken Hebrew was seven times more popular. While less than 10% of students in 1900 had agreed with the notion of Jewish peoplehood, in 1930, a full 63% felt that Jews in Yemen, Morocco, Russia and England were their kin. This statistic is also reflected in that in 1900, an overwhelming majority of students felt that the mission of Israel was to bring about universalism, while the two most popular answers in 1930 were that there was no mission and the preservation of the Jewish people. Notably, only 14% of students in 1930 had parents who were born in Western Europe, while a majority had at least one parent born in Eastern Europe, compared to 1900 when 39% had a parent from Western Europe and only 4% with mixed parentage. As the Eastern European Jews brought more traditions and spirituality with them to the United States, the statistics show a drop from 31% to 5% of students who oppose ceremonialism, often which incorporates connection the Land of Israel. Whereas for students in 1900, the most important characteristics in a professor were eloquent speaker and pedagogue, the new generation was more concerned with learning from someone who could solve the problems

facing the Jewish people. The same students who filled out the survey in 1900 responded thirty years later that someone who protects Jewish interests was highly important to them. However, depending on perspective, that could be a statement made with equal passion by a Zionist and an anti-Zionist.

The future of the rabbinate clearly favored the Zionist movement, as did the American Jewish community. In the early 1930's, the Pittsburgh Platform seemed completely irrelevant and unreflective of the challenges and demographic changes of American and world Jewry. There was a call by many in the CCAR to reform Reform Judaism and create a new platform, yet there was still pushback on Zionism. The UAHC found at this time that 20% of congregants were members of either the ZOA or the women's Zionist group, Hadassah (founded by Henrietta Szold, the daughter of Reform rabbi and early Zionist, who was a precursor to the Conservative movement, Benjamin Szold, and Emma Gottheil, the wife of ZOA founder Richard Gottheil).¹⁹ JTS graduate Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist movement, with its emphasis on Jewish peoplehood was also becoming a rising trend in the American Jewish community. The CCAR even passed a divisive resolution, by a vote of 54-41, to include the anthem of Jewish nationalism, *HaTiqvah*, into the Union Hymnal at their conference.²⁰ The CCAR took a step forward in 1935 with their Neutrality Resolution. Given that the movement was divided by Zionists and non-Zionists, with also an anti-Zionist minority, the fifth article of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which was the least debated item at its creation, seemed unrepresentative of the CCAR. The Neutrality Resolution still rejected Jewish peoplehood, stating that Judaism was a religion; however, it declared itself neutral on the topic of Zionism. The neutrality resolution

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Ibid., 24.

even went a step further in declaring that Zionism and Reform Judaism were no longer considered incompatible.

Zionism was becoming more popular among the lay community of Reform Judaism aside from just the changing demographics. The three primary leaders of the Zionist movement in America were Louis Brandeis, a hero to the American Jewish community, and Reform Rabbis Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. These three men were also liberals who were national advocates for labor rights, women's suffrage, and increased minimum wage, all of which were important to the Jewish community at large. As Brandeis, Silver and S. Wise championed these liberal causes alongside Zionism, the favorability of Zionism grew as it was equated as a liberal issue. A challenge to this view was the creation of Revisionist Zionism, led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, which was the primary opposition to Labor Zionism. Jabotinsky's movement was secular, right-wing and romanticized the idea of Jews settling in the entire biblical Land of Israel, far more land than the amount that the Labor Zionists were asking. Revisionist Zionism often turned violent against Arabs and British in Palestine, which many Zionists saw as counterproductive to them negotiating a peaceful establishment of the Jewish State. S. Wise denounced the movement as hostile territorial compromise and called it a group that glorifies military power, which is in violation of Reform ideology. S. Wise and Silver even went so far, during the rising power of Hitler and Mussolini to charge Revisionist Zionism as a "species of fascism."²¹ S. Wise, in order to completely ostracize Revisionist Zionism from the Reform movement, declared, "Germany

²¹ Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, LLC, 2012), 36.

for Hitler, Italy for Mussolini, Palestine for Jabotinsky!”²² The rhetoric poisoned the Revisionist Zionist movement for Reform Jews.

S. Wise went further to distance himself and the Reform movement from Revisionist Zionism. In 1935, he wrote a letter, signed by 240 rabbis, stating “(Labor Zionism’s) aim is to avoid erecting another social structure resting upon the sands of injustice and inequality.... This program of the *Histadrut* in Palestine and the League of Labor Palestine in America, seems to us to be at one with the essential principles of prophetic idealism.”²³ The alliance with Labor Zionism won many over, including Maurice Eisendrath.

Eisendrath is a significant figure in Reform Jewish history as he was a leader in civil rights and also in the anti-Vietnam War protests of the 1960’s (famously, he is seen holding a Torah next to Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel during an anti-war protest), also, he was the president of the UAHC from 1943 until 1973. Under his presidency of the largest body of lay Jews in the world, Eisendrath would see the horrors of the Holocaust, and the trials and victories of the War of Independence, Six-Day War, and, a few weeks prior to his death, the Yom Kippur War. However, early in his career, Eisendrath was an anti-Zionist. With the rise of Revisionist Zionism and Hitler simultaneously, Eisendrath compared Zionism with Nazism, as both desired creating a state for one race of people.²⁴ However, keeping an open mind, Eisendrath visited Palestine and met with leaders of the Labor Zionist movement, including future Israeli prime ministers David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), Golda Myerson (Meir), and future president Zalman Shazar. Eisendrath discovered equity and righteousness in Labor Zionism that he could not find in the Revisionist Zionism that he had

²² Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 107.

²³ Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 66.

²⁴ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 93.

heard about. He discovered among many of the Labor Zionists a hope for binationalism among many, such as his colleague Judah Magnes. He visited a kibbutz and saw equality without corruption, or abuse of power. Eisendrath felt that he was witnessing the prophetic message that was at the core of Reform Judaism, and that settlement in Palestine would bring about the world the prophets envisioned rather than moving away from universalism like the anti-Zionists claimed. Upon returning to North America, Eisendrath became an advocate for Zionism, preaching to the students at HUC how Zionism resembled the prophetic vision, which stated that at the end of days the People of Israel would return to their beloved homeland of Zion and there would be peace on earth. At the same time that Eisendrath was educating others about Zionism, Emanuel Gamoran, an educator and teacher at JIR looked for ways to show American Jews that Judaism in America would be strengthened, not weakened, by Zionism. Gamoran, who gained credibility for not being a secularist, published his own set of textbooks that promoted Zionism for UAHC religious schools during the 1930's; the Reform movement was the first movement in this regard to teach Zionism to children through religious education. As a result of his efforts, thousands of Reform Jewish children were raised in the 1930's and 1940's with a Zionist education in a religious Jewish context. In 1946, as president of the UAHC, Eisendrath stated that by definition, Reform Jewish ideology cannot be fixed forever; and, he believed that if he were alive today, Isaac Mayer Wise, the most vocal among anti-Zionists, would allow people to make their own choice regarding whether or not to be Zionists. The Zionist movement was building within American Reform Judaism, but the next decade would see tremendous challenges for the Jewish people. With British restrictions on immigration to Palestine, American immigration restrictions, the rise of anti-Semitism in the wake of the Great Depression and

Roosevelt's New Deal (called by many to be the "Jew Deal"), and the peril of Europe's Jews with Hitler's rise to power, the cause for political Zionism would reach a new level of urgency.

Chapter Three:

Changing of Perspectives and Building of the Jewish State (1937-1948)

After the 1935 Neutrality Resolution, the Zionists knew that as anti-Semitism and Nazism increased, a greater number of younger rabbis came into the field, and the American Jewish community as a whole became more embracing of Zionism, that within a few years, they could swing the pendulum from neutral to supportive. At the 1937 CCAR convention in Columbus, it was proposed that a new platform be put forward on the positions of the Reform movement. All knew that the suggested platform would be written to officially make the CCAR a Zionist movement, and the anti-Zionists and non-Zionists came out strongly against the resolution calling for a new platform. The president of the CCAR, Felix Levy, called for a vote, which was split exactly at 81-81 on whether or not to introduce the platform. Levy, with the deciding vote, casted in favor of crafting a new platform.¹ Whereas Zionism, or anti-Zionism, was the least debated topic of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, in Columbus, it was the most debated issue. The final wording of the platform was the following:

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. The non-Jew who accepts our faith is welcomed as a full member of the Jewish community. 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

¹ Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), 28.

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.... Judaism, from the days of the prophets, has proclaimed to mankind the ideal of universal peace. The spiritual and physical disarmament of all nations has been one of its essential teachings. It abhors all violence.... It urges organized international action for disarmament, collective security and world peace.²

The platform stated without controversy that the CCAR calls for world peace and is anti-violence, perhaps a message regarding Revisionist Zionism. However, the landmark platform, while putting a greater emphasis on religion, still claimed the Jews as a distinctive people, a major change in Reform ideology. The platform also called for the upbuilding of Palestine to be a center of refuge for oppressed Jews. Again, though some ardent anti-Zionists would find this language problematic, from a humanitarian perspective, most of the Reform rabbinate would not oppose this wording. However, the platform denotes the special place that the Land of Israel has for the Jewish people, and states, “We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland.” For anti-Zionists and non-Zionists, this language was unacceptable, as they claimed no homeland except for the United States. This wording did not represent their views, yet, nonetheless, they were called by their rabbinic body to assist in the upbuilding of the Jewish homeland, as an “obligation.” With the passing of the 1937 Columbus Platform, the CCAR had officially declared itself a Zionist body.

One of the rabbis who was angriest about the platform was Baltimore Hebrew Congregation’s Rabbi Morris Lazaron, a former Zionist, turned anti-Zionist leader. Lazaron, ironically had a special relationship with the Zionest leader Abba Hillel Silver. Lazaron and Silver were classmates at HUC, Lazaron immediately preceded Silver as the rabbi in the town of Wheeling, West Virginia, and they were brothers-in-law (their wives were sisters). Whereas the

² Rabbinic Voice, “1937 Columbus Platform,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/>.

rise of Hitler and Nazism convinced many to embrace Zionism, it had the opposite effect on Lazaron. He was disgusted by what he viewed as Zionists being opportunists over the plight of Europe's Jews, exploiting their suffering for political gain. In his eyes, the Zionists had lost all sense of Judaism, which would only flourish under universalism. Despite this hope for the coming together of all humankind, the Zionists advocated that the only option for European Jews was to go to Palestine. The Zionists claimed that anywhere else that Jews went, as history had shown, they would be met with anti-Semitism. Lazaron felt that the Zionists had turned their backs on Jews in need in Europe and promoted particularism. He and other anti-Zionists went so far as to accuse Zionists of purposefully sabotaging efforts to rescue Europe's Jews from the Holocaust when they could be sent to other places, and instead demanding Palestine or death. After the passing of the Columbus Platform, Lazaron addressed the UAHC biennial that year. He preached that Arab opposition and British imperialism in Palestine were too great of obstacles to overcome, and that attention should be turned away from statehood. Lazaron also demanded that the Reform Jewish world reject the notion that to be anti-Zionist or non-Zionist meant that one was a traitor.³ It had only been a couple decades that the anti-Zionists were charging the Zionists with treason. The movement was at a turning point; for the first time in 1937, a majority of Reform Jews were of Eastern European heritage,⁴ and the debate over Zionism was fierce outside of the rabbinate, but within the congregations. The following year, Lazaron wrote a book called *Common Ground: A Plea for Intelligent Americanism*, which became a source of inspiration for many anti-Zionists and an attack on S. Wise and Silver.

³ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 79.

⁴ Evyatar Friesel, "The Meaning of Zionism and its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements" in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Almog, Shmuel, Reinhartz, Jehuda, and Shapira, Anita. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 180.

With the World War II beginning, 32 nations of the world gathered in Evian, France to discuss the plight of Europe's Jews. The only Jewish representative was Golda Meir, who was not allowed to speak or vote at the conference. Meir watched as no country, other than the tiny Dominican Republic, offered to take in a substantial number of Jews. The following year, the British released a new White Paper, which permitted only 15,000 Jews per year to settle in Palestine over the following five years. In March of 1940, the British prohibited the selling of land in Palestine to Jews, and in October of 1941, Britain rescinded a statement from the previous year that had allowed the Jews to assemble their own army. The Jews were defenseless, and though Lazard's hope in universalism was for good, the world showed that the Jews had no place where they could seek refuge. The Jewish world was in a panic. Even the professors at HUC, who at this point were almost all cultural Zionists and supportive of settlement in Palestine, with only Diesendruck as the main outspoken political Zionist, realized that action was needed. The faculty as a group sent a letter to President Roosevelt asking him to use his influence to intervene regarding the British White Paper. Assessing the dire situation, James Heller, now president of the CCAR, urges the CCAR to form a Committee on Palestine, with the aim of helping in the establishment of a Jewish state.

With Heller, a ZOA official, as CCAR president and Edward L. Israel as executive secretary of the UAHC and also sitting on the executive committee of the ZOA, they sprang into action to try to help the Jews overseas. In 1942, the CCAR conference brought forth a resolution sponsored by 33 rabbis in support of the formation of a Jewish military fighting under a Jewish flag. Many rabbis were unable to attend the conference and were unable to vote. An intense

debate broke out, and eventually, the resolution passed by a vote of 64-38.⁵ Furious, 36 anti-Zionist or non-Zionist rabbis, approximately 10% of the CCAR membership,⁶ attended a two-day conference in June 1942 in Atlantic City to formulate a response to the CCAR resolution. In their invitation to fellow non-Zionists, the organizers of the conference wrote:

We like-minded men have appeased the Zionists with consent, assent, and cooperation from Convention to Convention, until their victories through the years have been so cumulative that they now know no bounds. The day had to come when we must cry 'halt.' The conditioning of American Jewry by a Jewish flag and a Jewish Army and a state in Palestine and a dual citizenship in America, is more than we can accept.... We refuse any longer to be religious acrobats. We cannot pact with the untenable position in society which nationalism as a creed imposes on us.⁷

The invitation expressed the sense of anger and betrayal by the non-Zionists, as well as the feeling of being bullied. By speaking about the Zionists as if they were the “other,” the Atlantic City Conference threatened to divide Reform Judaism in to two different movements. At the conference, the rabbis stated the following regarding their position and the plight of European Jewry:

Realizing how dear Palestine is to the Jewish soul, and how important Palestinian rehabilitation is toward relieving the pressing problems of our distressed people, we stand ready to render unstinted aid to our brethren in their economic, cultural and spiritual endeavors in that country. But... we are unable to subscribe to or support the political emphasis now paramount in the Zionist program. We cannot but believe that Jewish nationalism tends to confuse our fellow-men about our place and function in society and also diverts our attention from our historic role to live as a religious community wherever we may dwell.⁸

The remainder of the conference was spent discussing the dangers of Zionism, reminiscent of the words of the Orthodox Rabbi Isaac Breuer, “Zionism is the most terrible enemy that has ever

⁵ Robert Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem: American Jews and the State of Israel* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970), 196.

⁶ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 41.

⁷ Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee*, 196-197.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

arisen to the Jewish Nation. The anti-nationalistic Reform engages in it (the Jewish Nation) at least in an open fight, but Zionism kills the nation and then elevates the corpse to the throne.”⁹ At the conclusion of the conference, an open letter was drafted by the participating rabbis denouncing the CCAR resolution. Among the rabbis who signed were Julian Morgenstern and two other HUC professors.

The backlash to the Atlantic City Conference was immense. In response, 17 leading Zionist rabbis, including the presidents of the CCAR, Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative movement), and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis co-wrote “Zionism: An Affirmation of Judaism.” The letter stated that a majority of rabbis “regard Zionism not only as fully consistent with Judaism, but as a logical expression and implementation of it.” The letter was circulated within the Reform rabbinate by Stephen S. Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, James Heller, and Steven Bernstein, and gathered a total of 818 rabbinic signatures, 215 of which were Reform. The letter was also adopted as a student resolution and passed HUC’s student body by a vote of 42-9.¹⁰ The ramifications did not end there; S. Wise had secretly been planning to merge JIR with HUC to form one rabbinical school and further unite Reform Judaism. However, after Morgenstern’s signing of the Atlantic City letter, S. Wise wrote to J. Heller, telling him that he had decided not to go forward with the merger.¹¹ Tensions were high as those who sought leadership positions within the CCAR or other rabbinic organizations were blocked if they held non-Zionist or anti-Zionist views, while at the same time, the UAHC remained non-Zionist and had rejected the CCAR’s call to aid in the creation of a Jewish army under a Jewish flag.

⁹ Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 144.

¹⁰ Melvin I. Urofsky, *We are One!: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 67.

¹¹ Michael Meyer, “Kelal Yisrael: The Jewish Institute of Religion,” in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 167.

The anger and determination of the Zionist movement grew in 1942 and 1943 as the Holocaust continued, and especially after the sinking of two ships, the *Patria* and the *Struma*. Both were ships carrying European Jewish refugees to Palestine, but were denied entry. In one case, a ship was towed out to sea and promptly sunk by a Russian torpedo, and in the other case, Jews created what they planned to be a small explosion on the ship to force it to dock. In the latter, case, the explosion was too strong and the ship sank. Combined, roughly a thousand refugees drowned in these disasters, denied a place of safe haven while trying to escape Nazism. After the sinking of the ships, the UAHC, along with the American Jewish Conference, called for large-scale provisions to be made regarding immigration to Palestine. They wished that Palestine would remain under the supervision of international powers until it was possible to establish self-governance, which the UAHC said should occur with the establishment of a Jewish majority population, “without jeopardizing the rights or status of any group in Palestine.” They stated further that the eventual government should be democratic, non-sectarian and with separation of Church and State. The UAHC worded the resolution carefully in order not to take rights away from Arabs, not to explicitly endorse a Jewish state, nor to say that refugees should only go to Palestine.¹² Though the UAHC was beginning to slowly go in the direction of becoming openly Zionist, the Reform Zionists faced a new enemy from within the movement.

Morris Lazaron and Rabbi Louis Wolsey formed the American Council for Judaism (ACJ) at the end of 1942, which was solely committed to preserving Judaism as a religion and preventing the establishment of a Jewish country. Quickly, they recruited one of the most prominent, wealthy and powerful lay people in the country, Lessing J. Rosenwald of the Sears fortune from Chicago. Rosenwald is made the head of the ACJ at first, but they decide that the

¹² Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 106.

organization should be headed by a rabbi, hopefully a young one who could attract the next generation, in order to combat the charisma of the recently elected, Zionist James Heller as president of the CCAR. The council decided on 35-year-old Elmer Berger of a congregation in Flint, Michigan. Berger was the typical anti-Zionist Reform Jew, but perhaps born a generation too late; he was from the Midwest, German background, patriotic, and a pacifist, and Wolsey knew him well because he was Berger's childhood rabbi. Berger, who had previously served a congregation in Pontiac, Michigan, had risen to prominence after debating his successor, Eric Friedland, a Zionist, on the issue of Zionism. Berger was widely seen as the winner of the debate, and wrote a pamphlet titled "Why I am a Non-Zionist," which was widely distributed and praised by Julian Morgenstern. Rosenwald stayed heavily involved and was a major benefactor in the ACJ. Other prominent early sponsors were Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of the *New York Times*, Rabbi Jonah Wise, the executive director of the Joint Distribution Committee, HUC professor Abraham Cronbach, Irving Reichert of California, Rabbi Samuel Goldenson of Temple Emanu-El in New York, and HUC president Julian Morgenstern. All were well known social activists and also pacifists. The ACJ's main thesis was that "the basis of unity among Jews is religion. Jews consider themselves nationals of those countries in which they live, and those lands their homelands."¹³ They were trying so desperately to cling to what Reform Judaism once was, even though Reform Judaism was designed to conform to the challenges of modernity. J. Heller tried to reconcile with the ACJ in order to prevent public division, but his efforts were in vain. He then called on the ACJ to disband, but instead more than 90 rabbis gathered together in August of 1943 and signed the ACJ manifesto.

¹³ Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee*, 198.

The Zionist movement attacked the ACJ with all of its might. The ZOA wrote, “For the first time in decades the Zionist movement faces formal organized opposition from within Jewish ranks. A group of Reform rabbis selected this, the most critical hour in Jewish history, to attack the whole Zionist structure and to challenge the validity of our program.... The enemies of Zionism have declared war on upon us. They have set out to undermine and discredit the Zionist ideal before the American public and government.”¹⁴ Reform Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld formed an organization with the purpose of discrediting the ACJ called the Committee on Unity for Palestine. Lelyveld and others called the ACJ “traitors” and “self-hating Jews,” and even accused them of trying to appease Hitler and the Arabs. The Zionists pointed out the hypocrisy that the ACJ leaders were among the first to sign petitions supporting Indian independence, a second front aid to Russia and increased ammunition for China, yet abandoned Jewish nationalism. In return, the ACJ called the Zionist rabbis “tyrants.” The leaders of the ACJ lost respect in the mainstream community, and the once highly esteemed Lazon had most of his speaking engagements canceled. He refused though to abandon his position as the vice president of the ACJ, and in turn, his own family member, Abba Hillel Silver disassociated with him and refused to speak at his synagogue. In September, the CCAR passed a resolution formally censuring the ACJ and calling for it to dissolve as a group. Silver and S. Wise also drafted a resolution at the American Jewish Conference calling for the fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration, reconstruction of the Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, and the abrogation of the White Paper to allow immigration of Jews to Palestine. The American Jewish Committee tried to prevent the resolution from going forward, but a vote was held and the resolution passed by an overwhelming 497-3. The *New Palestine* reported after the sweeping victory, “The Zionist position is now the position of American Jewry. The Conference has served to crystalize Jewish

¹⁴ Ibid., 199-200.

opinion in our own country. This marks the end of a long discussion and debate.... The time has come for action.”¹⁵

In taking action, S. Wise became the co-chair of the Interim Committee of the American Jewish Conference, in charge of mobilizing the general American public with the Zionist agenda, and Silver became the head of the American Zionist Emergency Council (AZEC). As a result of the backlash, most of the nearly one hundred rabbis resigned their membership from the ACJ within one month, leaving in the fall of 1943 only 26 rabbis as members. By 1946, less than a dozen rabbis remained a part of the ACJ, especially after seeing the devastating aftermath of the Holocaust. The founder, Wolsey, resigned his membership and wrote a statement called “Why I Withdrew from the American Council for Judaism,” which became a propaganda article for the ZOA.¹⁶ Though the ACJ lost its rabbinic leadership, it still remained powerful with many prominent lay leaders, like Rosenwald, and played a critical part in the foreign policy debates of the United States for the decade to come. There were many Zionists who actually appreciated the creation of the ACJ, because its creation forced many American Jews and rabbis to either be Zionists or anti-Zionists, but no longer remain apathetic non-Zionists. Many also claimed that the anti-Zionists realized that they were scared and reactive, because Zionism, if the Holocaust did not already, brought to light for Jews and non-Jews alike that Jews were different than gentiles, the complete opposite of the initial hope for Reform Judaism. However, one rabbi who did stay a part of the ACJ after September of 1943 was Morgenstern. The CCAR and UAHC both condemned the ACJ and did not give in to its request that they revoke their pro-Palestine resolutions. Morgenstern’s support of the ACJ angered many of the alumni, who ended their contributions to the College. On the first day of classes of Fall 1943, Morgenstern said in his

¹⁵ Ibid., 231.

¹⁶ Ibid., 201.

opening address, “Is it not sad, is it not tragic for the Jewish people, which has dreamed the dream and voiced the hope and proclaimed the message of world-unity, and of world-salvation in such world-unity, to itself reject its message, its faith and its destiny, and seek for itself a salvation, impossible of realization, in the vain and exploded theory of restored racial statehood?” He then proceeded to say that Revisionist Zionism was “practically identical with Nazist and Fascist theory,” in the midst of the Holocaust.¹⁷ Led by Silver, 45 alumni wrote a protest against the speech and said that Morgenstern did not speak for Reform Judaism. The Jewish press also viciously attacked Morgenstern for his poor word choice and for being out of touch with his students and the movement. All of the work that Morgenstern had done to mend relations between the College and the movement after Kaufmann Kohler’s tenure had been destroyed. However, it became apparent that Morgenstern spoke more for himself than he did for the views of the professors and students of HUC. Privately, Morgenstern said that he was “uncompromisingly opposed to the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine.” A couple years later, after seeing the devastation of the Holocaust, he would remark that the events of the recent years “have made Zionists in a certain sense of all of us who are worthy of the name Jew.”¹⁸

Berger decided to focus his recruitment efforts on creating chapters at synagogues whose congregants were largely of Western European background. He took to heart the words of the 1944 CCAR president Solomon Freehof, who said that Americanism is intertwined with Reform Judaism, which is why many Reform Jews are anti-Zionists; Zionism represented a rejection of a

¹⁷ Michael Meyer, “American Rabbis for American Israel,” in *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 132.

¹⁸ Ibid.

main part of their religion.¹⁹ He traveled around the country distributing ACJ fliers and did find some support, including from former CCAR president Edward Nathan Calisch, who established a chapter at his Richmond, Virginia synagogue. However, Berger and the ACJ's largest victory came at the large, wealthy and prestigious Congregation Beth-Israel in Houston. Beth-Israel had just hired a new senior rabbi in the summer of 1943, electing the anti-Zionist Hyman Judah Shaftel by a vote of 346-91.²⁰ With Shaftel as rabbi, the synagogue passed a classically-based platform stating that anybody who observed kashrut, desired Hebrew in services, or supported Zionism would be a second class member without voting status. The board wrote in their basic principles that they would "safeguard at least a segment of the Jewish people of this action against the indictment before the Lord for worshipping a false god, ZIONISM."²¹ Though the younger, Eastern European background Reform Jews had called for a reformation of Reform Judaism, it was clear that at the ACJ affiliated congregations, the lay people and their rabbis were trying preserve, or perhaps resurrect, the days of the Pittsburgh Platform. The Beth-Israel board went further and ordered that in order to be a member of the congregation, a person would have to agree to the following:

We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation. We are a religious community, and neither pray for nor anticipate a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and the State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the 'Stars and Stripes.' Our race is Caucasian. With regard to the Jewish settlement in Palestine we consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural, and social welfare of our coreligionists there.²²

¹⁹ Naomi Wiener Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1947* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 39.

²⁰ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 68.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 69.

The resolution went further to call that they expected the CCAR to return to the Reform principles of 1885 and that HUC should only allow students who held traditional Reform beliefs and practices to be ordained as rabbis. The resolution passed by a vote of 632-168. Robert Kahn, the assistant rabbi of Beth-Israel who had not been chosen as the senior rabbi because of his Zionist views, charged the congregation as being un-American, denying people the right to freedom of speech, expression and religious practice in order to be members. Zionists and anti-Zionists both held that their views represented the true values of America. Kahn left and started his own Zionist-friendly synagogue, taking 142 members with him.

The incident at Beth-Israel became known as the Houston Controversy, and sparked fear and discussion throughout the Reform movement, bringing back concerns of the movement splitting in two. The UAHC, CCAR and HUC tried to intervene and sent delegates to Beth-Israel to talk with them, but the leaders at the congregation refuse to see them. Beth-Israel then sent pamphlets to congregations across the country, promoting its agenda. The UAHC formally rebuked Beth-Israel for lack of dialogue and for turning anyone away who wants to engage in a Jewish experience solely because of differences of views. Though few synagogues followed Beth-Israel's example, the Houston Controversy was seen as an embarrassment by the UAHC and CCAR rather than a victory for anti-Zionism. Beth-Israel came across as a synagogue wanting to break apart the unity of the Reform movement during a time in history when Jewish unity was most important. They strongly denied Jewish peoplehood while Jews in Europe were being rounded up and killed. Many who were undecided about the ACJ actually chose not to be affiliated with the organization over its contentiousness. Shaftel came to HUC to try to promote his anti-Zionist agenda. When he arrived, the students argued with him and rejected his views. During lunch, when the students were chanting the *Birkat HaMazon*, the blessing after the meal,

the students began shouting “*Boneh B’Rakhamav Y’rushalayim*” (May God in His mercy rebuild Jerusalem) at that part of the blessing in Shaftel’s direction. The students made their opposition to anti-Zionism clear to the leadership of the ACJ.

The showdown between the mainstream Reform movement and the ACJ continued within dictating American foreign policy. Abba Hillel Silver gave evidence to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that shows that the overwhelming majority opinion of Jews is to revoke the White Paper. However, Hull says that groups like the ACJ represent the popular American Jewish view. In the administrations of Roosevelt and, later, Eisenhower, the State Department used the voice of the ACJ to try to pass off their foreign policy positions as representative of the American Jewish community. Wolsey, still with the ACJ at this point, testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1944 that the creation of a Jewish state would mean “I am looked upon as a member of a nation whose headquarters is in Palestine, and that I am subject to suspicion, alienation, and perhaps worse.”²³ Wolsey stated that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would lead to ghettoization of the Jews. Not wanting the minority voice of ACJ to dominate the discussions with top officials, S. Wise and Silver increased their own lobbying efforts. Silver and his AZEC organization mobilized after finding out that Roosevelt was considering trying to find a way to relocate Jewish refugees to South America. Silver stated on September 27, 1943, that such a move would be the greatest miscarriage of justice of our days.²⁴ Political Zionism with the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine far exceeded the desire to establish a Jewish state elsewhere.

²³ Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee*, 199.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

The following week, on October 2nd, 11 senators (five Republicans, six Democrats) made a bipartisan call for an end to the White Paper restrictions. The next day, AZEC makes the same call. Five hundred rabbis marched on the Capitol on October 6th and presented a list of Zionist demands to Vice President Henry A. Wallace. Throughout the month of October, mass meetings on Zionism were held in cities around the country. On the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, November 2nd, 119 rallies were held across the nation, and 15,000 people were turned away from a rally at Carnegie Hall because they were over capacity. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of letters poured in to senators, congressmen, the State Department, and to President Roosevelt to end the British White Paper. Their efforts were not for nothing as on March 9, 1944 Silver and S. Wise met with Roosevelt to witness him signing a statement of concurrence regarding the White Paper. Roosevelt, who was not initially supportive of Zionism, had had his views altered from the Holocaust, and he expressed his desire to see the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine. The country was largely in agreement with Roosevelt. In the 1944 election, both the Republican and Democratic parties came out in support of Zionism. 86% of the Senate and 75% of the House (411 out of 531 reps) supported the creation of the Jewish State in Palestine, largely due to AZEC's efforts.²⁵ The ACJ was furious that a foreign policy issue was so important to American Jews that it was changing American politics. They feared that the gentiles would be angry that Jews had so much say over American politics, and that Jews were openly advocating for the creation of a country for the Jewish people, to which they would declare their loyalty, perhaps even over the United States. A 1945 Roper poll showed that 80.1% of American Jews were in favor of the creation of a Jewish state, 9.4% were undecided, and only 10.5% were opposed to Jewish nationalism.²⁶ The Zionist

²⁵ Ibid., 249.

²⁶ Ibid., 293.

position had prevailed in the battle for creating a new ideology on Jewish peoplehood and statehood.

As World War II came to an end, the Zionist momentum was unstoppable. With images of liberated death camps and the immensity of the loss of life in the Holocaust appearing before the American Jewish community, the ACJ had become a shadow of its former self from five years earlier. In comparison, membership in Zionist groups ballooned, with Hadassah and the ZOA reporting 500,000 members.²⁷ As a state had not yet been created, a small handful of congregations, like Houston's Beth-Israel, still tried to prevent the UAHC from becoming fully openly Zionist. Maurice Eisendrath, now UAHC president, said that it was the most divided that Reform Judaism had ever been.²⁸ At the 1946 UAHC biennial, the topic of Zionism was heavily debated; there were congregations and rabbis that threatened to leave the Union over its unwillingness to fully commit itself to Zionism, while others threatened to leave because they felt that the UAHC's affiliation with the American Jewish Conference was making the Union too Zionist. Knowing that the creation of a Jewish state was drawing nearer, the Zionists decided to compromise as time was on their side. They proposed that the UAHC remain neutral on Zionism and a state in Palestine for the time being, yet stay part of the American Jewish Conference. The ACJ members balked at this proposal, until Morris Lazaron stated that he believed that one can be religiously a Reform Jew and still be either a Zionist or an anti-Zionist.²⁹ The biennial voted on the proposal, and it passed unanimously.

²⁷ Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 17.

²⁸ Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 112.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

For the next couple years, the focus of many in the Reform rabbinate was the establishment of the Jewish State and putting pressure on the Harry Truman administration. S. Wise and Silver were in disagreement over to what level to publicly pressure the Democratic Party and Truman over the promises of Roosevelt on the Zionist vision. Silver wanted his criticism to be public to pressure Truman, whereas S. Wise felt that the discussions should be held privately in order to maintain a friendship with the president. Truman would later say in his memoirs that nobody lobbied him harder on any one issue than that of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.³⁰ Between 1945 and 1948, American Jews rallied and donated the equivalent of what would today be estimated at \$4 billion for development and defense in Palestine to the American Jewish appeal.³¹ The Zionist movement increased in power due to these contributions, and rabbis used their pulpits to advocate for support of Palestine. Even at HUC, it was a popular advocacy topic for the students, with one student, Richard Hirsch, taking a leave of absence from his rabbinical studies to go to Palestine and fight for the *Haganah*, the precursor to the Israeli Defense Forces. On November 29, 1947, much of the debate came to an end with the United Nations voting and declaring the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine. Political Zionism had achieved its goal.

³⁰ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

Chapter Four:

Unbreakable Solidarity (1948-1973)

The year of Israel's birth, 1948 was a year of coming together for many in Reform Judaism. Julian Morgenstern stepped down as president of Hebrew Union College due to pressure from Zionist alumni, and he was replaced by Nelson Glueck, a less aggressive non-Zionist. With Morgenstern gone, Stephen S. Wise decided to merge HUC and JIR into one school, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, but still commonly referred to as HUC. This merger would be one of the last public acts of S. Wise, who died the following spring. The UAHC had also grown immensely and had become more Zionist under the presidency of Maurice Eisendrath, who throughout the rest of his presidency, passed resolutions urging Reform Jews to buy Israel bonds. Whereas in 1937, the UAHC had 290 synagogues, representing 50,000 families, it had still been smaller than the Conservative movement, which claimed 250 synagogues, but 75,000 families. By 1957, the Reform movement had become the largest movement in America, with 520 synagogues and 255,000 families. Conservative Judaism also grew to 500 congregations and 200,000 families.¹ The UAHC had gone from the weakest of the three mainstream movements, to the strongest in two decades. Among the reason for this growth was the growing acceptance of Zionism by the Reform movement, but also the commitment to Americanism. In the aftermath of the American effort in World War II, the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, American Jews sought out progressive movements that celebrated their patriotism, but also strengthened their Jewish identity, which Hitler had tried to destroy in the years prior. The economy had dramatically improved and Jewish Americans wanted to contribute to strengthening Judaism in America and also helping

¹ Melvin I. Urofsky, *We are One!: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 211.

the besieged, fledgling State of Israel. The UAHC had gone from being the weakest of the three mainstream Jewish unions to the strongest, and Orthodox synagogues were closing their doors, as many of the anti-Zionist and radically anti-assimilationist ultra-Orthodox ones no longer spoke to American-born traditional Jews.

Among the first laws that Israel passed was the law of population registration in 1949, which mandated that every resident of Israel over the age of 16 had to carry an ID card that says nationality, religion and citizenship. In this case, Judaism was both a religion and a nationality. The following year, Israel passed the Law of Return, allowing any Jew from around the world to immigrate to Israel and receive automatic citizenship. While many celebrated the implementation of these new laws, others were fearful of their ramifications. For traditional Reform Jews, the thought of Judaism being a nationality and that the State of Israel was calling for Jews from every country, including the United States, to move to the new nation was an affront to their beliefs, ideals and patriotism. At HUC, Richard Hirsch, having returned from his time taking part in the Israeli War of Independence, gave his student sermon stating that encouraging immigration to Israel and supporting Zionism would strengthen American Judaism. The sermon sparked a fury among the still predominately ethnically German faculty of the Cincinnati campus. Leo Baeck, the pre-war leader of progressive Judaism in Germany, theologian and Holocaust survivor, who was a non-Zionist, politely tried to explain to Hirsch that his ideology was flawed.²

Glueck was concerned about the direction in which the student body was moving and invited Elmer Berger to visit the campus to explain anti-Zionism to the students. Likewise, in

² Richard G. Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism, A Personal Mission* (New York: URJ Press, 2011), xxxvii.

1949, the HUC 70th anniversary volume contained a Zionist and non-Zionist interpretation of Reform Judaism and Zionism. Glueck sparked fury from Eisendrath and other Zionists when he gave honorary doctorates to ACJ members Morris Lazaron and William Fineshriber. In 1951, the CCAR chose the non-Zionist Jacob Marcus as its new president hoping to bridge the gap between the few, but vocal, anti-Zionists, and the Zionist majority. Eisendrath decided to take action and to appeal to his friend, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, to win over the Zionist cause. Eisendrath chastised the Reform movement as being the only Jewish organization not to hold a celebration for the establishment of the State of Israel (other than the ACJ, which lamented it). Seeing the concern that many Reform Jews had over dual loyalty, Ben-Gurion proclaimed:

The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment, and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel... the State of Israel represents and speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of the Jews who are citizens of any other country. We, the people of Israel, have no desire and no intention to interfere in any way with the internal affairs of Jewish communities abroad.... (I am) anxious that nothing should be said or done which could in the slightest degree undermine the sense of security and stability of American Jewry.³

Ben-Gurion's speech alleviated the concerns of many Reform Jews. He made it clear that though American Jews were welcome to immigrate to Israel, they would in no way be recruited or asked to declare allegiance to the Jewish State. A few years later, Eisendrath led the first UAHC trip to Israel in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Eisendrath reported that all of the lay leaders who went on the trip returned with greater love for Israel.

³ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 194.

The ACJ tried a new strategy to counter the increasing isolation that it felt from within the Reform movement. Under pressure, Berger decided to concentrate his efforts on teaching the youth of the movement. At the few ACJ-affiliated synagogues, the ACJ established their own religious schools, arguing that other synagogues were teaching Zionism over Jewish texts to the children. The ACJ developed their own anti-Zionist curriculum, based largely around selective Jewish texts, and created their own textbooks. The CCAR president of the time, Rabbi Joseph Fink, criticized these schools and launched a formal investigation into the education program. Not finding the support that they were looking for in the movement, the ACJ reverted back to its technique from a decade prior; lobbying the State Department. That same year, 1953, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), in an operation led by Ariel Sharon, launched a reprisal attack for ongoing Arab terrorism on the city of Kibya in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. The attack resulted in the killing of 69 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including women and children. The State Department harshly condemned the attack and formally suspended aid to Israel. Every Jewish organization was either silent or critical of the Eisenhower administration for their response to Israel. The ACJ was the lone prominent Jewish organization in the country that supported the government's response and also condemned Israel for the massacre.⁴ The Eisenhower administration was trying at the time to appease the governments of the Arab world in an attempt to lure them to the American side of the Cold War, and took controversial measures that angered much of the Jewish community, like selling arms to Egypt in 1954. The ACJ was turning much of its rationale away from theology, but instead, towards pro-Arab, humanitarian rights advocacy, especially following a trip to the Middle East by Berger. The Eisenhower administration found an ally in Berger and the ACJ.

⁴ Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 15.

The mainstream Jewish community was in opposition with Eisenhower over the issue of Israel. Rabbi Barnett Brickner, in his 1955 CCAR president's address, said that America's Jews must convince the government that supporting Israel was in America's best interest. Silver told Eisenhower that the condemnation of Israel's right to defend itself was causing tension between the American Jewish community and the United States government. In an effort to relieve those tensions, Eisenhower made Silver his unofficial liaison to Israel, sending him on trips to deliver messages to Israeli leaders and report back to Eisenhower. Tensions came to new heights when the administration condemned Israel and threatened sanctions for its role in the 1956 Suez Conflict with Egypt. The CCAR put forward a resolution celebrating the eight years of independence of Israel and thanking the United States for its initial support. However, the resolution then expressed frustration with the State Department for its appeasement of Arab regimes and its inflammatory statements about Israel, which could hurt Israel. The resolution stated that all of Jerusalem should be in Israel's hands to safeguard holy sites and that the United States should give aid to Israel, while using aid as leverage for peace negotiations for Arab nations. With the bond between the Jewish community and the government at a low, the ACJ claims that it predicted that the creation of Israel would lead to a deterioration of the good relations that American Jews had once held with gentiles in the United States. ACJ-ally, Assistant Secretary of State Henry A. Byroade, cited ACJ reports on the Middle East and Israel and claimed that they represented the majority opinion of American Jews.⁵ Furious, the CCAR passed another resolution in June 1956 stating that the ACJ did not represent Reform Judaism, and that the organization promoted the anti-Semitic, dangerous agenda of the Arabs.⁶ Whereas the ACJ claimed that the mainstream Jewish movements had betrayed America, the CCAR shot

⁵ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 309.

⁶ Jack Ross, *Rabbi Outcast: Elmer Berger and American Jewish Anti-Zionism* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), 120.

back that the ACJ had betrayed the Jews. The ACJ and anti-Zionism had become outcasts in the Reform movement, and when John F. Kennedy was elected president, his administration did not take the ACJ seriously; the group's power would reach a low, from which they would not be able to recover.

With support for Israel at a near-consensus by the end of the 1950's within the Reform movement, the movement decided that in order to truly have a relationship with Israel, and for Israel to authentically be the Jewish State, the Reform movement must be present within the country. With the state established and a decade old, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, a leader in the Conservative movement, stated that "Zionism, is, for all practical purposes, dead."⁷ He was right that political Zionism had achieved its aim, the birth of a country for the Jews in Palestine. However, J. Heller disagreed and said that there is still work to be done, because the goal of cultural Zionism, the constant improvement of Israel, had an endless goal. The Reform movement knew that Zionism no longer required sitting on the sidelines as a cheerleader, but rather, like the prophets, whom the movement held so dearly, going within the country and working to ensure its survival as a state with Jewish ideals. In 1958, the first Israeli Reform synagogue, Har El, was dedicated in Jerusalem. That same year, the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), the Reform youth movement, had its first trip to Israel, led by Richard Hirsch, who brought the first Torah for the congregation.

Though still a non-Zionist, Nelson Glueck saw benefit to having an HUC satellite in Jerusalem. Glueck, one of the world's top biblical archaeologists had lamented that the previous institute dedicated to biblical archaeology had ended up on the Jordanian side of the Armistice Agreement, and he sought to build a new one in Israel under the name of HUC. As a shock to

⁷ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 289.

many, the Orthodox rabbinate fought heavily against Glueck for wanting to build a Reform chapel on the grounds of the school. The Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog said that the building of a Reform synagogue would divide the country. Tel Aviv Chief Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman said, "We shall fight against it.... It is not a question of a place of worship but of making a niche for a new interpretation which misrepresents Judaism.... There is no place for it here." Minister of Religion Zerah Warhaftig personally attacked Glueck and also said, "(the Reform movement) must not be allowed to strike root in this country and defile the Holy City." Vice Mayor of Jerusalem Moshe Porush added on the radio that Reform Judaism would bring "disaster to Jewry and would bring about the destruction of the state."⁸ Additionally, Reform rabbis were discriminated against and given a denigrated status to Orthodox rabbis. The Reform movement was shocked by the prejudice against them, the largest movement in the United States, in what was supposed to be the Jewish State. In 1964, the CCAR passed a resolution deploring the denial of legal status for non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel, as well as the harassment of worshippers at Reform synagogues. Though this topic became an issue of passion for the rabbis of the movement, the lay population remained apathetic as they had no plans to live in Israel. Seeing the potential for destruction between the Diaspora and Israel while Israel relied on the political and financial support of the American Jewish community, Ben-Gurion and the mayor of Jerusalem, Gershon Agron, sought to rectify the situation. The two leaders supported Glueck's project and came to the dedication of the building. As a show of their support, the city of Jerusalem sold the plot of land, which lay on the border with Jordanian East Jerusalem, overlooking the Old City, for a ceremonial \$1.⁹ At the

⁸ Ibid., 253.

⁹ Ephraim Tabory, "The Hostile Environment" *Reform Judaism in Israel; Progress and Perspectives* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Argov Center of Bar Ilan University, 1998).

time, the land was undesirable, being on the frontline of a hot border, but became among the most valuable pieces of real estate in the city after the unification of Jerusalem.

Despite the support of Ben-Gurion, the challenge of authenticity of liberal Judaism remained a contentious issue, especially regarding the question of who is a Jew. As the Law of Return allowed any Jew to move to Israel and have “Jewish” placed on their identification card as religion and/or ethnicity, this question was of utmost importance. This concept of questioning one’s “Jewishness” was foreign and uncomfortable for American Jews. Prior to Emancipation, there was no question of who was a Jew, as it was fairly obvious and Jews had an understood diminished status. However, after Emancipation, Jewish identity was more about religion than peoplehood as far as the governments were concerned. A French Jew was a Frenchman and an American Jew an American as much as an American Christian in the eyes of the law. The United States would never have a law defining who is a Jew, and the notion of a state making a legal definition of a Jew reminded many of the Nazi Nuremberg Laws. This ideology of the Israeli rabbinate ran counter to the most important values for Reform Jews in the Diaspora, separation of Church and State and religious pluralism. In 1958, the Interior Minister Yisrael Bar Yehuda stated, “Any person declaring in good faith that he is a Jew shall be registered as a Jew and no additional proof shall be required.... If both parents declare that the child is Jewish, the declaration shall be regarded as if it were the legal declaration of the child itself.”¹⁰ This decision did not draw any protest from Reform Jews, but was decried by the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel and the National Religious Party, which resigned from the government coalition as a result. Ben-Gurion reached out to Jewish scholars around the world search for an answer to the question of who is a Jew, including Reform rabbis, but decided to table the discussion for a later time.

¹⁰ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 95.

Two notable High Court cases over determining who is a Jew made headlines; this issue would soon become the most contentious issue between Reform rabbis in America and the State of Israel. In 1962, Brother Daniel, a Catholic friar, requested Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return. Though it would seem that Brother Daniel should be rejected on the grounds that he is a Catholic friar, the case was more complicated. Brother Daniel was born Shmuel Oswald Rufeisen, a Jew, active in the Zionist youth movement, from Oswiecim (Auschwitz), Poland. In order to escape Nazi persecution, Rufeisen was taken in by a convent and posed as a Catholic. During the war, Rufeisen helped rescue hundreds of Jews, but also came to truly believe in Catholicism and officially converted and joined the seminary. The case sparked a large debate, as the Orthodox and Conservative movements stated that a person who is born to a Jewish mother is always a Jew. The Reform movement on the other hand, coming from the perspective that Judaism is first a religion, disagreed. After hearing arguments for both sides, the High Court determined that Brother Daniel was ineligible for the Law of Return, because once he converted to Catholicism, he ceased to be Jewish. The Reform movement applauded the decision, reaffirming their Jewish values, while the Orthodox movement was infuriated.

In 1970, a second High Court case also divided the Jewish people and Israel. Benjamin Shalit, an officer in the Israeli Navy, had married a non-Jewish European woman, who had his children. Shalit planned to raise his children as atheists, and register their religion as such for their identification cards. However, Shalit insisted that the children have their nationality listed as Jewish. Despite the decision of Interior Minister Bar Yehuda twelve years earlier, the clerk refused to write their nationality as Jewish, as Orthodox law does not recognize the children of a non-Jewish mother to be Jews. After considerable debate, the High Court ruled by a 5-4 vote that the nationality of Shalit's children was Jewish. The Orthodox were livid and threatened to break

away from the government unless legislation was taken to amend the Law of Return. Many interpreted the High Court's decision as a sanctioning of intermarriage. Prime Minister Golda Meir was compliant in allowing the law to be amended to maintain control of her government. In March of 1970, the Law of Return was amended saying that those eligible to the Law of Return and eligible to put "Jewish" as their national identity are those who are born Jews, meaning someone with a Jewish mother or maternal grandmother. Though ineligible to have Jewish nationality, the Law of Return would also give citizenship to non-Jewish spouses of Jews, converts, or people with Jewish ancestry, meaning they had one Jewish grandparent or a Jewish father. The ancestry rule had been in place since the creation of the Law of Return as the Nazis had persecuted anyone having one Jewish grandparent. The Reform leadership was concerned during the discussions of amendment, knowing that the religious parties would try to make Reform and Conservative converts ineligible under the Law of Return. Privately, Meir promised Richard Hirsch that she would ensure that any revisions done would still recognize Reform conversions performed abroad.¹¹ As expected, the religious parties tried to include the words "according to *halakha* (Jewish law)" after "conversion". However, Meir did not allow this to happen, knowing the backlash that would come from the Diaspora Jews. Though not treated equal to the Orthodox rabbis within Israel, the leaders of the Israeli government knew the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the Reform rabbinate in the United States.

Despite differences, nearly every Jew in America rallied for Israel when its existence was threatened. In May of 1967, it became apparent that the Arab nations were preparing for war with the aim of destroying Israel. For American Jews, seeing Nasser prepare for the annihilation of the Jewish State brought back memories of the years leading up to the Holocaust. Panic, but

¹¹ Ibid., 71.

also a drive to say “Never Again”, motivated the American Reform rabbinate and their congregations. Reform synagogues around the country held solidarity rallies and fundraisers to send aid to Israel in the days leading up to the Six-Day War. That year, \$430 million was raised to support Israel and a total of \$280 million within two months of the war.¹² On June 8th, thousands of Jews rallied outside of the White House, stating their dual identity with Israel and America. Israel had truly become the spiritual center, with Jerusalem as the spiritual capital for Jews in America. Following the war, the Western Wall would be seen as the spiritual symbol for American Jews.

The victory of Israel was cause for mass celebration. Such an improbable victory seemed as though divine intervention had somehow taken place. The thought of Israel being destroyed and the potential catastrophic loss of Jewish life and religion brought the American Jewish community together. Zionism had once being a divisive issue among Jews of America, but polls showed that at the end of the war, 99% of Jews in America expressed strong sympathy with Israel.¹³ Leon Kronish, a Reform rabbi and Zionist, reported:

The united response of American Jews was a miracle that was second only to the miracle of Israel itself. Never in history – not even during the Hitler Holocaust or Israel’s War of Independence or the Sinai Campaign were the Jewish people so united and responsive both politically and financially. Never was so much money given by so many different people in such a short period of time. Perhaps the most dramatic element of all was the outpouring of teenagers and college students – many of the ‘lost generation’ – ready to go as volunteers to be used in any way that Israel deemed necessary – to pick fruit and vegetables or to pick up the wounded.¹⁴

¹² Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 356.

¹³ Ibid., 358.

¹⁴ Leon Kronish, “Yisrael Goralenu: Israel is our Destiny,” in *Towards the Twenty-First Century: Judaism and the Jewish People in Israel and America; Essays in Honor of Rabbi Leon Kronish on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ronald Kronish (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1988), 313.

Richard Hirsch's experience was similar to that of Kronish. Hirsch wrote that following the Six-Day War, "the vast majority of our youth identified as never before. Let us recognize frankly that for many young Jews, what neither the synagogue, the Hillel Foundation, nor the Jewish community centers could do, Israel was able to do. Let us recognize that for many Jews, the State of Israel, seven thousand miles away, offers a more tangible expression of Jewishness than the synagogue on the next block."¹⁵ As Hirsch and Kronish noted, Israel had become the magnet for Jews who had been going the route of assimilation. For many Jews, they were intermarried and not members of a synagogue, or really had anything to do with organized religion, however, they found Jewish identity with Zionism and their hearts moved by the events of June. Israel had become a source of pride for Jewish youth, who often faced anti-Semitic-related bullying. Kronish said, as many young Jews came to identify with following the war that showed that Jews can fight and be tough, "Israel is the counterpoint to the humiliation and the horror of the Holocaust. The morale of ordinary Jews everywhere has been heightened."¹⁶

The Six-Day War also struck a major defeat to anti-Zionism and non-Zionism. Synagogues and rabbis that had previously been affiliated with the ACJ and had declared themselves non-Zionist found themselves holding fund raisers for Israel. Jews who had never known that they had a connection to Israel were glued to the radio and scrapping together their extra money to send to the Jewish State. Though most of the money collected arrived to Israel after the brief war was over, American Jews felt as though they had played an important part in Israel's survival and became emotionally invested. Suddenly, Israel was seen as the light unto the developing nations of the world, Hebrew was appreciated, the insurmountable odds against Israel showed a connection with God, and Jews from around the world had gathered there from their

¹⁵ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, xviii-xix.

¹⁶ Kronish, *Yisrael Goralenu*, 315.

places of exile. With American Jews seeing pictures of Israeli soldiers holding a Torah at the Western Wall, uncovering ancient synagogues in the Galilee, and climbing the mountain of Masada with the vow that it would never fall again, Israel had made Jewish history, peoplehood and the Bible come alive. Nelson Glueck went from a non-Zionist, who supported some form of binationalism, to a firmly committed Zionist. Quickly, he excavated much of the newly acquired Israeli territory and excitedly showed the Israeli government his findings, which validated claims that the Jews had biblical roots in the West Bank. In 1970, the man who had less than two decades earlier created controversy by awarding ACJ members honorary doctorates, opened the second building of HUC-Jerusalem, and at the dedication presented Prime Minister Golda Meir with her honorary doctorate from the College-Institute.

Israel's victory meant complete defeat for the ACJ. Leading up to the Six-Day War, Elmer Berger went to Jerusalem, and before a crowd of Arabs gave a prophetic speech predicting Israel's downfall in the month ahead. Berger blamed Israel as the aggressors for the war, and much of his leadership resigned with this statement and gave money to support Israel, and declared themselves in support of the Jewish State. His attack on Israel at such a time when others were preparing for a genocidal war against the Jewish State caused immense anger among members of the ACJ. Berger had not just taken a stance against Zionism by pride of Americanism, he was instead exposing that he had an agenda against Israel. Berger tried to claim that American Jews and rabbis were hypocrites for supporting civil rights for blacks in America, but ignored the plight of the Palestinians through Zionism. Berger was seen by nearly all as an outlier and extremist, and in 1968, the ACJ asked for his resignation. One Berger supporter said about the situation, "What Berger said was right but it was bad timing. I hate negativism. If he

couldn't say anything good about Israel why couldn't he have kept his big yap shut?"¹⁷ The ACJ and its members were not the only ones that were embarrassed by association with Berger; he was still a member of the CCAR. Daniel Silver declared the following resolution passed by the CCAR on June 21, 1967, "We declare our solidarity with the State and the people of Israel. Their triumphs are our triumphs. Their ordeal is our ordeal. Their fate is our fate."¹⁸ Hirsch also stated that "In June, 1967, it became clear that the destiny of *Am Yisrael* was inseparable from the destiny of *Medinat Yisrael*."¹⁹ Having not paid his CCAR dues in 1969 for some time and the CCAR leaders pushing for his expulsion,²⁰ Berger came to an agreement with the union to resign his membership. Over the next decade, Berger would become increasingly radicalized. He formed a new organization with a few other extremists called American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism, which still exists but is irrelevant in the mainstream discussion. Berger would correspond with the PLO, work with the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, and become a regular speaker at college campuses for "Palestine Week" throughout the 1970's. However, the organization and the rabbi that once spoke before Congress, influenced American foreign policy, and took over synagogues taken seriously by neither the media nor the American Jewish world. Today, the ACJ, an organization that at its peak had 14,000 members and several prominent congregations, operates a budget of around \$55,000 per year and has a website that attracts only 10,000 unique visitors per year; however, their leadership, though now more non-Zionist than anti-Zionist, still believes that they represent a silent majority of American Jews.²¹

¹⁷ Marshall Sklare, "Lakeville and Israel: The Six-Day War and its Aftermath," *Midstream: A Monthly Jewish Review*, October 1968, 4.

¹⁸ Kronish, *Yisrael Goralenu*, 309.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 152.

²¹ Samuel Freedman, "American Jews Who Reject Zionism Say Events Aid Cause," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/26/us/26religion.html?_r=1&.

As the fate of Israel had been determined to be the fate of American Jewry by the Reform rabbinate, it seemed incumbent upon the movement to do more to build progressive streams of Judaism within Israel. Prior to the Six-Day War, the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) had earmarked only \$10,000 annually to support the mere two Reform congregations in Israel, whose rabbis were considering leaving Israel due to lack of support.²² At the UAHC biennial in December 1967, the Union decided to form a national committee on Israel and ask each of the million Reform Jews in America to donate a dollar (\$1 million total) atop their normal synagogue dues to support the upbuilding of liberal Judaism in Israel.²³ The movement, which had half a century earlier prided itself on having centrality in the Midwest of America, found itself ideologically aligning with the 1968 World Zionist Organization (WZO) statement, that the first aim of Zionism is “the unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of the State of Israel.”²⁴ The 1968 WUPJ conference was supposed to be held in Amsterdam, but in a show of solidarity with the liberal movements in Israel, the conference was moved to Jerusalem. The Reform Jews who came from around the world eagerly planned to have a moving egalitarian prayer service at the Western Wall, an old symbol of their faith, which had only recently become central to their hearts. However, Minister of Religious Affairs Zerah Warhaftig barred the service from taking place and Augudas Israel newspaper *HaModiyah* called Reform Jews “traitors to their people, their land and their God.”²⁵ In order to prevent potential physical violence, the WUPJ leadership decided to cancel the service. The WUPJ and Reform leadership realized that they needed to do more to promote interactions between progressive American Jews with Israelis to dismiss misconceptions about Reform Judaism.

²² Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, xvii.

²³ Robert Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem: American Jews and the State of Israel* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970), 489-90.

²⁴ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 25.

²⁵ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 400.

Between 1948 and 1970, American Jews mostly supported Israel as it symbolically represented the survival and rebirth of the Jewish people post-Holocaust. In fact, a poll in 1970 showed that 82% of Reform adults and 67% of Reform youth stated that it was desirable or essential to support Israel. In 1957, supporting Israel was ranked as the #14 most important element of being a good Jew by American Reform Jews, but in 1970, it was bumped up to the fifth spot.²⁶ However, American Jews were not engaged with Israel; few visited Israel and less learned Hebrew. Part of the problem was that Jewish leadership had not personally interacted with Israel, and in 1970, it was decided that every HUC rabbinical student would spend their first year of seminary studies in Jerusalem. This initiative was supported by many at the College, who in the years prior had gone to study at Hebrew University to learn Hebrew and become more conscious of Israel. American Jews began taking trips to Israel and worshipping with students at the synagogue on the HUC-Jerusalem campus. Richard Hirsch and others believed that in order to promote progressive Judaism in Israel, the WUPJ should be centered in the heart of world Jewry. The head of the WUPJ was Rabbi Bernard Bamberger, who had been a non-Zionist and did not feel compelled to move the WUPJ headquarters from New York to Jerusalem. The next president was expected to be the prominent rabbi from Toronto, Gunther Plaut. However, the German-born Plaut had a classical approach to Reform Judaism, and Hirsch lobbied instead for Gerry Daniel, a wealthy layperson and Zionist, who donated the Reform Kedem Synagogue and Cultural Center in Tel Aviv (later renamed Beit Daniel, was not actually finished until 1991 because of municipal opposition regarding construction of a large Reform synagogue in Tel Aviv). Plaut stepped aside to allow Daniel to become the WUPJ president, and in 1973, the headquarters officially moved to Jerusalem. The CCAR president from 1971-1973, David Polish, officially acknowledged Jewish peoplehood and declared that if Israel and the Diaspora were to

²⁶ Seliktar, *Divided We Stand*, 24.

go separate ways, it would mean the end of the Jewish people.²⁷ Polish continued that American Jews are not in a physical exile, but rather a spiritual exile, which was a spiritual darkness from not living in Israel. However, engagement with Israel creates a moonlight that, though distant, illuminates the darkness.²⁸ As the movement tried to engage congregants with Israel, which the congregants strongly desired following the Six-Day War, the movement also tried to engage Israel with Reform Judaism, and therefore, the American Jewish community.

With the spiritual and emotional connection growing for Israel in the years following the Six-Day War, the fear that Israel's luck would run out and that the Arab armies would succeed in not only recapturing their lost territory, but in destroying Israel heightened. CCAR resolutions in the early 1970's stated that Jerusalem should not be divided to pre-1967 status citing the closure of Hadassah hospital and Hebrew University and the desecration of holy sites. The CCAR also expressed its concern with the American government for giving weapons to Arab military forces that were hostile to Israel. For many Reform leaders, the movement that had once declared so loyalty to America was now favoring Israel's security interests over American foreign policy interest. These concerns came to fruition on Yom Kippur of 1973, when Syria and Egypt launched surprise attacks on Israel. It looked likely that the Jewish State would be destroyed as the invading armies made incredible advancements. The UAHC desperately sent a pamphlet to all its members saying, "It is incumbent upon every Jew to offer financial support to the fullest extent of his capabilities, and to solicit further assistance from all men who believe in freedom and the right of a sovereign state to live in peace and security.... As members of the Household

²⁷ Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 247.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

of Israel... our obligation.... When Jewish life is threatened – as it is now... matters of internal disagreement fade into insignificance against the Jewish crisis of the day.”²⁹

The unity of American Jews during the Yom Kippur War, like the Six-Day War six years prior, was incredible. The CCAR urged its rabbis to call their elected officials and pressure the government to resupply Israel with arms during the war. HUC students at each of the three-stateside campuses, Cincinnati, New York and Los Angeles, were prepared to go to Israel to help in whatever way necessary, with the College stating that it was prepared to postpone, reschedule, or cancel classes to allow students to help. In New York, the students protested outside of the United Nations and demanded that the Syrian and Egyptian delegations provide a list of Israeli prisoners of war to the Red Cross. Meanwhile, Cincinnati students drove the *Israel Action Mobile* around the city collecting funds to send to Israel. Students went to their pulpits and raised money, with one student collecting nearly \$30,000 in the Texas-Oklahoma region and another nearly the same amount in the Tennessee, Kentucky and Southern Illinois area.³⁰ On the Jerusalem campus, the school was taken over by the *Haga* civil defense force, the College’s vehicles were given to the government, and the staff went to the reserves. The students in Jerusalem did not return to the United States, but rather volunteered in hospitals, worked on *kibbutzim* to fill the places of mobilized soldiers, gave concerts on army bases, worked as custodians and guards at media and cultural institutions, and filled other jobs that had been vacated by reserve soldiers. The congregations also responded to the call to action. Fundraising stations were set up at every UAHC region in the United States and at the New York headquarters. Congregants sent thousands of telegrams to the American government pleading for its support to Israel. In Cincinnati, the board of the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple, named for the

²⁹ Alfred Gottschalk, "United States of America: Perspectives," in *The Yom Kippur War: Israel and the Jewish People*, edited by Moshe Davis, (New York: Arno, 1974), 40.

³⁰ Ibid., 43.

man who so vehemently opposed Zionism, unanimously agreed “to postpone indefinitely the construction of a new facility, and... to invest the bulk of the remaining proceeds from the sale (of its old facility)... in Israel bonds.”³¹ The city’s Valley Temple, which had been founded in the 1950’s by the ACJ, took part in the plan of all the Cincinnati synagogues to purchase \$3 million for the purchase of Israel bonds. At synagogues across the country, congregations put their entire focus around saving Israel. The UAHC president-elect, Alexander M. Schindler, stated, “The synagogue was key” in saving Israel.³²

Though the rabbis and congregations of the Reform movement had become more unified on the issue of Zionism and peoplehood following the Holocaust and the creation of Israel; yet, there was still some dissent by the ACJ. However, the movement became unified around Israel when they saw that they had the opportunity to take action and prevent a second genocide of the Jewish people with the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars. Moreover, connection with Israel was at an all-time high as congregants and rabbis felt directly responsible for saving Israel and the Jewish people. This feeling of empowerment led to a desire to teach the importance of Israel to the youth. Summer camps developed Israeli themes and Israelis were brought in to interact with the children. In religious schools, Israel was taught as a utopian society where Jews from all over the world were treated well and could be proud to be Jewish. Rabbis seldom criticized Israel from the pulpit in the decade that followed the Six-Day War, and a term “Israeloltry” was given by sociologist Daniel Elazar to describe the reverence of American Jews for the Jewish State. As a result, as Israel began to appear as an imperfect place, shattering the idealistic images held in the minds of American Jews, a crisis of connection and a divide within the Reform movement would come to an ugly and often public light.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid.

Chapter Five:

Voices of Dissent (1973-1995)

Following the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars, support for Israel was an issue that had near unanimous agreement among American Jews. In 1974, the United Jewish Appeal raised \$750 million. One Jewish woman sent money with a note that read, “Although I am unemployed and my husband is a grad student, we are sending you about 2/3 of this week’s unemployment check because Israel must survive.”¹ A strong connection was established between American Jews and Israel; they felt a sense of urgency, while also feeling a satisfaction for being able to help Israel. The CCAR began passing resolutions encouraging tourism to Israel, and calling on the United States to end funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for its work with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the de facto head of the Palestinians, which had committed numerous terrorist attacks against Israel. The CCAR also decided that *Yom HaAtzmaut*, Israeli Independence Day, and *Yom HaZikaron*, Israeli Memorial Day, should be observed within American synagogues. However, as American Jews began traveling to Israel, they encountered discrimination against them for being affiliated with non-Orthodox movements. Alfred Gottschalk, the president of HUC, wrote in the months following the Yom Kippur War that despite assimilation and normalization of American Jews, we remain “a people set apart” and that the Diaspora has cultural, social and religious needs, which are only provided by Israel. However, when Reform Jews move to Israel they are questioned as to whether or not they are really Jewish, as if the act of making *Aliyah* does not speak for itself. Gottschalk continued that Reform Judaism must be recognized, as the response from the

¹ Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 22.

movement during the Yom Kippur War shows that Israel should be inclusive and not exclusive on peoplehood.² Reform Jews, who had been known as the most assimilated and non-Zionist of Jews, were the first movement to move their international headquarters, the WUPJ, to Israel. The movement was one whose rabbis had fought as soldiers in Israel's wars, and who had allowed the country to use their campus in 1967 and 1973 for the war effort. Gottschalk wrote, "Reform Jews are in Israel not as occasional visitors but as a firmly planted legitimate factor of Israeli life."³ For many who came to Israel out of their love of Zion, but were questioned as to whether or not they were Jews once arriving in the Jewish State (often they had been leaders of their Jewish communities in the United States), an internal betrayal began to take hold.

Another area of dissent for some American Jews was over Israel's occupation of land captured in the Six-Day War and the treatment of the Arab citizens that Israel had acquired, but not given the rights of citizenship. Palestinians had at times been forced to move in order for Israel to build settlements. By 1973 there were approximately 50 settlements and 70 by 1977.⁴ Israel's arrogance and feeling of invincibility, which was seen in their lack of preparedness for the Yom Kippur War, also drew criticism by the Jewish world. The ostracized Elmer Berger stated, "I felt a strange combination of sadness and near-amusement as I witnessed their (Reform rabbinical colleagues) participation in the civil rights battles in the United States while they were silent – and perhaps ignorant, as well – about the near-apartheid practiced by the Zionist infrastructure in the Zionist state."⁵ Many rabbis who had lobbied and rallied for equality in America felt hypocritical not advocating for the rights of Palestinians. One of these rabbis was

² Alfred Gottschalk, "United States of America: Perspectives," in *The Yom Kippur War: Israel and the Jewish People*, edited by Moshe Davis, (New York: Arno, 1974), 46.

³ Ibid., 48.

⁴ Michael E Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 285.

⁵ Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 129.

the rabbi of Temple Solel of Chicago, Arnold Jacob Wolf. Wolf had mortgaged his synagogue's building in 1967 to send money to support Israel during the war. Likewise, he traveled to Israel with the graduates of his Hebrew school twelve years in a row, with all expenses being paid by the synagogue. However, feeling disconnected with Israel's handling of Gaza and the West Bank, in 1973 Wolf started the organization Breira, meaning "Alternative" in Hebrew, though the initial name was "Project of Concern in Israel-Diaspora Relations". He saw that the mainstream organizations that unabashedly supported positions of Israel did not speak to the concerns that he had for the future of the Jewish State. At the same time, he and other rabbis felt that groups like the ACJ did not speak to them because they were still Zionists and their critiques came out of a love for Israel. Wolf felt that an alternative was needed. The name, Wolf said, "betokened our desire to the intransigence of both the PLO and the several governments of Israel. We proposed what has come to be known as the two-state solution, now more than ever the chief possibility for a peaceful, long term resolution of the Middle East conflict."⁶

Quickly, over a hundred Reform and Conservative rabbis joined Breira. The founding statement of the organization said, "This is the reason we join together now – we deplore those pressures in American Jewish life which make open discussion of these and other vital issues virtually synonymous with heresy."⁷ Indeed, the backlash was immense; the magazine *The New Anti-Semitism* urged the B'nai B'rith and Hillel to fire anyone associated with Breira. Breira advocated in its monthly newsletter, *interChange*, negotiations between the PLO and Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state, while also calling for a halt to settlements. The organization called in December 1973, just weeks after the Yom Kippur War, for Israel to make territorial concessions to achieve lasting peace, and to "recognize the legitimacy of the national aspirations

⁶ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 280-281.

⁷ Ibid., 281.

of the Palestinians,” and claimed to be inspired by “the idealism and thought of many early Zionists with whom we identify.”⁸ For these reasons, the group opposed the “Rally Against Terror,” a protest sponsored by many Jewish groups against PLO leader Yasser Arafat’s November 1974 speech at the United Nations. As Breira gained notoriety through advertisements, hearings, and articles, they were charged by many in the Jewish community as caring more about the Palestinians than they did the Israelis, with the ZOA calling them representatives of the PLO and “Jews for Fatah.”⁹ Breira rebutted that unlike extremist groups like the Jewish Defense League (JDL), they represented a mainstream voice within the American Jewish community that encouraged discussion and discouraged polarization. The following statement summarized their position:

Our immediate and overriding concern is peace in the Middle East. Our concern grows out of our love and respect for the people and the land of Israel as well as our understanding that the continuity of Jewish life in the Diaspora is inextricably linked to the existence of Israel. We are not innocent bystanders. If we share the anxieties about Israel’s policies, we have the responsibility to say so. If we detect mistakes which might have catastrophic consequences, we must ignore or swallow our concern. . . . For the sake of Zion, we shall not be silent.¹⁰

Breira tried to explain that their objectives were rooted in the Ahad Ha’am ideology of cultural Zionism, working to always improve the Jewish State out of love. However, Breira’s many critics were relentless in their attacks on the organization, in hopes of destroying it.

The members of the organization were called “indeed, inauthentic, traitorous, and anti-Jewish.”¹¹ Former Vice President Spiro Agnew called the group “dangerously anti-Israel,” despite Breira defining itself as a pro-Israel organization. At the time, the common moral view,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 38.

¹⁰ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 292-293.

¹¹ Ibid., 299.

still held by many today, was that only Israelis have the right to make foreign policy decisions since it is only their lives that are at risk and they have to deal with the consequences of such decisions. Jewish political columnist J.J. Goldberg noted, “These rules were quickly taken up by the Jewish leadership as a sacred writ from Jerusalem, Jews who disagreed found themselves unwelcome in community forums, asked to leave governing boards, shouted down at meetings.”¹² Breira’s spokesperson, Rabbi David Saperstein, founder of the Religious Action Center of the Reform movement, stated in response to the criticism, “Are we going to stand up and say to the American people, you can be for national rights of the Palestinians and be strong supporters of Israel, or, by our silence, are we going to force Americans to choose between support of Israel and support of the Palestinians just because Israeli policy at this moment makes the two seem incompatible?”¹³ UAHC president and the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO), a collective organization of the mainstream Jewish organizations in the United States, was the only leader to come to the defense of Breira. While others accused the organization of having the same position as the Arab world towards Israel, Schindler stated that Breira represented “a new openness to divergent viewpoints and I am determined to keep that openness alive.”¹⁴ Seeing the complexities of Israel increase, Schindler thought that having diversity among opinion while still remaining in support of Zionism and the State of Israel was healthy for the American Jewish community. Stephen S. Wise and other early Zionists had promoted freedom of speech and debate as among their most important principles, and Breira deserved this respect as well.

This position of Schindler came after two public and controversial public criticisms of Israel by Breira. In the first incident, the organization responded to a rally held by the settlement

¹² Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 25.

¹³ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 294.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.

movement Gush Emunim in the West Bank during Passover of 1976 in support of increased settlements. The Palestinians protested and one Arab was killed during the protests by Israeli security. In an open letter titled “Open Letter to Israel’s Leaders,” Breira wrote:

We are grieved by the tragic events of the past week in the occupied West Bank and within Israel proper.... Police action, even when justified will not end growing Arab civil resistance to the Israeli government’s plan for the expropriation of Arab and Jewish land in the Galilee, nor will it end growing frustration in the captured territories over Israel’s nine year occupation. Rigorous suppression of Arab dissent serves only to strengthen Arab nationalism and to weaken faith in Israeli and Jewish commitment to the human and national rights on which Israeli society was founded and is maintained.¹⁵

A month later, Breira wrote another open letter, this one titled, “The Time Has Come To Say NO to Gush Emunim,” which received over one hundred signatures, including from prominent leaders, such as the feminist Betty Freidan. In it, Breira wrote, “We American Jews who are ardent supporters of Israel’s existence encourage all peace forces in Israel in their demonstration on the eighth of May against the proposed Jewish settlement in Kadum on the West Bank. Like our brothers and sisters in Israel, we feel that further Jewish settlement in the occupied territories is an obstacle to peace efforts. We will join with all people committed to a secure Israel in building a just and equitable peace.”¹⁶ With outrage mounting against Breira, Schindler offered as a compromise that Jewish groups and Jews should be able to debate positions on Israel; however, the criticism of Israel by Jews should remain within the Jewish press. It was perceived that Breira was airing the dirty laundry of the Jewish people to the gentiles, and in doing so, despite the good intentions that they claimed, were causing an increase in anti-Israel sentiment.

The downfall for Breira began in November 1976 after secret meetings between leaders of certain Jewish organizations and Israeli Arab Leaders with PLO ties became public. With the PLO having conducted heinous acts of terror against innocent Israeli civilians at the time, these

¹⁵ Ibid., 296-297.

¹⁶ Ibid., 298.

meetings crossed a red line. The CPMAJO stated that it “vigorously opposes and deplores any meetings official or unofficial – with the PLO” as they may undermine peace.¹⁷ In January 1977, the *Jewish Week* wrote, “Why, of all the many millions of Arabs with whom one might seek dialogue, has the Breira inner dictatorship elected to approach the PLO? It is not because these ideologists assume that peaceful and passive people are so unrepresentative of virtue as to be contemptible, while terrorists and murderers are so only because the holiness of their cause justifies and demands violence?”¹⁸ For the remainder of the month, the Jewish press heaped attacks against Breira and accused it of conspiring with Israel’s enemies. Under pressure, much of the leadership of Breira, such as Joachim Prinz, resigned their membership from the organization.

The following month, on February 20, 1977, Breira held their first, and what would turn out to be their only, national conference. Breira called for “the immediate cessation of Jewish settlement of the occupied territories.” The group continued to state, “While Jerusalem will continue to serve as the capital of Israel, the Arab part of the city should become, after the establishment of peace, the capital of the Palestinian Arab State.” It adopted these views because “we love Israel. We cherish the cultural treasures and the many moral examples it has given us. And we similarly affirm the richness of the Jewish experience in North America and are eager to explore and extend its possibilities.... Our Jewish prophetic values demand that we fight oppression and work to bring about economic and social justice in the American society in which we live.”¹⁹ At the conference, JDL members protested outside before some actually entered and assaulted some of the attendees. Within a couple months, the short-lived, provocative organization disbanded. Wolf tried to join the Conservative movement’s Rabbinical Assembly

¹⁷ Ibid., 300.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 304-305.

after leaving the Reform movement, but as a result of his affiliation with Breira, was always denied a seat on the executive council.

Though Breira existed for less than four years, it made a difference in the way that Jewish leaders talked about Israel. To some degree, rabbis felt a greater comfort criticizing Israel's policies, while still being able to be Zionists and supporters of the State of Israel. Wolf noted that the focus of Jewish education had been on victimhood, where more emphasis was placed on the Holocaust than God, Midrash or Zionism. He said, "I love Israel as the prophets did, (which means) demanding that Israel be the Covenant people."²⁰ In being a movement that aligned Jewish values with actions, the CCAR took notice and began to challenge Israel to be a Jewish State with Jewish morals. The CCAR passed a resolution in 1976 stating their unequivocal support for Israel, but at the same time asked Israel to curb the radical actions by the Gush Emunim. Likewise, in 1978, the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA), an organization that will be discussed in great detail further, called for Israel to live up to its prophetic vision of peace in a resolution. These resolutions were in line with the statements of Breira, but did not go so far as to call for meetings with the PLO. The views expressed by Breira are today considered mainstream as further dissent to Israel's actions towards the Palestinians came to light in the 1980's and beyond. Though Breira collapsed, within a couple years, especially with the rise of Menachem Begin and the rightist Likud Party, new dovish organizations of American Jews came to the surface; New Jewish Agenda (1978), New Israel Fund (1979), and Americans for Peace Now (1981).

ARZA was one of the organizations founded in the later part of the 1970's through the Cultural Zionist movement taking place within Reform Judaism. The association was built in response largely to the debates that had been taking place during Golda Meir's tenure as prime

²⁰ Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, LLC, 2012), 82.

minister over the Right of Return and the question of who is a Jew. In 1974, controversy broke out as an anti-Reform organization, the Movement for Unity of Nation, ran a fake advertisement in the *New York Times* that a Reform rabbi officiated at a marriage with a priest on *Tisha B'Av*, the saddest date in the Hebrew calendar, commemorating the destruction of the Temple. The advertisement was published while the Knesset was debating changing the guidelines to the Right of Return law. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stated that Reform Jews should not have a say in the Law of Return as they violate Jewish tradition. Though the story was made up and the said rabbi did not exist, Rabin claimed that the non-existent rabbi was a leader within the Reform movement.²¹ In order for the ignorance of Reform Judaism to be dispelled, Reform Judaism had to become more engrained in Israel. The couple of synagogues, annual congregational trips, and the sending of rabbinical students to live in Israel for one year before returning to the United States was not enough. As the WUPJ joined the WZO in 1976, the Reform movement decided that the founding of a specifically Zionist movement that would advocate for Reform interests in Israel was needed. ARZA appeared for the first time in the 1978 WZO elections, a year after its founding. The acronym ARZA means in Hebrew “toward the Land,” intending to promote Zionism within American Jews, while at the same time bringing Reform Jews and Reform Judaism to the Land of Israel. With the help of American Reform rabbis lobbying their congregants to vote for ARZA, the party gathered 11,900 votes in its first election.²² With large wins by ARZA and also the Conservative movement, the progressive movements put two agenda items up for resolution upon joining the WZO; equitable funding for Reform Zionist programs and equal status for non-Orthodox movements in Israel. These resolutions passed and led to the ultra-Orthodox Mizrachi party walking out and threatening to quit the WZO.

²¹ Richard G. Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism, A Personal Mission* (New York: URJ Press, 2011), 68.

²² *Ibid.*, 215.

ARZA did not want to alienate any Jew, but was firm in the upbuilding of Reform Judaism in Israel. To demonstrate that they were in complete solidarity with the State of Israel and Zionism, all members of ARZA are required to agree to the Jerusalem Program, which is the WZO's definition of whether or not a person is a Zionist. The Jerusalem Program, most recently amended in 2004, states that a Zionist must agree to the following:²³

1. The unity of the Jewish people, its bond to its historic homeland Eretz Yisrael, and the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem, its capital, in the life of the nation;
2. Aliyah to Israel from all countries and the effective integration of all immigrants into Israeli Society.
3. Strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state and shaping it as an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character, marked by mutual respect for the multi-faceted Jewish people, rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world.
4. Ensuring the future and the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by furthering Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education, fostering spiritual and cultural values and teaching Hebrew as the national language;
5. Nurturing mutual Jewish responsibility, defending the rights of Jews as individuals and as a nation, representing the national Zionist interests of the Jewish people, and struggling against all manifestations of anti-Semitism;
6. Settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.

In order to fulfill the Zionist vision, the Reform movement took on more projects. In 1976, Kibbutz Yahel was founded in the Negev Desert. The kibbutz promoted Reform ideals and would be a place where many Reform youth would go to work the Land of Israel. In 1983 Kibbutz Lotan was founded, also in the Negev, as an eco-friendly, environmentally conscious kibbutz, that was geared towards the Jewish value of *Baal Tashchit*, the prevention of unnecessary waste, and Ben-Gurion's vision of making the desert bloom. In 1985, the progressive Har Halutz *Moshav* (settlement) was founded in the Galilee. With the founding of these kibbutzim and the *moshav*, Reform Judaism had firmly planted itself in the soil of the Land

²³ Ibid., 220.

of Israel. When one looked on a map of Israel, they would see the physical presence of the Reform movement.

As an effort to expand the movement's presence, greater focus was put on the future of the Jerusalem campus of HUC. The vision was that HUC Jerusalem would become an Israeli institution, rather than an American study-abroad campus. In 1971, the campus acquired an additional 12.8 dunam plot of land, though the government had tried to restrict the campus to half that size. Mosh Safdie, the architect who built the Mamila Mall in Jerusalem and the Western Wall Plaza, was commissioned to build the expansion of the campus to what would eventually be an \$8 million project.²⁴ The institution reached milestones in 1980, when Mordechai Rotem became the first student ordained through the Jerusalem campus, and in 1992 when Naamah Kelman became the first woman in Israel to be ordained as a rabbi. Kelman, the granddaughter of the CCAR president Felix Levy, who cast that deciding vote in 1937 that ushered the Reform rabbinate into Zionism, would later become the dean of the Jerusalem campus. As of 2010, over 65 students have been ordained through the Israeli program.²⁵ As the Reform movement rooted itself in Israel, it faced more opposition, yet decided that the need for advocacy was too important to stand down.

The Reform movement focused its activism on three areas; advocating for persecuted Jews worldwide to be able to settle in Israel, promoting religious pluralism, and seeking peace with Israel's neighbors. The plight of the Jews of Ethiopia and the Soviet Union gave Reform Jews a reason to mobilize with a sense of urgency that also reminded them of the need for a Jewish State. Rabbis preached about the importance of Zionism in this regard from the pulpit and organized rallies around Zionism and helping persecuted Jews. Leon Kronish created ritual

²⁴ Ibid., 152.

²⁵ Ibid., 173.

around this social justice issue, for Zionism had become a social justice cause for a large number of American Jews; Kronish created a supplementary to the Haggadah that incorporated the ingathering of exiles from Africa, Arab lands, and the Soviet Union to the Hebrews of the Torah. Kronish's Haggadah stated, "We were slaves unto Hitler, Nasser, and the Kremlin in the Soviet Union and now we are redeemed," and asked the Four Questions as follows:

Why is this Passover different from all other Passovers?

1. Now all who are enslaved can be redeemed by coming to Israel
2. Israel is included among the variegated family of nations
3. We can now dip into our resources as American Jews to help Israel
4. There are no kings and beggars like in the Diaspora, all are equal with the crown of Freedom²⁶

For Kronish and other rabbis, there was a righteousness and holiness deeply rooted in Jewish tradition with the Zionist cause. The Four Children portion of the Haggadah reiterated this ideology, with the following as the summary of the children:

1. The one who does not know enough to ask: The assimilated Jew, who does not deny his Jewish heritage, but has no knowledge or involvement in Judaism, but was maybe moved by the Six-Day War.
2. The simple child: He is indifferent, self-absorbed and does not think about Judaism except for life ceremonies, otherwise, it is of no concern to him, but he can change.
3. The evil child: He thinks that he is smart, and worries about the backlash of advocating for Israel, as if this will undermine him as an American. He draws a line between Judaism and the Jewish people.
4. The wise child: He knows the morals of Jewish history and has great pride in Judaism. He advocates for teaching Hebrew and engaging with Israel culturally. He knows that survival for American Jews is spelled S-Y-N-A-G-O-G-U-E and for North African, Soviet and Egyptian Jews S-T-A-T-E. With the wise child, we will all celebrate the universal freedom of Israel and humankind.²⁷

²⁶ Leon Kronish, "Passover Supplementary Haggadah," in *Towards the Twenty-First Century: Judaism and the Jewish People in Israel and America; Essays in Honor of Rabbi Leon Kronish on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ronald Kronish (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1988), 324.

²⁷ Ibid., 325-326.

As it is clear, all American Jews should strive to be like the wise child, while non-Zionists and assimilated Jews make up the other children, who are not modelling good behavior. During the 1970's through the 1990's the CCAR passed multiple resolutions stating their support for helping Jews of the Muslim world, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union, urging their rabbis and congregants to ask for United States government to help aid in this effort and to do what they could on their own to help.

However, Kronish's Passover supplementary guide did not include the many flaws and challenges that plagued Israel, but instead made it sound as though Israel was a place where all Jews would lead good lives. As "Israelolotry" was the common expression used to describe the way that Israel was talked about in synagogues, youth traveled to Israel, learned songs, and had kibbutz-style summer camps, that gave the image of an Israel without war or poverty. Many of the rabbis spoke about Israel through idealistic viewpoints in sermons, with the Jewish scholar Jack Wertheimer commenting, "(the religious school curriculum) presented an idealized Israel, with little emphasis on teaching about the reality of life in Israel, the religious implications of the establishment of the state, or the value of *aliyah*."²⁸ Likewise, in his reevaluation of Lakeville, Marshall Sklare noted that following the Six-Day War, "Our respondents were shaken by the threat posed by the Crisis, were unambiguously pro-Israel, were tremendously stirred by the victory.... (Yet they) have not shifted in their level of pro-Israel support, and have not evinced any extraordinary eagerness to visit Israel."²⁹ The apathy American Jews and their lack of engagement with "the real" Israel created a sense of betrayal when Israel did not live up to their ideals. The diplomat Abba Eban, who had become a hero during the Six-Day War among American Jews for his speeches at the United Nations, observed in 1985, "Some Diaspora Jews

²⁸ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 29.

²⁹ Ibid.

renounce any analytical role and give blind endorsement to any doctrine or practice that comes out of Israel. They are thus for everything and the opposite – according to the rise and fall of the electoral seesaw.”³⁰ However, actions by Israel that could not be accepted by American Jews would cause a deep divide within synagogues and movements over what it meant to be a Zionist and a supporter of Israel.

Though there had been struggles before with religious pluralism in Israel, the rise of the rightwing parties in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s brought new concern to the relationship between the Reform rabbinate and Israel. Historically, despite having some differences at times, the Reform movement had had a good relationship with the Labor party. Ben-Gurion, Eshkol and Meir had always been supportive of HUC and tried to work as partners with the movement in negotiating with Orthodox parties regarding the Right of Return. With the 1977 election of Likud’s Menachem Begin, many worried for the future of relations. Schindler went to Jerusalem and met with Begin, giving him a favorable review. Schindler stated in 1978 to the CPMAJO, “Dissent ought not and should not be made public because... the result is to give aid and comfort to the enemy and to weaken that Jewish unity which is essential to the security of Israel.”³¹ In 1987, with Likud members seeking to delegitimize the Reform movement, feeling as though the movement was allied with the Labor Party, the CCAR passed a resolution stating that it was a non-partisan organization. However, with the wars and lack of religious pluralism during the 1980’s, it proved impossible and immoral for the Reform rabbinate to remain silent in criticism of Israel. The CCAR passed numerous resolutions during the mid-1980’s calling for greater pluralism and commending those who worked for it, especially ARZA.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

In the mid-1980's the movement reached its boiling point after worshippers at Levy Kelman's (brother of Naamah) Congregation Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem were attacked in an assault instigated by a Sephardi community rabbi on Simchat Torah of 1985. The attack infuriated Mayor Teddy Kollek, and knowing that the congregation had struggled to acquire land for the building of a synagogue, Kollek allocated a special piece of property for a permanent building for Kelman. Around the same time, the grave of Rabbi Morton Berman, a Reform rabbi, in the sacred Mount of Olives cemetery was desecrated by religious extremists who opposed a Reform rabbi being buried there. This act brought strong condemnation by the CCAR, who continued to lobby for further religious pluralism. However, with Yitzhak Shamir up for reelection in 1988, after years of deterioration, he offered to make the Law of Return apply only to Orthodox conversions, in an effort to entice Orthodox parties into joining his coalition. The CCAR released what was possibly their fiercest criticism of the Israeli government in a resolution, blasting those within the Labor and the Likud parties who sought to delegitimize progressive Judaism. Allying itself with the Conservative movement, the Reform movement has spent decades continuing to battle the changes proposed by Shamir, which have not gone into effect. Shamir's actions alienated many in the Diaspora, with the Jewish Federation in Atlanta and Boston threatening to withhold donations to the United Jewish Appeal. Discrimination continued within progressive institutions in Israel, with the Tel Aviv municipality blocking the construction of the Kedem synagogue (now known as Beit Daniel), for over a decade due to Orthodox opposition, finally finishing in 1991. Other synagogues were denied building permits, and venues were threatened that if they allowed non-Orthodox congregations to use their facilities, they would lose their kosher certificates.

Hateful comments against Reform Judaism became the norm within Israeli society and the Israeli government. In 1989, Likud member of Knesset Reuven Rivlin visited a Reform synagogue in New Jersey as a guest of Uri Regev, the head of the Israeli Religious Action Center (IRAC) to see Reform Judaism for himself. Though Rivlin was respectful on the visit, upon returning, he told the press:

As a Jew who does not observe 613 commandments and perhaps not even 13 commandments, I was deeply shocked without any limit. I discovered what kind of worshiping group was in front of me, such that any connection between it and Judaism didn't even approach reality. I felt as if I were in a church. I was completely stunned. This is idol worship and not Judaism. Until now I thought Reform was a stream of Judaism, but after visiting two of their synagogues I am convinced that this is a completely new religion without any connection to Judaism. Total assimilation. Their prayer is like a completely Protestant ceremony.³²

Such slander was not uncommon. The same year, the head of the Or Sameach Yeshiva, Rabbi Ben-Porath, which focused primarily at recruiting assimilated Jews and turning them Orthodox, stated that he would never sit on a dais with liberal rabbis, because, "sitting with the Reform and Conservative movements is worse than sitting with the PLO, because while the PLO wishes to destroy the state, these movements want to destroy Judaism itself."³³ The ad hominem attacks were not the only discrimination, as frequent High Court battles were waged by the Reform movement and IRAC to receive funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. When the High Court ruled that HUC should receive funding in 1995, the College-Institute was given \$66,500, less than half a percent of the ministry's Torah culture allocations funding.³⁴ To send a message of frustration with the lack of progress for Reform rights, Richard Hirsch decided to

³² Ben Sales, "Reuven Rivlin on Reform Judaism in 1989: 'Idol Worship and not Judaism,'" *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 26, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/2014/05/26/life-religion/reuven-rivlin-on-reform-judaism-1989-idol-worship-and-not-judaism>

³³ Ephraim Tabory, "The Hostile Environment" *Reform Judaism in Israel; Progress and Perspectives* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Argov Center of Bar Ilan University, 1998).

³⁴ Ibid.

symbolically run for election for chairman of the WZO in 1992. Traditionally, the chairman was picked by the ruling party of Israel, which at that time was Labor. Hirsch's decision to run angered many in the Labor Party and also worried Reform leaders in America, who feared that the election would cause a further divide between the new Israeli government and the movement. The Labor candidate, Simcha Dinitz, easily won the election, with a vote of 382-101, but Hirsch's high vote total was seen as a major victory by many Reform Jews, that over 20% of delegates wanted a Reform rabbi as the leader of the WZO.³⁵

With the rise of the Likud government, fears over the treatment of Arabs came to the forefront of the minds of many Reform leaders as well. The CCAR at first was pleased with Begin as he made peace with Egypt. The CCAR passed resolutions applauding the peace efforts of Begin and Anwar Sadat, while criticizing President Jimmy Carter for selling fighter jets to Arab countries and his hypocritical statements condemning Israel, while remaining silent on the Egyptians when there was lack of progress in negotiations. However, Begin made a central point of his administration the increase of settlements. In 1980, 52 prominent American Jews, including three past chairmen of the CPMAJO issued a statement in the *New York Times* called "Our Way Is Not Theirs," which harshly condemned settlement activity.³⁶ Over the next several years, a transformation in the minds of American rabbis would take place. Though Israel had been spoken of in idealistic terms, with the Lebanon War, massacre of Sabra and Shatila, images of 400,000 Israelis protesting over the massacre, the arrest of Jonathan Pollard, and Shamir's support only for Orthodox conversions, rabbis felt compelled to speak out against Israel in their sermons. The press also published photographs during the First Intifada of Israeli soldiers, on orders of Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, subduing Palestinian youth protestors with beatings.

³⁵ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 254.

³⁶ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 26.

Schindler stated that the beatings were “an offense to the Jewish spirit that betrays the Zionist dream, we plead with you to bring this madness to an end.”³⁷ The CCAR throughout the 1980’s passed resolutions condemning violence and loss of life on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and urging Israelis to form peace groups, while still stating that the PLO should not be negotiated with. The CCAR even applauded offshoots of Breira and groups such as Interns for Peace, which brought the plight of the Palestinians to attention. In 1988, the CCAR passed a resolution calling the status quo with Palestinians unacceptable, and sent Shamir a letter denouncing the beatings as “beyond the bond of Jewish moral values.”³⁸ The prominent Reform congregant Albert Vorspan wrote for the *New York Times Magazine* regarding Jews who did not speak out against Israeli policies regarding the Arabs, “We have ceased to be champions of social justice and have become cheerleaders for failed Israeli policies.”³⁹

The toxicity of Shamir’s government between the increased discrimination against Reform Jews and the increased, highly publicized Israeli suppression of Palestinians led to American Jews feeling as though they had to choose sides in the 1992 Israeli election. Likewise, Israeli politicians reached out to Diaspora Jews for support based on which movements they found the most sympathy with their policies. These years also caused Zionist organizations within the United States to become partisan, for instance, when President George H.W. Bush ordered in 1992 a settlement freeze, the centrist AIPAC was silent on the issue, while the rightwing ZOA opposed Bush’s position, and the leftist New Jewish Agenda and Americans for Peace Now applauded Bush. One could often tell a person’s political affiliation based off of what Israel organizations they were members of. During the negotiations of the Oslo Accords, there

³⁷ Ibid., 31.

³⁸ Seliktar, *Divided We Stand*, 94.

³⁹ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 31.

was excitement in the air as Jews worldwide believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was close to being solved. The Reform moment and CCAR were overall supportive of the peace process and the efforts made by Rabin, supporting a two-state solution, while still officially stating that Jerusalem must remain the unified capital of Israel. A 1993 poll found that Reform Jews in America were the least supportive of settlement increases, while the most supportive of the Oslo Accords; 90% of Reform Jews supported Oslo, compared to 84% Conservative, 83% unaffiliated and 53% Orthodox.⁴⁰ The ZOA, which had been founded by Reform Jews, had little following by the movement now, as they actively lobbied against Oslo and foreign aid for the Palestinians.

Whereas criticizing Israel became acceptable, being against negotiations with the PLO was now seen as going against the Israeli government. AIPAC asked the CPMAJO to discipline the ZOA for their opposition to the American and Israeli governments. Over the two decades between the Yom Kippur War and Oslo, views among the Reform rabbinate continued to change rapidly regarding Israel, especially regarding the peace process and the place of Reform Judaism within Israel itself. In a sense, the rabbis felt more ownership over Israel as an increasing number had spent a year living there, and therefore, became more comfortable critiquing the country and seeing it from a “warts and all” viewpoint. With the signing of the Oslo Accords, optimism was sweeping through the movement; Israel seemed on the verge of a lasting peace, Jewish ideals were being increasingly upheld by the state, and the Labor government was alienating the progressive movements less than the previous Likud-led administration of Shamir. However, on November 4, 1995, a rightwing extremist’s gun would ring out at a peace rally in Tel Aviv, cutting down Yitzhak Rabin, and with it, the peace process. The following spring, Likud would again come into power with the election of Binyamin Netanyahu, who had actively opposed the

⁴⁰ Seliktar, *Divided We Stand*, 125.

Oslo Accords and the two-state solution, and tensions would again rise with the Reform movement, which now was accustomed to giving criticism of a Jewish country that did not always hold the Reform movement's Jewish values.

Chapter Six:

The Quest for Peace and Equality (1996-Present)

The election of Binyamin Netanyahu coincided in the same year with Eric Yoffie becoming the president of the UAHC. From the beginning, the two were at odds. Whereas Americans had loved Yitzhak Rabin, who had fought for Israel's independence, guided the Israeli army to victory in the Six-Day War, served as the ambassador to the United States, and won the Nobel Peace Prize in his pursuit for peace, the young Netanyahu did not endear himself as greatly to the Diaspora community. The new prime minister was perceived as arrogant, with his lack of commitment to the peace process and his ties to right wing donors in the United States, American Jews were largely put off by Netanyahu. The CCAR passed a resolution calling for Israel not to use gambling money from the United States that threatened peace and caused agitation in Jerusalem, which was an unsubtle reference to Netanyahu's ties with casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson. The issue of religious pluralism became one of the most pressing matters during the Netanyahu government.

Though Israel and American Jews had lobbied hard for the incoming of Soviet Jews to Israel, a problem occurred for the Orthodox. 225,000 of the new Russian immigrants did not have a Jewish mother or maternal grandmother, meaning that according to Orthodox law, they were not Jewish.¹ As the Orthodox rabbinate controlled marriages taking place in Israel, and since they prohibit intermarriage, a crisis was on hand as a large percentage of the new immigrants could not marry within the state. This problem continues today as the daughters of these first immigrants are now in their 20's and 30's and neither they nor their children are

¹ Richard G. Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism, A Personal Mission* (New York: URJ Press, 2011), 103.

considered to be Jewish by the rabbinate. Approximately 80% of the Jews from the Former Soviet Union were intermarried and came from a land where they were discriminated against for being Jewish, to a land where they were treated as second class citizens for being gentiles.² Fed up with the Orthodox religious services for marriages, when most Israelis are not ultra-Orthodox, many Israelis decided to marry abroad instead (Israel recognizes weddings officiated abroad regardless of officiant). The leftwing Meretz Party's Naomi Hazan reported that between 1992 and 1994 1,826 couples went to Cyprus to be married and 2,055 couples married by proxy through mail correspondence with the country of Paraguay.³ Other couples would legally have an Orthodox wedding, but then have their ceremony abroad as they felt alienated by the Orthodox services. Hazan estimated at the time that 15% of those marrying each year used non-Orthodox measures,⁴ while Richard Hirsch put the 2010 estimate at 20%.⁵

Non-Orthodox Judaism began to have other victories within Israel at the time, as HUC won their appeal to be given more money from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Minister of Religious Affairs Shimon Shetreet gave the college a grant of \$214,000 to cover the sums owed to the College up to the end of 1996 after the Reform movement accused him of contempt of court for ceasing allocations. Furious, ultra-Orthodox Member of Knesset Avraham Ravitz of United Torah Judaism complained that Shetreet "performed an inexcusable act by allowing the Reform to squeeze the public coffers. The Reform movement... has much money and it is *chutzpah* that they lay claim to the meager funds of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and steal the lone sheep of the religious public."⁶ The Orthodox establishment had also consistently

² Ibid., 104.

³ Ephraim Tabory, "The Hostile Environment" *Reform Judaism in Israel: Progress and Perspectives* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Argov Center of Bar Ilan University, 1998).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 114.

⁶ Tabory, *The Hostile Environment*.

opposed the election of Reform or Conservative members to municipal religious council, and had ignored court decisions to halt their policy of discrimination. In 1994, the High Court required new elections of the religious councils for Tel Aviv and Jerusalem as Reform and Conservative candidates had been disqualified for their religious affiliations. This decision paved the way for Bruria Barish, the former chairwoman of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) to be elected as the first woman to serve on the Tel Aviv religious council. Another United Torah Judaism member of Knesset, Moshe Gafni, compared Barish's election to a terrorist penetration of an army headquarters; despite the court's decision, Barish's appointment had still not been confirmed by the minister of religious affairs as of 1998.⁷ Similarly, in 1997, the High Court of Justice ruled in favor of Joyce Brenner, a Reform woman, to serve on the religious council in Netanya. The court ordered Eliyahu Suissa, of the ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Shas Party, to sign the requisite documents of appointment. Suissa refused and the papers had to be signed by Netanyahu instead. As a result, by 1998, the Netanya religious council had not held any meetings to prevent Brenner from participating.⁸ These legal challenges came as a result of the IMPJ's 1981 decision to call upon its leaders to take legal action to enable non-Orthodox rabbis to carry out all the activities performed by Orthodox rabbis within Israel. IRAC, funded by ARZA, made these attacks their primary focus and served a barrage of lawsuits against the government.

Feeling new pressure, the Orthodox parties retaliated against the progressive movements with slander. Shas Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri stated that Reform and Conservative Judaism are new religions that are not Jewish. Sephardic Chief Rabbi Eliahu Bakshi Doron

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

declared that Reform Judaism has done more damage to the Jewish people than the Holocaust.⁹ In a 1996 sermon, Doron praised the biblical character Pinchas for killing Zimri for his relationship with a gentile woman. The sermon outraged Eric Yoffie who felt as though Doron was inferring that his followers kill Reform Jews and intermarried couples, and Yoffie called for the attorney general to prosecute Doron. Doron denied the accusations, but did say that intermarriage is the greatest threat to the collapse of the Jewish people.¹⁰ As the battle became more public, the Orthodox parties decided to press Netanyahu to change the Law of Return to not recognize conversions of non-Orthodox rabbis performed abroad.

The Reform movement feared the passage of such a bill now that Netanyahu was in power. Alexander Schindler and Ammiel Hirsch, the executive director of ARZA, warn that the conversion bill and the lack of recognition of Reform rabbis will cause liberal Jews to disengage from Israel. As a result of the controversy, the UJA lost \$20 million in donations from Conservative and Reform Jews, who chose to instead give to organizations that promoted religious pluralism.¹¹ Yoffie stated that though he does not mind when Orthodox Jews do not see him as authentic, it is problematic when Israel, the state of the Jewish people, does not recognize him as a rabbi, when he is the head of the world's largest branch of Judaism. To make up for the lost donations by progressive Jews, Netanyahu solicited Evangelical Christians, which sparked further outrage by and alienation of progressive American Jews. A 1997 poll showed that only 13% of American Reform Jews felt very close to Israel, compared to 62% of Orthodox Jews, and 38% of Reform Jews felt very distant from Israel, versus only 4% for the Orthodox community.¹²

⁹ Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 177.

¹⁰ Ibid., 163.

¹¹ Ibid., 162.

¹² Ibid., 176.

Feeling frustrated by these numbers, the divide between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in Israel, and the discrimination against Russian immigrants, Yoffie proclaimed, “the age of ethnicity is over,” echoing the movement from a century prior, which had focused exclusively on the religious component over the peoplehood aspect of Judaism.¹³ Yoffie stated that instead Judaism must reach out for the spiritual, the transcendent, the holy, and worship of Israel must be replaced by God and mitzvot. Yoffie, a firm Zionist, made this call out of hopes that a focus on religion would further show that Reform and Conservative Judaism were indeed religious movements, despite the claims of the Orthodox.

Meanwhile, the Orthodox parties in Netanyahu’s coalition introduced the Conversion Bill in 1997, which passed its first reading (three readings are required to adopt a bill into law) with 7 abstentions. The bill stated that “the conversion of a person in Israel will be in accordance with the Law of the Torah” and that no conversion will be recognized without the president of the Supreme Rabbinical Court (the chief rabbi of Israel).¹⁴ The leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States recommended that their congregations should ban visits by Knesset members who voted for the bill. Angrily, Member of Knesset Rivlin said that the recommendation showed “contempt for the people of Israel and Israeli democracy.” Rivlin called on the speaker of the Knesset to forbid all Knesset members from taking part in the Reform movement’s events until the leaders of the movement retracted their threat and apologize.¹⁵ Shimon Peres, who had stated that he would support the bill in order to lure Orthodox parties to his coalition should he win election, now in the opposition, stated that “the passage of the bill would mean isolation and division of the Jewish people.” Labor Party

¹³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴ Tabory, *The Hostile Environment*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

chairman Ehud Barak concurred and told the WZO that his party would vote against the bill.¹⁶

The Orthodox rabbinate in America, sensing the vulnerability of Netanyahu, tried to convince the Israeli government to pass bills only recognizing Orthodox Judaism and allowing only Orthodox prayer services at the Western Wall. Tempers were also flaring after an arson attack on a Reform kindergarten in the Jerusalem suburb of Mevasseret Tzion on the eve of the first day of school. Hoping to avert a crisis abroad, as well as at home, as secular Israelis grew increasingly frustrated with the rising power of the Orthodox rabbinate, Netanyahu convinced the Knesset to table the conversion bill.

Seeking an alternative solution to please everybody, Netanyahu established the Ne'eman Commission, which includes leaders from across movements (IRAC's Uri Regev represented the Reform movement), to examine the process of conversions. At first, the CCAR applauded the commission, praising Netanyahu, while condemning Shas in a resolution. However, the Chief Rabbinate refused to accept any of the commission's recommendations of having Orthodox rabbis work alongside progressive rabbis. Yoffie angrily declared that the commission worsened the position of the Reform movement, as the Chief Rabbinate rejected the proposals, still controlled conversions, created a false illusion that they were making compromises, and used the opportunity as a soapbox to degrade Reform Judaism. He and many other Reform rabbis wanted the movement to withdraw from the commission. Richard Hirsch disagreed with Yoffie though, arguing that had the Reform movement pulled out of the commission, it would have shown an unwillingness to participate on the part of Reform Jews, and the Orthodox parties would have exploited the scenario to pass the bill and invalidate progressive conversions.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Netanyahu's government seemed to stir chaos since its beginning. Whereas Rabin was loved and respect throughout the world, including by many Arab leaders who envisioned their countries recognizing Israel, Netanyahu was disdained by Jews and non-Jews alike. In addition to the rising power of the Orthodox rabbinate, who Netanyahu was trying desperately to appease, the masses were also frustrated by the derailment of the peace process and essential nullification of the Oslo Accords. In September 1997, Schindler and Yoffie were among forty American Jewish leaders to sign an open letter in the *New York Times* to Secretary of State Madeline Albright, which encouraged her to pressure Netanyahu to follow the course of Oslo and make peace with Yasser Arafat. At this time, a 1998 national survey of American Jews found that 28% of people aged 60 and over felt a very close connection to Israel, with 5% feeling very distant, while 23% of those under 40 felt close to Israel and 11% distant. Lower income Jews were also more closely connected to Israel than higher income Jews. Jews married to other Jews felt drastically more connected to Israel (23% to 13%) with intermarried Jews feeling greater numbers of emotional distance (54%) to Israel than inmarried Jews (21%). Younger, higher income, and intermarried Jews are all more typically either unaffiliated or affiliated with progressive movements of Judaism, whereas inmarried, lower income, and older Jews are more representative of Orthodoxy.¹⁷ A *Los Angeles Times* poll from the same year showed that 39% of Reform Jews who had connection with Israel had friends and family in Israel, which was lower than the percentage for the same question for Conservative and Orthodox Jews. During the Netanyahu years, more Orthodox observers rated relations between American Israeli Jews as excellent than Reform.¹⁸ Where the poll did find a majority, was that 81.3% of American Jews

¹⁷ Seliktar, *Divided We Stand*, 174.

¹⁸ Ibid.

supported recognition of Reform and Conservative rabbis in Israel.¹⁹ With growing disillusionment at home and abroad, Netanyahu's government collapsed.

The Israeli public elected the most decorated soldier in the history of Israel, Ehud Barak of the Labor Party as their new prime minister in 1999. Barak ran on the platform that he would restore Rabin's work and would bring peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the neighboring countries. The CCAR passed a resolution enthusiastically congratulating Barak on his victory, as they felt that once again, they would have a partner who would advocate for both religious pluralism and peace. However, in order to secure his coalition, Barak included Shas and United Torah Judaism within his government. The leader of United Torah Judaism, Meir Porush, called on Israel to stop soliciting funds from the "cults" of Reform and Conservative Judaism, which use their money to take people away from Judaism. Likewise, Interior Minister Haim Ramon refused to help advance the upbuilding of progressive movements. In May 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that women have the right to pray at the Western Wall, which was challenged by Shas and United Torah Judaism, who tried to push legislation through the Knesset to override the decision. Over the summer, arson attacks on Reform and Conservative synagogues brought to mind images of Kristallnacht for many. Fifty thousand Israelis rallied in protest of the assault on democracy in the summer of 1999 angered by the impositions of the Orthodox parties and their lack of respect for the rulings of the court. Among them were authors Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and David Grossman, who rallied for Reform Judaism, saying that progressive Judaism has potential for "a new dynamic Israeli Judaism which will renew our spiritual and cultural landscape." A.B. Yehoshua added, "To stand with the Reform and Conservative movements is to

¹⁹ Ibid., 178.

defend ourselves.”²⁰ At the time, a full two-thirds of Israeli Jews supported granting Conservative and Reform movements equal status with the Orthodox.²¹ The Reform movement came across to many as a more inclusive form of Judaism that represented their values. The new HUC renovated campus finally opened, with its café receiving a certification of *kosher m’had’rin min han’had’rin*, the highest level of kosher certification, dismissing many false preconceptions of the rejection of Jewish traditions by the movement.²² At the dedication, occurring right as the Second Intifada was beginning, Richard Hirsch made clear that all religions and Jewish movements would be allowed to visit the campus. Leading up to this dedication, the CCAR gathered again in Pittsburgh, as they had 114 years earlier. This time, they wrote a new platform, which included the following words:

We are committed to (*Medinat Yisrael*), the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in (*Eretz Yisrael*), the land of Israel, and encourage (*aliyah*), immigration to Israel.

We are committed to a vision of the State of Israel that promotes full civil, human and religious rights for all its inhabitants and that strives for a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors.

We are committed to promoting and strengthening Progressive Judaism in Israel, which will enrich the spiritual life of the Jewish state and its people.

We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities. As we urge Jews who reside outside Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language and to make periodic visits to Israel in order to study and to deepen their relationship to the Land and its people, so do we affirm that Israeli Jews have much to learn from the religious life of Diaspora Jewish communities.²³

²⁰ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 174.

²¹ Asher Arian and Ayala Keissar-Sugarman, “A Portrait of Israeli Jews; Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2000,” The Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute and for the AVI CHAI – Israel Foundation, 7.

²² Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 147.

²³ Pittsburgh 1999, <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/>.

This platform showed the progress made by the Reform rabbinate on the issue of Zionism. They were secure enough in themselves living in the Diaspora to state the importance of having a strong Diaspora, while still encouraging those who want to move to Israel. However, they were able to reaffirm their commitment towards Israel, their love, support and investment spiritually in the Land, State and People. This platform summarized a larger one passed two years earlier in Miami that was solely dedicated to speaking of the Reform rabbinate's commitment and obligation to loving and supporting Israel. Though the previous few years had been rocky in its relationship over the lack of religious pluralism and the derailing of the peace process, the Reform rabbinate firmly came out and said that Israel is part of our lives, and we cannot separate it when it is convenient for us. No matter the challenges, the Reform rabbinate stands with Israel.

With the outbreak of further violence and a lack of progress with the ultra-Orthodox parties, Barak's government collapsed less than two years into his term. With the fall of Barak, the Likud Party reemerged victorious, with Ariel Sharon being elected prime minister. Sharon, was notorious internationally for his role in the massacres of Sabra and Shatila and also the 1953 Kibya massacre, and had walked onto the Temple Mount with his security, sparking the Second Intifada. Though the CCAR blamed the Palestinians for the violence, tensions once again ran high between the mostly dovish Reform rabbis and the new hawkish Israeli government. The CCAR also called for tourism to Israel despite the violence, however, in June 2001, Eric Yoffie made the controversial decision to cancel all summer youth trips. Many were outraged, feeling as though the Reform movement had abandoned Israel at one of its times of greatest need and that the Reform movement wants to be integrated within Israel only when it is not dangerous. Yoffie

responded by saying, “We do not make political statements with other people’s children.”²⁴

Tensions ran high as the new interior minister, Eli Yishai of the Shas Party, did away with listing religion on identity cards, as the Supreme Court had ruled that he had to put Jews who identified as Reform and Conservative as Jews religiously on the identity cards. Rather than acknowledge Reform Jews as Jews, Yishai removed the category. Yoffie further found himself at odds with the Sharon administration when he called for a settlement freeze and endorsed George Bush’s choice for ambassador to Israel, an Orthodox Jew named Daniel Kurtzer who had supported the Oslo Accords. The ZOA, on the other hand, strongly opposed Kurtzer’s nomination. The Reform movement also made the decision to not take part in measures that would divide Jews and Palestinians, but instead do research as to why the two sides were fighting and the effect of settlements on Palestinians. Many perceived this stance as an attempt to be neutral, and for Jews to be neutral on issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict, meant, in the eyes of masses, that the Reform movement was not backing Israel and they were breaking the unity of the Jewish people in America on the topic.

In 2004, Rabbi Arik Ascherman, an Israeli Reform rabbi, was arrested for protesting the demolishing of Palestinian homes as part of a rally organized by Rabbis for Human Rights. The CCAR passed resolutions calling for the charges against Ascherman to be dropped and condemning the discriminatory practices of Israel in demolishing Arab homes, only to allow permits for Jewish homes to be built in their place. However, the relationship between Sharon and the Reform movement improved drastically though with his about-face decision to disengage from Gaza. A few months prior to the disengagement, the *New York Times* ran a full page advertisement that had been taken out by the Reform movement saying that they supported

²⁴ Gil Troy, *Why I am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Problems of Today* (Montreal: Bronfman Jewish Education Centre, 2002), 131.

disengagement. AIPAC also openly supported the disengagement, while the ZOA opposed the plan, with their leader, Morton Klein, stating that the disengagement plan was to “throw Jews out of their home and give a terrorist regime more land.”²⁵ With the plan in the works, the CCAR passed a new resolution proclaiming it the duty of American Jews to visit Israel to help the country economically, and encouraging all CCAR rabbis to lead biannual congregational trips to Israel. The following year, after Sharon suffered a stroke that would leave him in a permanent vegetative state, the CCAR passed resolutions wishing him well and applauding his decision to withdraw from Gaza. Sharon’s legacy would always be mixed with the Reform movement; upon his death in January 2014, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, Yoffie’s successor as head of the Union for Reform Judaism (the new name for the UAHC, hereon known as URJ), lamented the death and praised Sharon’s years of distinguished military service and peace efforts in dismantling the settlements in Gaza that he had once helped construct. However, though the statement largely celebrated Sharon’s life and mourned his passing, Jacobs added, “His military prowess did not always serve him well. His decision, as Israel’s Minister of Defense, to promote the 1982 war in Lebanon, and his actions that played a role in the deaths of residents of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp by Lebanese phalangists, were terribly misguided.”²⁶

Sharon’s incapacitation led to the premiership of Ehud Olmert, the former Jerusalem mayor who had unseated Teddy Kollek, an ally to the Reform movement. Olmert’s term as prime minister was largely considered disastrous. The peace process was once again derailed with the rise of Hamas in Gaza, a second, poorly managed war took place in the summer of 2006, Israeli soldiers Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev were kidnapped

²⁵ Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 39.

²⁶ Reform Movement Mourns the Death of Ariel Sharon, Union for Reform Judaism, last modified January 11, 2014, http://urj.org/about/union/pr/2014/?syspage=article&item_id=109820.

(Goldwasser and Regev were killed, with their bodies exchanged for five high profile terrorists during Olmert's administration, and Shalit was exchanged alive in 2011 for 1027 prisoners), and a war in Gaza that killed 1400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis. While prime minister, the president of Israel, Moshe Katsav, refused to acknowledge Yoffie as a rabbi given that he was Reform, leading to Yoffie canceling his meeting with Katsav. Katsav would later be forced out of office and convicted of rape charges, for which he is currently serving prison time, and was replaced by ally of the Reform movement, Shimon Peres. Olmert's government collapsed due to its mismanagement, and he would later be convicted of corruption and sentenced to six years in prison. Following Olmert's downfall, Netanyahu rose to power again, putting the relationship between Israel and the Reform rabbinate in greater jeopardy.

Given the tension, many cited a distancing in the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel. Richard Hirsch laid out the following five reasons as to this disconnect:

1. More news accessibility and media allowed American Jews to see Israel for its flaws, rather than as a utopian society, as it had been perceived during the 1970's.
2. Israel's existence was no longer threatened as it had been in 1948, 1967 and 1973, and therefore more American Jews are apathetic or willing to reject Israeli policy. A study by Steven M. Cohen reported that nearly 50% of American Jews under 35 would not see the destruction of Israel as a personal tragedy.
3. With the Holocaust being a relic of the past and no pressing emergency regarding Ethiopian, North African, and Soviet Jews, the need to mobilize and support Israel politically and financially as an emergency was not prevalent.
4. The Arab-Israeli conflict with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement taking place on college campuses, along with UN biases and unpopular Israeli policies create further disconnect with Diaspora Jews, as too much time has elapsed for young people to remember the origins of the conflict.

5. The economic crisis of 2008-2009 made visiting Israeli and supporting Israel financially less feasible.²⁷

Another source of growing disconnect had largely to do with the deterioration of relations between Jewish and Christian leaders in the United States. Though the Reform movement had always supported interfaith dialogue, since 1967, liberal Christian groups had frequently protested military action by the Israeli government. Jewish leaders charged that these liberal Christians fail to recognize the immoral nature of the desire to destroy Israel and see the creation of Israel as a political event, unable to see Judaism as a people. For many of these Christians, Judaism is a religion, so for a Jew to support policies of Israel solely because it is a state of predominately Jews, would be as illogical as a Catholic supporting the policies of Ecuador simply because most people in that country belong to the Catholic faith. The tension rose in 2014, when, against the urging of Jacobs, the Presbyterian Church in the United States decided by a narrow vote to pass a resolution supporting the BDS movement. On the other hand, rightwing Christians have stood solidly in support of Israel, yet it is for theological reasons related to the return of Jesus, which many Jews find offensive. On nearly every other issue, such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and partisan politics, most Reform Jews share little in common with rightwing Christians. With the growing rate of intermarriage, and a desire to participate in interfaith work, being outspokenly in support of the policies of the Israeli government became increasingly more difficult during wartimes.

With a perceived crisis in Diaspora-Israel relations at hand, Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman wrote in 2007, “We are in the midst of a massive shift in attitudes towards Israel, propelled forward by the process of cohort replacement, where maturing younger cohorts that are

²⁷ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 44-46.

the least Israel-engaged are replacing older cohorts that are the most Israel-engaged.”²⁸ Cohen and Kelman attributed these findings to the fading memory of Israel’s struggle for existence and rising intermarriage rates, and they predicted a long-term and ongoing decline in Israel attachment. In a sense, Jews were becoming a normal Diaspora, like any other group, such as Irish-Americans, French-Americans, and others who were no longer feeling an allegiance to the countries of their heritage. However, social scientist Theodore Sasson interpreted the trends of American Jews and relation to Israel differently. Sasson claims that the evidence shows that American Jews are not actually distancing themselves from Israel, but rather they are more likely to advocate politically on behalf of their own personal views and target their Israel-bound donations to causes that they care about personally. Younger Jews always were less emotionally attached to Israel, but the evidence shows that connection with Israel is not decreasing across generations, but instead, increasing over the course of life.²⁹ In the United States, in 2010 there were 774 American Jewish organizations that transfer funds to Israel.³⁰ The donations by decade for such organizations by American Jews have looked as follows:

Donations to Israeli Organizations by Year ³¹				
Year	Jewish Agency	Direct donations to Israeli Non-Governmental Organization’s (NGO)	Total amount	Total amount in 2010 dollars
1975	223 million	60 million	283 million	1.147 million
1985	261 million	200 million	461 million	934 million
1994	224 million	550 million	774 million	1.139 billion
2007	330 million	1.729 billion	2.059 billion	2.165 billion
2010	169 million	1.281 billion	1.450 billion	1.45 billion

²⁸ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 69.

³¹ Ibid., 68.

As the data shows, the amount of donations to Israeli causes, with inflation taken into account, is dramatically higher in the recent years (the 2010 decrease from 2007 can be explained by means of the severe economic recession of 2009, yet was still higher than previous decades). What is seen is that donations once were given predominately to the Jewish Agency over NGO's, whereas today, significantly more money is given to NGO's than the Jewish Agency. The difference of organizations supported can be seen across movements, as Orthodox Jews tended to be the primary donors to organizations that supported settlement activities, while Reform donors gave more to peace-creating organizations.³² Under Netanyahu, the Knesset proposed laws restricting the civil liberties and funding of human rights NGO's, which drew outrage from the Reform movement, who said that investigating only leftwing NGO's was undemocratic.

The years 2008-2010 saw a rise in leftwing activity among Reform rabbis and the movement in regards to Israel. Netanyahu's coming to power once more was part of the reason for the spark of leftwing activism, as were the two wars that Israel fought in 2006 and 2008/2009. At this same time though, the Occupy Social Protest gathered steam in the United States and Barack Obama's 2008 campaign based off of hope and change motivated Jews to become activist in leftist organizations. In 2008, J Street came to the attention of the American Jewish community. The organization bore a strong resemblance to Breira. It held similar position and also it chose a unique name to show that it was representing a new voice for American Jews interacting with Israel. Breira, meaning "Alternative" in Hebrew, had been named to show that there was an alternative path for Israel and American Jews in their support of the Jewish State. Likewise, J Street chose the name of the letter that is not featured in the Washington DC street system (there is an H Street, followed by I Street, then a K Street, J is skipped). The name

³² Ibid., 79.

represented that J Street was an organization that was off the grid and different than the mainstream voices in Washington. Their name though also implied that they were a lobby-based organization focused in the nation's capital, with the J also standing for Jewish, for they were formed as a Jewish organization, which desired Israel to represent Jewish values. Another similarity between the two organizations was that Arnold Jacob Wolf, in the final year of his life, was pivotal in its founding. J Street reflected the view of Obama, who said that peace between the Israelis and Palestinians would be a key part of his foreign policy strategy as president. Obama's views on the Arab-Israeli conflict had perhaps been shaped in 1996, when he was a candidate for the state senate in Illinois, and one of his earliest and most prominent supporters was Wolf. Wolf's synagogue, KAM Isaiah Israel was across the street from Obama's home, and Obama frequently asked Wolf about Israel while developing his own viewpoints. When Obama ran for president, Jews were twice as likely to vote for him as other white American voters.³³ With Obama's popularity peaking, J Street found momentum in attracting supporters. Its first move was forming a rabbinical advisory committee, which it had taken from the dissolved grassroots organization of similar focus, Brit Tzedek.

J Street quickly, like Breira, became one of the most controversial organizations in the American Jewish world. Whereas they stated that they were a pro-Israel, pro-peace organization, their constant criticism of the Israeli government led many in doubt. J Street's founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, stated that it was the right of Americans to have a say over foreign policy as it relates to Israel. In particular, for American Jews, who have emotional investment in Israel and deal with the effects of Israel's decisions, American Jews should openly express their views on Israel. An example of this criticism came in December 2008, during the Gaza War, when J Street

³³ Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, LLC, 2012), 84.

released a statement saying, “Real friends of Israel recognize that... only diplomacy and negotiations can end rockets and terror.”³⁴ The J Street statement went further in giving a balanced understanding of the grievances of both the Israelis and people of Gaza and said that both sides had committed wrongs. Eric Yoffie responded angrily in an article in the *Forward*, in which he denounced J Street:

These words are deeply distressing because they are morally deficient, profoundly out of touch with Jewish sentiment and also appallingly naïve. A cease-fire instituted by Hamas would be welcome, and Israel would be quick to respond. A cease-fire imposed on Israel would allow Hamas to escape the consequences of its actions yet again and would lead in short order to the renewal of its campaign of terror. Hamas, it should be noted, is not a government; it is a terrorist gang. And as long as the thugs of Hamas can act with impunity, no Israeli government of the right or the left will agree to a two-state solution or any other kind of peace. Doves take note: To be a dove of influence, you must be a realist, firm in your principles but shorn of all illusions.³⁵

J Street responded with its own counterattack against Yoffie, which alienated it from many Reform rabbis, as he was still the leader of the movement. J Street also got into a spat with Yoffie when they supported the findings of the Goldstone Commission on the war and when they discouraged the United States from using its veto on a resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the United Nations. In the latter case, J Street stated, “We cannot support a US veto of a resolution that closely tracks long-standing American policy and that appropriately condemns Israeli settlement policy.”³⁶ The controversy of the organization led to some Reform communities banning J Street from their synagogues, and one synagogue in Newton, Massachusetts cancelled a lecture by Ben-Ami after great pressure on the rabbi by prominent

³⁴ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 47.

³⁵ Eric Yoffie, “On Gaza, Sense and Centrism,” *Forward*, December 31, 2008, <http://forward.com/articles/14847/on-gaza-sense-and-centrism/>.

³⁶ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 48.

board members.³⁷ However, Yoffie would later speak at the 2009 J Street Policy Conference, and applaud J Street's response in later wars, in which J Street expressed sorrow over the loss of Palestinian lives, while supporting Israel's defense.³⁸ By this point, the Reform movement had joined J Street in lobbying for Jerusalem to be the capital of two states, overturning its longstanding position of supporting an undivided Jerusalem.

A crucial move by J Street in establishing itself was being a voice against war with Iran, which appealed to many liberal Jews, tired of American troops fighting in the Middle East. At the same time, AIPAC urged President Obama to define red lines of what should trigger an attack on Iran. Many J Street supporters began to define the organization as "the left-wing version of AIPAC," and to the predominately leftwing Reform movement, it indicated to them that their voice belonged within J Street. Similarly, media helped play a role in the rapid growth of J Street. Between 2009 and 2011, AIPAC was mentioned the most by media columns among US-Israel political organizations, with J Street coming in second and the ZOA a distant third.³⁹ The two most read online newspapers regarding Israel by American Jews are the rightwing *Jerusalem Post* and the leftwing *Haaretz*. In the *Jerusalem Post*, most mentions of AIPAC were positive or neutral, while most mentions of J Street were neutral or negative. In comparison, *Haaretz* mostly wrote about AIPAC in either a negative or neutral light, and J Street in a positive or neutral light.⁴⁰ For the Reform movement in particular, which is the most leftwing of all the movements, *Haaretz*'s unofficial endorsement of J Street and denouncement of AIPAC, and the *Jerusalem Post*'s opposite standing, made readers of these journals who already held leftwing positions more inclined to support J Street.

³⁷ Ibid., 51.

³⁸ Ibid., 47.

³⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55.

Rabbinical students also found themselves more likely to agree with the positions of J Street. The younger generation, which had grown up during the time of the Oslo Accords and the Second Intifada felt deeply connected to the topic of peace of with the Palestinians, J Street's main focus, and also had felt empowered with the victory of President Obama. In the curriculum for HUC students, they read Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, which focuses on seeing the humanity within every person rather than seeing others as a means to an end. During the year in Israel, HUC students also had the option, and by many were encouraged, to miss days of class to go with a group called Encounter to the West Bank and live with a Palestinian family for a couple days. The organization, whose board of directors includes Rabbi Marion Lev-Cohen of the prominent Reform Central Synagogue in New York, encourages students to see the conflict through the eyes of the Palestinians in hopes that mutual understanding will encourage peace. The students in seminary at the time of J Street's rise also experienced living in Israel during the time of the Rotem Bill, which sought to ban progressive converts from immigrating to Israel under the Law of Return. The bill drew condemnation from the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League and AIPAC, leading as had happened in years prior, more Jews to donate to partisan organizations, in the case of Reform Jews, ones that opposed the administration of the time. Yoffie stated regarding the bill, "If Reform rabbis in Israel are not rabbis and their conversions are not conversions that means that our Judaism is not Judaism and that we are second class citizens."⁴¹ At the same time, Danny Danon, a Knesset member of Netanyahu's rightwing Likud party, held an inquiry about J Street and summoned Ben-Ami to the Knesset. After asking Ben-Ami many questions, Danon read a prewritten statement of the "panel's findings" (this drew outrage from others on the panel who had not discussed their views whatsoever), declaring J Street to be an anti-Israel organization. Danon's opinion only reaffirmed

⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

the views of the opponents of J Street, while others, disgusted by the way that the panel was conducted, saw J Street's opposition to Netanyahu as a noble cause. Steven M. Cohen conducted a survey of students and alumni of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). 80% of the rabbis ordained between 1980 and 1994 viewed AIPAC favorably, and 32% viewed J Street favorably. 64% of rabbis ordained between 1995 and 2011 viewed AIPAC favorably and 54% had favorable opinions of J Street. However, among current students, 42% supported AIPAC and 58% supported J Street.⁴² As progressive Jews, these numbers would likely be similar, if not higher for support of J Street among HUC students, given opinion polls relating to the movement's views on Israel. J Street engaged rabbinical students from its beginning in programing, and in recent years, AIPAC has started a fellowship for rabbinical students. The Leffel Fellowship, named for its donor, Michael Leffel, that takes the students to Israel for a week of meeting with Israeli leaders and then to Washington DC for their policy conference and pairs them with rabbinic mentors, who are rabbis in the field that support AIPAC. In 2014, 13 of the 27 Leffel Fellows were students of HUC.⁴³ At present the other 14 students are from JTS and the Ziegler School at American Jewish University, both from the Conservative movement; AIPAC plans to expand the fellowship to include Modern Orthodox students, while not increasing or decreasing the numbers of the other movements, to have a roughly equal distribution of representation between the three largest branches of American Judaism.

In looking at major American-Israel political lobby organizations, the spectrum is often considered Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) on the far left, J Street on the left, AIPAC as a centrist organization, and ZOA on the far right. It is important to note that some of these organizations

⁴² Ibid., 56.

⁴³ Jeremy Pappas, email message to author, November 4, 2014.

have different goals, so, for instance, one can be a member of J Street and AIPAC or AIPAC and the ZOA. AIPAC focuses on a legislative approach to strengthening the US-Israel relationship through bills related to joint cooperation in development, preventing a nuclear Iran, and foreign aid, while remaining bipartisan and not ranking or endorsing candidates. J Street on the other hand, does rank and endorse candidates for public office based off their alliance with the organization's views and their primary focus is a prescriptive approach to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many within the Reform rabbinate, and American Jewish community, have been under the misconception that one must choose one of the above-mentioned organizations. URJ President Rick Jacobs spoke in 2014 at the AIPAC Policy Conference (approximately 25% of the over 300 rabbis present were Reform⁴⁴) and afterwards sent an email to the movement speaking of his experience at the conference, but then reassuring all that he planned to speak at the J Street conference as well, adding to the perception that the two organizations ran counter to each other. On AIPAC's rabbinic advisory council, 11 of the 51 rabbis were affiliated with the Reform movement.⁴⁵ In comparison, over half, 14 out of 24 members of J Street's executive cabinet of rabbis were from the Reform movement, including Richard Levy, an HUC professor and leader in Breira.⁴⁶ On the J Street website, many more rabbis, cantors and rabbinical and cantorial students are listed as part of the rabbinic cabinet of J Street, though some stated that their names were added for signing up on J Street's email list. In total, it has been reported that over 700 rabbis and cantors make up the totality of J Street's rabbinic cabinet.⁴⁷

The ZOA did not have a rabbinic cabinet on their website, and when asking an employee, the response was that they were unaware of a rabbinic cabinet. Despite being founded by those in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rabbinic Cabinet, J Street, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://jstreet.org/supporters/rabbinic-cabinet>.

⁴⁷ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 43.

the Reform movement in 1897, the ZOA is a shadow of its former dominant self and has alienated itself in a large degree from the Reform movement. The ZOA runs against ARZA in the WZO elections, and its platform supports the building of settlements in the West Bank, which goes counter to the position of the Reform movement. The organization also sharply criticized the election of Rick Jacobs as the president of the URJ for having sat on the J Street rabbinic cabinet and for having protested Israeli demolishing of Arab homes in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Other organizations and some within the Reform movement also expressed reservations regarding Jacobs' election for the same reasons. In March of 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited the United States, and on the invitation of House Republicans, spoke before Congress denouncing President Obama's position on diplomacy regarding Iran's nuclear program. Jacobs harshly criticized the visit and urged Netanyahu to cancel his speech, as a result, the ZOA condemned Jacobs and the URJ.

JVP represents an extreme position on the left. Founded in 1996, JVP gained prominence at the same time as J Street, with the empowering of the left and the Occupy movement in the United States. Capitalizing on Obama's campaign, the organization posted pictures of a Palestinian girl's face, artistically painted colors with the word "HOPE" appearing at the bottom of the picture, replicating Obama's iconic campaign poster. JVP though does not define itself as a pro-Israel organization, criticizes Israel's creation, supports the BDS movement, and does not openly endorse a two-state solution, leaving the option for a singular, binational state on the table. JVP is generally considered a fringe movement, and there is not tremendous involvement by mainstream Jewish leaders in the organization. The rabbinic council had 44 rabbis, 5 of whom

were ordained at HUC and are affiliated with the Reform movement.⁴⁸ Many of those on the council were from rabbinical schools that lack recognition from the main movements within the American Jewish community. At the time that this information was gathered, Leonard Beerman was among the five listed as Reform rabbis on the rabbinical council of JVP. Beerman was the founder of the Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles, named for the pacifist, non-Zionist German rabbi. His synagogue is located down the street from the Stephen S. Wise Temple, founded by Isaiah Zeldin, the protégé of Stephen S. Wise, which has established itself as one of the foremost Zionist synagogues in the nation. Beerman fought in Israel's War of Independence, but was later disillusioned by what he saw as Israel's abuses of the Palestinians. Beerman became a leader in denouncing Israel, and controversially met with Yasser Arafat in 1983, prior to Arafat's recognition of Israel's right to exist. This meeting drew outrage, and Beerman's sermons routinely blasted the positions of Israel. As rabbi emeritus of Leo Baeck Temple, Beerman sparked outrage when on Yom Kippur in 2012 the 91-year-old compared those who sit by idly as Israel kills Palestinians to those who did not alert the authorities when they knew that Jerry Sandusky of Pennsylvania State University was raping children. Beerman died while this thesis was being written in December 2014. However, his synagogue juxtaposed with Stephen S. Wise Temple represented the polarization that Israel could have at times within the Reform movement.

As JVP and the ZOA represent extreme positions in regards to Israel, it is of little surprise that the Reform movement, as the largest movement in America, has little involvement with either. AIPAC is the most established organization of the four listed and represents a moderate viewpoint of supporting Israel and endorsing a two-state solution. As it is bipartisan and has views reflective of both the US and Israeli governments, its rabbinical council likely

⁴⁸ Rabbinical Council, Jewish Voice For Peace, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/jvps-new-rabbinic-council-4>.

contains more diversity among movements than the other organizations, which could suggest why its numbers for Reform rabbis are smaller than J Street's, so that the organization remains non-partisan in terms of religious movements as well. However, in noting the high percentage of J Street rabbinic council members who are Reform and J Street's growing popularity within the movement, the reason for its popularity can be traced back in history. J Street's position is like that of Breira's, but it came at a more appropriate time. Breira tried to establish itself within years of the Six-Day War and in the same year as the Yom Kippur War when dissent for Israel's positions was at an all-time low, and concern for Israel's survival was at its peak. At the same time, Breira urged a two-state solution and negotiations with the PLO while the PLO was still refusing to recognize Israel's right to exist and routinely launching terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. J Street came into being 20 years after the PLO announced its recognition of Israel and after widespread acceptance by all recognized parties for a two-state solution. In 2008, the Arab countries did not represent an existential threat to Israel and American Jews had grown tired of two American wars in the Middle East and the Intifada, claiming thousands of American and Jewish lives. They were ready to try Obama's approach of diplomacy over the Bush Doctrine. J Street and Breira had little difference, but the main difference was timing; J Street chose the best time in history to succeed with its message, while Breira chose the worst. J Street presented itself as an organization that loves Israel, yet must criticize it in order for the country to have a strong future, the platform for Cultural Zionism, that attracted so many in the Reform movement, as it aligned with the prophetic message.

Though J Street has become a major part of the Reform movement's relationship with Zionism and Israel, it is still not accepted by many within the American Jewish community. On April 30, 2014, the CPMAJO voted to reject J Street's application to join the conference, even

though the ZOA, AIPAC, and even American Friends of Likud, are all members, along with ARZA, the URJ and the CCAR. Jacobs was furious and threatened to have the URJ quit the CPMAJO, thereby delegitimizing the body as a whole as it would lack the largest lay Jewish organization in the United States. Yoffie also, despite his early quarrels with J Street, strongly opposed the vote, writing an article in *Haaretz* two days prior to the decision titled “J Street is Part of the American Jewish Family.” Indeed, as had been in previous generations, the voice within the American Jewish world and the Reform rabbinate lacked unity. Now, however, the majority of Reform rabbis would call themselves Zionism, but their approaches to how to advocate for Israel changed and created division within their communities, with lay people leaving or joining synagogues based off of the rabbi’s affiliation with Israel-related organizations.

Conclusion:

The Prophetic Vision The Future of the Reform Rabbinate-Israeli Relationship

As I write the conclusion of this thesis, the Israeli elections have just finished. Netanyahu and the rightwing parties seem to have defeated the leftwing Zionist Camp Party, which is a merged party of the Labor Party and the center-left party Hatnua, after a heated race. Coalition talks are still in progress, but if a far right coalition is formed with ultra-Orthodox parties, it will play a large role in the future of the relations between the Reform rabbinate and Israel. In the past couple of weeks, late February of 2015 and early March, Netanyahu's opposition to President Obama's diplomatic approach to negotiating with Iran over their nuclear program divided Congress. He also stated in the day prior to the elections that a Palestinian state would not come into being as long as he was prime minister. 47 Republican senators wrote to Iran with the aim of torpedoing the president's efforts, which was widely viewed as an act backed by Netanyahu. With Rick Jacobs' and Obama's denouncement of Netanyahu's speech to Congress, Netanyahu became seen as the darling of the Republican Party. With the division on Iran and the growing admiration of the Republicans for Netanyahu, and the Democrats' growing disdain for him, many are starting to see Israel as a growingly partisan issue.

Within Israel, support for progressive Judaism has also become a partisan issue; as more leftwing parties and leaders have indicated support for recognition of progressive rabbis. In 2012, the Israel Supreme Court ruled that Israel had to pay Reform and Conservative rabbis as they would Orthodox rabbis; however, the funding came from the Culture and Sports Ministry as the Religious Affairs Ministry refused to allocate money from their budget. Reform rabbis are still not permitted to officiate weddings in Israel, and their conversions are still not recognized. A

growing movement in Israel is advocating for the legalization of civil marriage. The center-right party Kulanu, as well as most left parties have advocated for civil marriage, with Hatnua leader and second on the Zionist Camp list, Tzipi Livni officiating over an unrecognized same-sex marriage. The young, 29-year-old, Israeli social activist and leader, Stav Shaffir, who appears fourth on the Zionist Camp list has donned a tallit and marched with Women of the Wall, protesting the lack of religious pluralism in Israel. The charismatic leader of the center-left party Yesh Atid, Yair Lapid, has also been an outspoken advocate for progressive Judaism. Lapid's party finished with the second most seats in the election of 2013 with 19 in the party's first campaign, running on the platform of having ultra-Orthodox Jews serve in the military and defunding the excessive spending on Orthodox yeshivas. Lapid agreed only to join Netanyahu's coalition on the condition that no ultra-Orthodox parties, such as Shas and United Torah Judaism, be included in the government. Lapid, who has frequented the Reform synagogue, Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv, stated in 2006, "All of us secular Jews are really Reform Jews – except we don't know it."¹ Rabbi Gilad Kariv, the executive director of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, while not winning a seat in the Knesset, was ranked 28th on the Labor Party's 2013 list and is ranked 32nd on the Zionist Camp list.

Had the leftwing parties win in the election, there may be a rekindling of the previously strong relationship between the Israeli government and the Reform rabbinate. It is likely that Reform rabbis will not disengage with Israel, but rather, become more involved in organizations like IRAC and J Street, which express dissent from the policies of the Israeli government. In the day prior to the election, Netanyahu drew in rightwing voters by changing his position, saying that he would prevent a two-state solution as prime minister. He also used racism in a last minute

¹ Richard G. Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion: Reform Zionism, A Personal Mission* (New York: URJ Press, 2011), 175.

video, by saying that the leftwing was bussing in Arabs to vote in the election, and that he needed everyone to come out and vote for Likud to prevent the Arabs from having too much power in the government. These statements will cause tremendous distance between the new Israeli government and the Obama administration, the international community, as well as the leaders of the Reform movement. Movement president, Rick Jacobs, released a statement after Netanyahu's surprise victory that said, "The final hours of the campaign - including the Prime Minister's renunciation of his commitment to a two-state solution as well as his naked appeal to his hard-right bases' fears rather than their hopes - were disheartening. Israel deserves better, especially from a Prime Minister who holds himself out as the leader of entire Jewish people.... Our Movement is, and remains, committed to democracy, to peace, and to pluralism. We will reach out to the new government, partnering where possible, challenging where necessary."² With Netanyahu's rejection of the two-state solution (he backtracked on this following his victory, making all unsure of his true position), the challenging of the Reform rabbinate will increase; many Reform rabbis will likely speak out in support of UN resolutions condemning Israel and also be in favor of the Palestinian unilateral efforts to achieve statehood, citing that the Palestinians do not have a partner for peace in Netanyahu. Whereas dissent will increase, apathy among the Reform leadership will perhaps decrease; however, Reform congregants may become disillusioned with the Israeli government and may choose to distance themselves due to the increasing emotional exhaustion that comes with supporting Israel, especially when the policies of Israel fail to match Reform values.

In order to improve the relationship with the Israeli government, leaders may seek support from the president of Israel, who is a figurehead, picked to represent all of the people

² Richard Jacobs, "Rabbi Rick Jacobs Responds to Israeli Election Results," *Union for Reform Judaism*, March 18, 2015, http://urj.org/about/union/pr/2015/?syspage=article&item_id=116901.

and not politics. Though Moshe Katsav was hostile towards the Reform movement, his successor, Shimon Peres enjoyed a strong friendship with the movement. Peres was followed by Reuven Rivlin in 2014 as president, the former Likud Knesset member, who had been so hostile towards the Reform rabbinate. Since taking office, Rivlin has been an outspoken advocate against violence and racism towards Israel's Arab citizens, earning him respect from liberal Jews. Though it happened before his election, in January 2014, a Reform synagogue in Ra'anana was vandalized and heavily damaged. Should such an act take place again during Rivlin's seven year term as president, which is likely, his reaction could dictate much of the relationship between Israel and the progressive movements. Rivlin has met closely with Rick Jacobs, following Jacobs' open letter in *Haaretz* congratulating Rivlin on his victory, but urging him to change his attitude about Reform Judaism from years past. The president, who once compared Reform Judaism to idol worship and Protestantism, met with Jacobs and leaders of HUC in November 2014, saying, "I can say to all of you, we are one family and the connection between all Jews, all over the world, is very important to the State of Israel. I welcome you here, and want to tell you that I know so many Jerusalemites now that are grandfathers and grandmothers, and only came here to study at the Hebrew Union College, but have now been here for three generations."³ Rivlin is taking strides in the right direction for building a partnership with the Reform rabbinate, but has yet to support the recognition of Reform rabbis.

Another factor that will determine the fate of the relationship between the Reform movement and Israel will be Iran's suspected quest for a nuclear bomb. In 1948, 1967 and 1973,

³ "Israel President Reuven Rivlin Hosts North American and Israeli Reform Movement Leaders of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem," *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*, November 11, 2014, <http://huc.edu/news/2014/11/11/israel-president-reuven-rivlin-hosts-north-american-and-israeli-reform-movement>.

Reform rabbis rallied for Israel when its existence was threatened; however, with the wars of 1956, 1982, 2006, the two Intifadas, and the two major wars in Gaza in 2008-2009 and 2014, when Israel's existence was not threatened, the response by American leaders and Reform rabbis has varied. Should Iran launch a war with the mission of annihilating Israel, the Reform rabbinate would likely respond as it did in the Six-Day War, an all-out effort for saving Israel.

As part of the research for this thesis, I looked at the resolutions listed on the CCAR website and analyzed them. The resolutions from 1889-1972 were grouped together and not listed according to year. It seemed too that they also did not include all of the resolutions as 213 resolutions were listed, only 12 of which were about Zionism. The website contained the various resolutions by year from 1973 to 2010, with some years not listing any resolutions. Between 1973 and 2010, 164 resolutions posted had Israel or Zionism as a focal point, with 425 resolutions on other issues (see Figure 1).

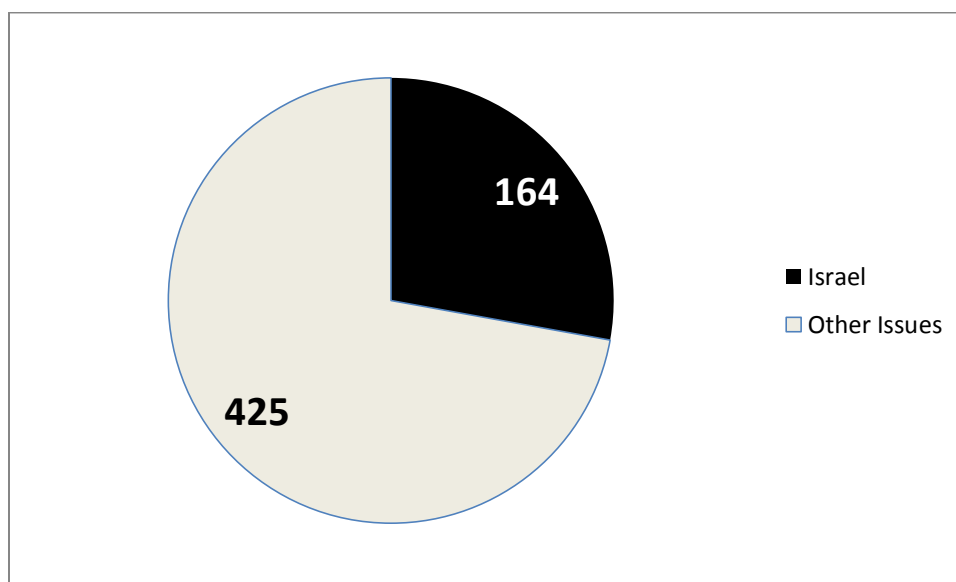


Figure 1: of the 589 CCAR resolutions listed on the CCAR website between 1973 and 2010, 164 were in regards to Israel

I read through every resolution on Israel and using my own evaluation, I determined whether or not the resolution was in support of Israel, critical of the Israeli government, mixed reaction with condemnation and support in the same resolution, or neutral. This evaluation was fairly subjective, as for instance, the Reform movement may write a statement criticizing an action such as not recognizing the Reform rabbinate, while an Orthodox group would see that scenario as praiseworthy. As Figure 2 shows, the overwhelming majority of CCAR resolutions regarding Israel were in support of Zionism and Israel.

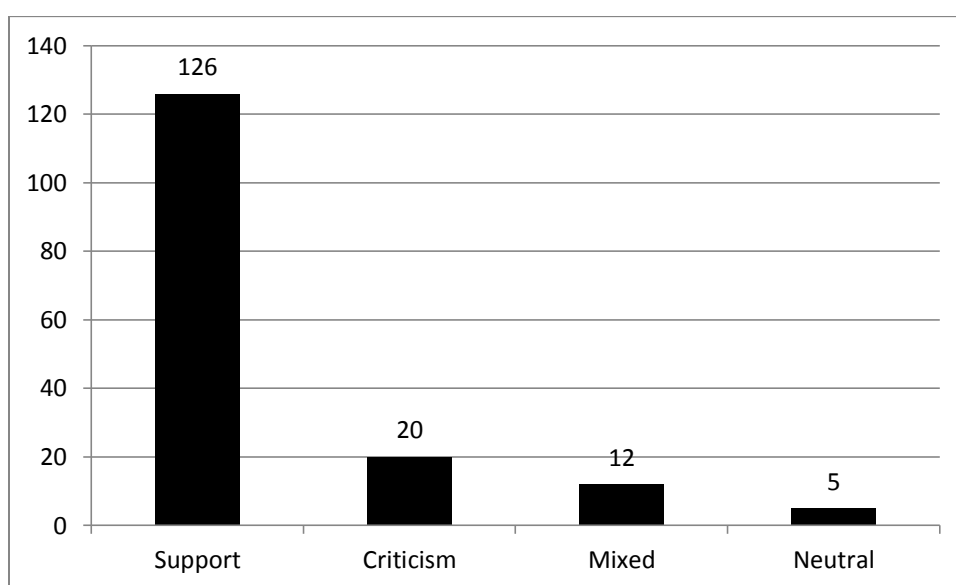


Figure 2: Resolutions regarding Israel 1973-2010

The resolutions ranged on a variety of topics. One category was on settlement and absorption, which was predominately encouraging *aliyah* and the absorption of Jews from Muslim lands, the Soviet Union and Ethiopia. The topic that received the most resolutions was about the Arab-Israeli conflict, which included any resolutions on peace negotiations, war, and settlements in the occupied territories; these resolutions typically encouraged peace talks, while supporting Israel over the Arab parties. Settlement resolutions often condemned settlements, but supported a unified Jerusalem. The second largest category of resolutions had to do with the upbuilding of the Reform movement in Israel, which includes travel to Israel, support for the

IMPJ, ARZA, and HUC in Jerusalem. The third largest category had to do with the topic of religious pluralism, and most often, the lack of recognition of Reform rabbis. This category received numerous critical resolutions regarding Israel's position on the Reform rabbinate, acts of discrimination, and proposed legislative changes to the Law of Return. Other categories included social issues, US-Israel relations, tributes and celebratory or commemorative resolutions, and general position statements on Israel (see Figure 3 for tallies). On the resolutions for US-Israel relations, many supported the US on its efforts for peace negotiations (deemed positive), while others criticized the United States over issues such as arms dealings to Arab countries or the sentencing of Jonathan Pollard (deemed positive for Israel also). While some resolutions addressed numerous issues, I categorized the resolutions based off of the most central issue to the resolution.

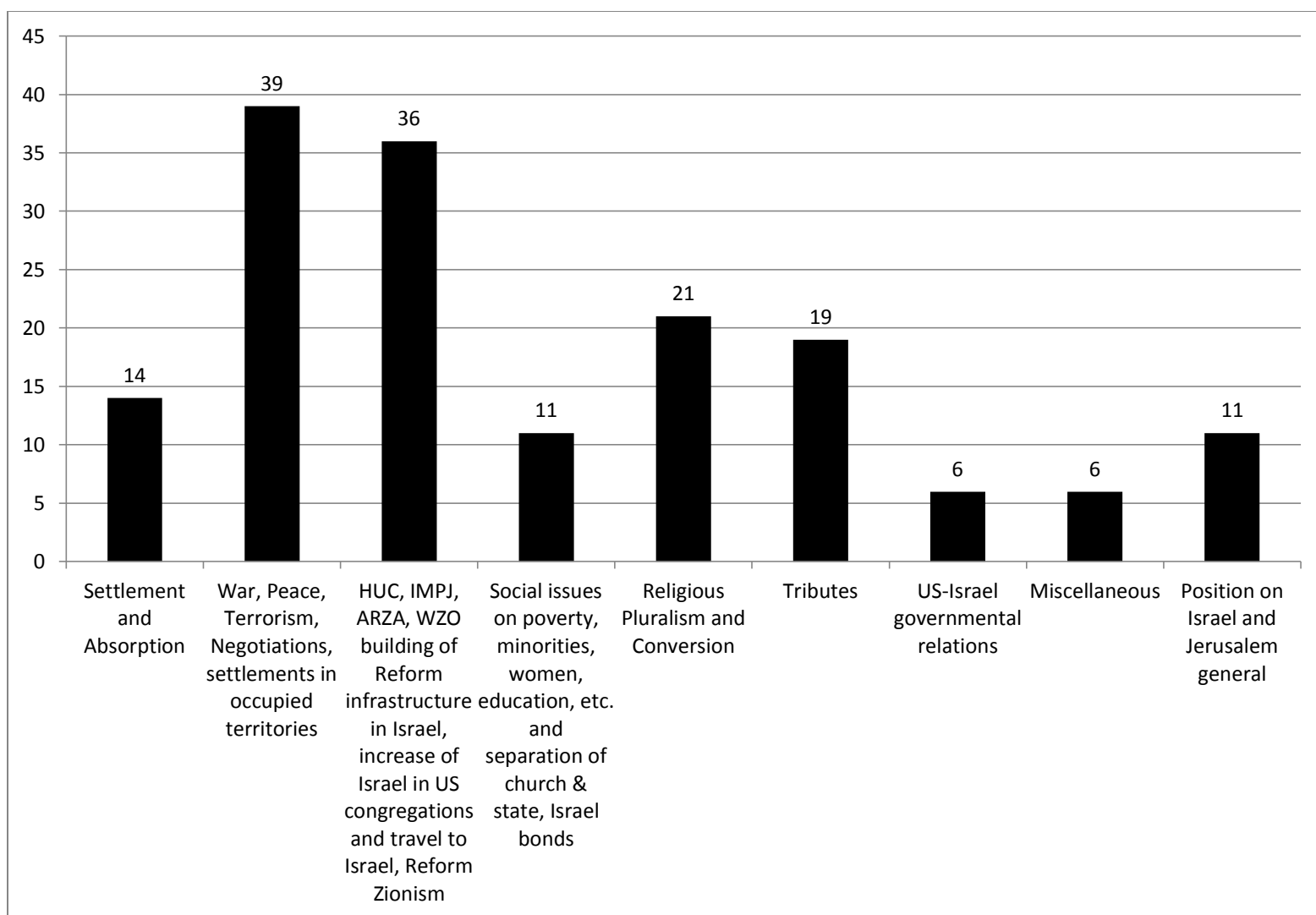


Figure 3: Specific topics of Israel-related resolutions 1973-2010.

As one can see from Figure 4, the proportion of Israel-related resolutions from 1990 to 2009 is higher than it was from 1973 to 1989. The past two decades have had greater focus on peace negotiations and also more media exposure to problems within Israeli society, including wars and the Second Intifada. Figure 5 shows that as time has progressed, the CCAR has grown more comfortable criticizing the Israeli government, with higher proportions of critical resolutions with each passing decade. In the days of “Israelolotry” post Yom Kippur War, the resolutions were unanimously in support for Israel. As peace agreements collapsed and more efforts were taken to delegitimize the Reform movement, the criticism by the CCAR increased.

One can look at this as a disengaging and distancing with Israel, but as we see still mostly positive resolutions and a higher percentage of resolutions being on Israel, it appears that Reform rabbis are actually becoming more greatly invested in Israeli society, including the challenges that Israel faces.

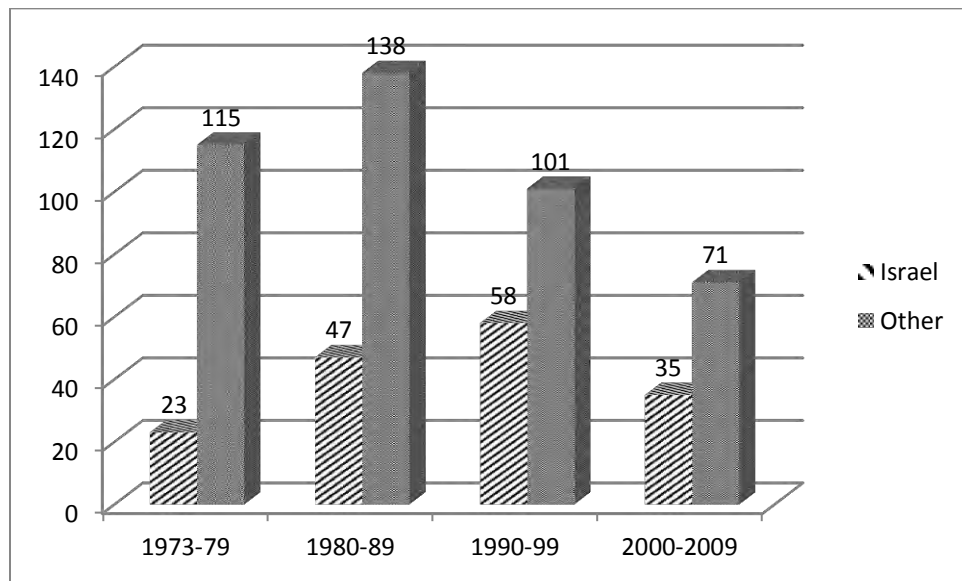


Figure 4: Resolutions by year on Israel versus other issues

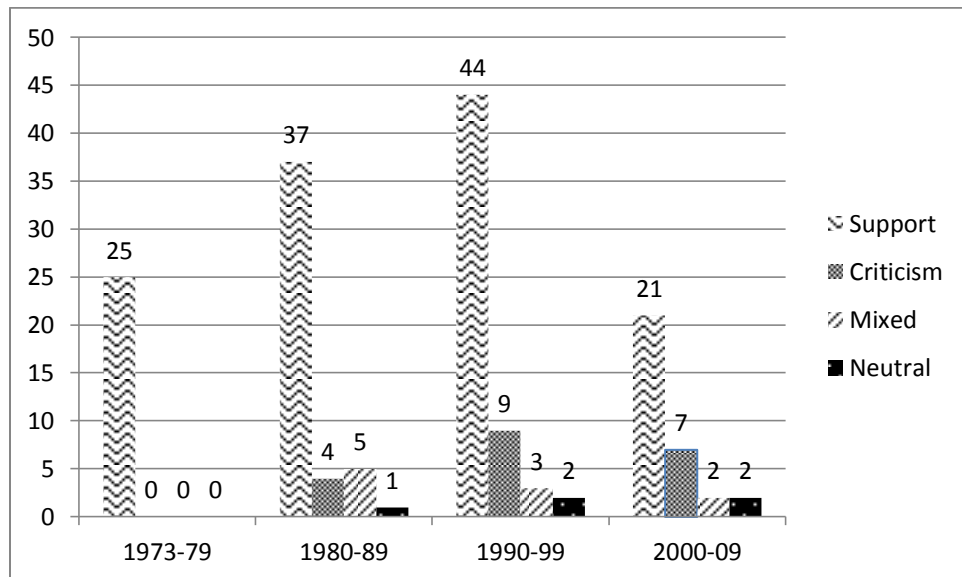


Figure 5: Resolutions by year in terms of support or criticism of Israel

Figure 6 shows that more resolutions criticizing Israel by the CCAR have come under Likud administrations, both in terms of numbers and percentage, than the Labor Party. Included is also Kadima's short time in power, which saw Israel engage in two wars and the peace process become more difficult. However, Kadima's time running the government was so short, and the party has practically disappeared less than ten years after its creation, so comparing it with Labor and Likud does not accurately represent the CCAR's relationship with Israel. With Netanyahu pandering to the religious parties, opposing Obama, and now stating his opposition to a two-state solution, should the Likud Party (in which, Netanyahu is more moderate than many of its members) maintain power, the likelihood of dissent between the Reform rabbinate and the Israeli government is greater. This result would not mean that the CCAR would disengage with Israel though; rather, should a rightwing government maintain control, it is likely that the Reform rabbinate will become more involved in organizations like J Street and NGO's that are critical of the Israeli government. Should a leftwing government become elected, the Reform rabbinate may seize it as an opportunity to push for recognition of Reform rabbis and other social issues within Israel. The leftwing coalition could ignite a rekindling of love and excitement between liberal Jews and Israel, as was seen in the years following the Six-Day War and during the Oslo Accords. However, as Israel becomes less of a state in need of repair, the rabbinate may turn their attention elsewhere, yet view Israel through more favorable eyes.

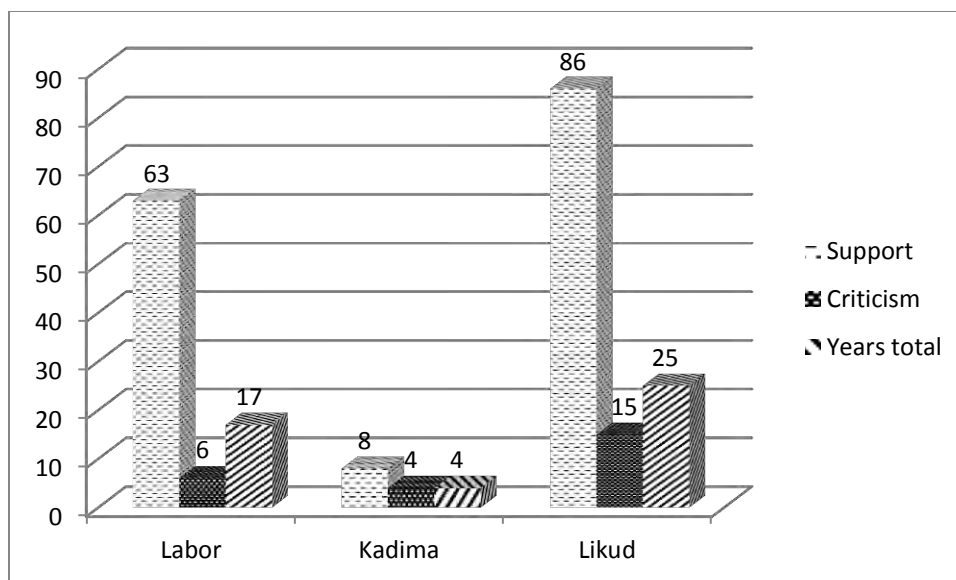


Figure 6: Showing the support and criticism by the CCAR resolutions by administration with the total number of years the party held power from 1973-2010. In years where two parties held power, the numbers were added to both parties' totals.

In an online survey of 552 rabbis published in 2013 by Steven M. Cohen and Rabbi Jason Gitlin, it was seen that the rabbinate may be on a collision course with Netanyahu, but is strongly supportive of Israel. Most of the survey takers were older men, with 94.5% of respondents being over the age of 35, and over half of respondents being over the age of 55. Of the 384 people who answered the question, 51.6% of respondents identified themselves as Reform rabbis, 28.9% Conservative, 3.9% Reconstructionist and 2.1% Orthodox. Only 8.3% of respondents characterized themselves as being politically conservative, with 59.4% identifying as liberals, and 78.5% stating that they were Democrats. At the time, 77.4% had some degree of support for President Obama's handling of Israel, while 88% supported a settlement freeze in the West Bank to some extent. A majority of respondents put most of the blame for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the Palestinian leadership, while an overwhelming majority stated that they believed that to some degree, the Israeli government wants peace with the Palestinians. It would be interesting to see how these numbers have changed, if at all, over the past month with the public disagreement between Obama and Netanyahu on Iran and Netanyahu's backtracking on support

for a two-state solution. In this regard, support for the president may go down among some, while others may doubt Netanyahu's true desire for a peaceful solution with the Palestinians.

The rabbis surveyed stated that most had a favorable opinion of both J Street and AIPAC, yet the numbers for great extent of support for AIPAC were significantly higher than for other groups. J Street enjoyed less support than AIPAC, as it is a more polarized organization, and likewise, the rightwing ZOA had the least amount of support, with most rabbis indicating that they have no opinion or support of the organization. The rabbis also perceived their congregants to have mostly favorable views of AIPAC and J Street, with most rabbis believing that the majority of their community overwhelmingly supports AIPAC to some degree. The majority also believed that their lay community had little to somewhat sympathy towards J Street, but, again, a much higher percentage being negative towards the organization, versus only 2.7% for AIPAC (see Figure 7 for full results). However, going back to the research conducted by Cohen among JTS students in chapter six, J Street enjoyed greater support among younger rabbis, and AIPAC less support; the data from the survey below is from a predominately older generation of rabbis. The 2013 Cohen-Gitlin survey showed that *Haaretz* was the most commonly read online paper on Israel by rabbis (45.8% reporting that they frequently read *Haaretz*), and *The Jerusalem Post* second highest (32.8% frequently reading). Theodore Sasson's analysis (see chapter six) showed that left-leaning *Haaretz* portrayed J Street in a more positive/neutral light and AIPAC in a more negative/neutral light. Therefore, as J Street gains prominence, especially should there be continued stall on the Palestinian peace negotiations and a rightwing government, should younger rabbis continue to read *Haaretz* frequently, J Street's popularity will continue to grow. As *Haaretz* has had to resort to charging for people to read many of its online articles, though

The Jerusalem Post, *Y Net*, and the new *Times of Israel* do not, its popularity may decline in the coming years, changing the bias of information that American Jews receive on Israeli news.

Among Rabbis					
	Great extent	Somewhat	Little	Not at all	Not sure
Sympathetic to AIPAC	36.0%	29.3%	22.8%	10.7%	1.2%
Sympathetic to J Street	21.7%	26.4%	20.9%	27.4%	3.7%
Sympathetic to the ZOA	6.5%	13.2%	16.3%	43.3%	20.7%
Rabbis' perception of the views of their congregants and lay leaders					
Sympathetic to AIPAC	41.5%	35.5%	11.1%	2.7%	9.2%
Sympathetic to J Street	8.1%	27.8%	31.0%	19.4%	13.7%
Sympathetic to the ZOA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Figure 7: Chart showing perceived support for AIPAC, J Street and the ZOA among rabbis and their congregants.

The future of the Reform rabbinate though will be one that is connected to Israel, as the new incoming rabbis, though having grown up with a different narrative than their predecessors, were raised in communities whose rabbis largely connected with Israel. The Cohen-Gitlin study showed that 97.1% of rabbis have been to Israel at least twice, with 70.1% having visited within the past three years. An overwhelming 90.7% of respondents had also studied in Israel at some point in time. Every rabbi survey felt a degree of attachment to Israel, with 92.7% saying that they were “very attached” to the Jewish State. Jews having grown up in these rabbis’ congregations were likely exposed to Israel as well, with 76.5% of rabbis saying that in the past three years, some education was offered on Israel to the community and 72.5% reporting that the congregation traveled to Israel, or that a trip is currently being planned, in the past three years.

The rabbis reported that at least 87.5% of them had given a sermon on Israel in the past year, 31.4% claiming over six sermons focused around Israel in that time period.⁴

American Jews are also getting to travel to Israel more and interact with Israelis, largely due to the hundreds of thousands of young American Jews who have traveled to Israel on a free, organized trip that promotes a love of Israel, called Birthright. The name of this 21st century program attaches the Jews, often targeting more assimilated ones, with their heritage and includes a several day component of interacting with Israelis of the same age, often soldiers. The soldiers present the polar opposite of the way that they are portrayed in the media to the participants and befriend them. 31,000 North American Jews traveled to Israel in 2012 on Birthright, which met its target for ensuring that at the same rate of travel, half of all American Jewish young adults will have participated in an educational trip to Israel in the coming year. A 2010 survey showed that 40% of American Jews between 18 and 29 had visited Israel, half of whom on a Birthright program.⁵ Birthright participants were more likely to feel connected to Israel, marry Jews and become active in Jewish communal life than those who had not had a Birthright experience. Today, 250,000 American Jews travel to Israel each year, the highest number ever.⁶ Young leadership also shown an increase in involvement with Israel; whereas 30% of older Jewish leaders had studied in Israel and 21% rated their Hebrew as good, 56% of young American Jewish leaders had done a long-term study program in Israel and 48% described their Hebrew as “good” or “excellent”.⁷ A large number of these young leaders had been on a Masa program, which is a subsidized long term work, study or volunteer program in Israel. The

⁴ Steven M. Cohen and Jason Gitlin, “Reluctant or Repressed?: Aversion to Expressing Views on Israel Among American Rabbis,” *Jewish Council for Public Affairs*, October 2013, <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3075>.

⁵ Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 104-105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

Israeli government helps fund both Masa programs and Birthright trips in order to engage Diaspora Jews. The HUC Year in Israel Program is also subsidized by Masa, as are other non-Orthodox programs, and the Reform movement has its own track of Birthright trips. In these evaluations, those engrained heavily enough in the Jewish community to pursue the rabbinate are likely to have been to Israel, learned about Israel in their communities and had interaction with Israelis. Unlike the prevalent non-Zionists and anti-Zionists of a century ago, the next generation of Jewish leaders will have mostly had significant encounters with Israel and not be apathetic to the concerns of the Jewish State or its relationship with worldwide Jews.

However, for Jews who are largely assimilated and unaffiliated, there is likely to be a growing disconnect with Israel. For a long time, the United States has been, in Richard Hirsch's analogy, like Babylon of Talmudic times. The Jews of Babylon were the main political and financial supporters of the Jews in the Land of Israel, and the power mostly was in the Diaspora.⁸ Yet, as most of these supporters were of the progressive movements that are not recognized by the Israeli government as legitimate, support for Israel among many Reform Jews has come to feel like taxation without representation. As a result of diasporic communities in which Jews represent a small minority, rates of intermarriage continue to rise, and with the struggles of the economy and Jews affiliating with synagogues less, fewer people are choosing to go into Jewish professions. The absence of wars where Israel's survival is at stake and the crises of Jews in the Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Muslim world has also decreased the sense of urgency for American Jews to support Israel. If Israel makes peace with its neighbors there may be less reason to dissent, but also, Israel will be less at the forefront of the minds of Jews and the media, perhaps causing a distancing between the Diaspora and Israel.

⁸Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, xxiv.

As intermarriage increases, the association with peoplehood is likely to decrease, and Reform Jews may revert back to the old rejection of peoplehood and Zionism on this account, which is what Rabbi Howard Berman sees happening. Berman is the head of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, a minority part of the Reform movement that holds ideology and practices more similar to the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform (no *kippot*, more English in services, and non-Zionism). Berman stated that his connection with Israel is solely that it is a place where people who worship the same God and read the same texts as him can live safely, but his allegiance is solely to the United States and his ethnicity is American. He continued that as a majority of Reform Jews who marry today marry non-Jewish people, the idea of peoplehood is becoming obsolete. Berman explained that for many children in the Reform movement, and many emerging rabbis, ethnically, they are only 25% or 50% Jewish, yet their hearts are 100% Jewish, and this standard is why we consider them Jews. Israel as a place for the Jewish people will not be relatable to the future of the Reform Jewish community, Berman explained.⁹ It is true that intermarried Jews have significantly lower attachment to Israel than Jews who have married other Jews, and the rising rate of intermarriage makes this statistic a cause for concern. As the Reform movement has higher levels of intermarriage than the Conservative and Orthodox movements, it comes as little shock that Reform Jews are the least attached to Israel of these three movements.¹⁰ For American Jews who view Jewish peoplehood and Zionism in this light, they will become a normalized Diaspora, like Irish-Americans, who say that their family originally came from Ireland, but have little connection, no loyalty, and likely have never been to that country. However, with the trends of young Jewish leaders becoming increasingly engaged in Israel, only a rare person that Berman described will go on to become a Reform rabbi.

⁹ Howard Berman, discussion with author, November 12, 2014.

¹⁰ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 141.

Should Israel continue to not recognize the Reform movement and its marriages and conversions, disengagement with Israel will rise among lay people. Only 6-10% of the Diaspora population is Orthodox, yet only recognizing this movement makes the “Jewish State” belong to a small minority of the Jewish people.¹¹ Within Israel, the numbers are not greatly different, as the ultra-Orthodox population comprised 11% of the total numbers of Israel in 2011; however, this number is expected to rise to 17% by 2020, as ultra-Orthodox families average 6.5 children per family, compared to 2.6 children in secular Israeli homes.¹² Professor Sergio DellaPergola estimates that by the year 2050, 8.23 million Jews will be living in Israel, making up 55% of the world’s Jewish population, with another 6.251 million in the Diaspora (5.036 million in the United States and Canada).¹³ In order for Israel to be the Jewish State, it must recognize the largest branch of Diaspora Judaism, instead of the smallest of the three main branches, which does not reflect the views of most of its own citizens. Should Israel fail to do this action, and also fail to recognize patrilineal descent, which the Reform movement did in 1983, there will be a crisis on hand. Millions of Jews already, and this number will only increase in the Diaspora (it is still large with the Russians in Israel) are unable to marry in Israel, as they are not recognized as Jews. Should this law not change, it will destroy the purpose of the state; Diaspora Jews will disconnect with Israel (the lay population, not the rabbinate, but this will decrease the quality of the Reform rabbinate), and Jewish peoplehood will no longer exist. This logic means that the fate of the Diaspora community, including the Reform rabbinate, and the State of Israel are interdependent. Currently, this situation has caused many Reform Jews to not feel welcome living in Israel. They feel degraded and treated as second-class citizens, and their status becomes a human rights issue, the most important notion of Reform Judaism, which includes democracy

¹¹ Hirsch, *For the Sake of Zion*, 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*

and religious pluralism. Emerging Reform rabbis have faced such discrimination while studying in the politically conservative, religious-dominated city of Jerusalem, causing discontent among the next generation of leaders with Israeli policies. They came from the United States where they were role models in the Jewish community, possibly facing anti-Semitism at times, and arrived in the Jewish State, where they were called “*goyim*.” Their connection to Israel may not wane, but their sense of betrayal of the utopian place where all Jews are friends that they learned about in religious school creates a lasting wound in their hearts.

Like the Birthright model of having Diaspora Jews and Israelis encounter each other to promote a connection, the Reform movement has made this idea part of their focus in engaging their young congregants with Israel. Rabbis are leading trips, promoting study abroad programs for high school students through the Reform EIE Israel program, as well as the NFTY in Israel five-week summer tour of Israel, which includes having Israeli high school students join the trip. Rabbis have also brought *shlichim*, Israeli emissaries into their communities for their congregants to know an Israeli and to engage with Israeli programs. They have Israeli flags in the synagogue, often on the *bimah*, read a prayer for the State of Israel, which is in Reform prayer books, and lead synagogue delegation trips to AIPAC and J Street policy conferences. Rabbis are including in their contracts sabbaticals to study in Israel and also annual programs lasting several weeks of intensive study in Israel through organizations such as the Shalom Hartman Institute, which brings rabbis from different denominations together for an intensive study of Jewish texts and their relation to issues in Israeli society. Rabbi Donald Goor is the rabbi emeritus of Temple Judea in Tarzana, California, who after retiring, moved to Israel and works for ARZA’s educational travel agency, organizing congregational trips to Israel. Goor said that young American Jews are not as interested in the idea of peoplehood and why historically

Israel is important, and that in order to engage them, rabbis much introduce them to cultural activities such as the Jerusalem Beer Festival or Israel's filmmaking scene. By engaging their interests, they can form a connection to Israel as Jews and as people who enjoy Israel out of pure interest.¹⁴ Interaction causes Jews to connect with Israel and also, as American Jews have gone on experiences such as Encounter, they have had increasing interaction with Arabs and challenges facing Israel, viewing Israel through a more critical lens. Leon Kronish promoted the philosophy of interaction in the January 1977 article of *Jewish Frontier Magazine* with his "Ten Zionist Mitzvot":¹⁵

1. Visit Israel as much as possible, every 7 years fulfills the mitzvah, it is great for celebrations such as weddings and B'nei Mitzvahs
2. Encourage youth to study and work in Israel on programs
3. Read classic Zionist literature and know the biblical roots of Zionism
4. Study Hebrew and know basic Hebrew terms and phrases, every American Jew should join an *ulpan*
5. Join some branch of the Zionist movement
6. Make contributions to some organization supporting Israel
7. Take political action through lobbying our elected representatives to help Israel diplomatically, militarily, and financially to ensure Israel's survival
8. Uphold and remind others of Israel's right to exist as an independent state
9. Celebrate Israeli culture (songs, literature, Hebrew, Israeli holidays, food, etc.)
10. Maintain relationships with people in Israel

The tenth commandment on Kronish's list is perhaps the best way for American Jews to maintain a connection with Israel. When they see images of a war taking place in Israel, they do not see it as another news story, but instead, they picture their friends who are living in bomb shelters or fighting on the front lines.

Reform rabbis have also tried to inspire a connection with Israel by connecting holidays with Israel. Synagogues put a focus on Yom HaAtzmaut, Yom HaZikron and Yom HaShoah, the Israeli holidays, as well as eating Israeli fruits for Tu B'Shevat, *sufganiot* (Israeli jelly donuts) at

¹⁴ Donald Goor, personal communication with author, January 5, 2015.

¹⁵ Leon Kronish, "Ten Zionist Mitzvot," in *Towards the Twenty-First Century: Judaism and the Jewish People in Israel and America; Essays in Honor of Rabbi Leon Kronish on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ronald Kronish (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1988), 317-318.

Chanukkah, and connecting Israel with other holidays such as Passover (as seen in Kronish's supplement seder) and Shavuot. However, the *New Union Haggadah*, the Society for Classical Reform Judaism's 2014 publication, omits the phrase "Next year in Jerusalem" in English, rather saying, "Next year peace for Jerusalem and all of the world"¹⁶ on the non-Zionist standing that we should not yearn to gather in Jerusalem, but rather our home is in the United States; we should be praying for the entire world to be in peace. For many Reform Jews, "Next year in Jerusalem" is said more as a metaphor than an actual desire to return to Israel. They yearn for peace and for Jerusalem to be a place that reflects the values of the Reform movement. Like David Ben-Gurion and other founders of Israel, many Reform Jews are "believing atheists," who want a social democratic state that is free from religious law, yet, committed to Jewish values and heritage. In Israel, people who want this vision are often called *Yehudim Khofshim*, Free Jews, as they deeply identify and connect with Judaism, but at the same time, do not want to be controlled by, or have their country run in accordance with, strict Jewish law. In the United States, these people are progressive Jews.

The aim of Ahad Ha'am's vision of Cultural Zionism is that the prophetic message of *Tikkun Olam* will turn Israel not into a state ruled by Jewish biblical law or a secular state for the Jews, but instead a state that is reflective of what it means to be a Jew internally in the way that we treat others. By biblical law, this statement is referring more to the practices of Judaism, such as people in a free country should not be forced under penalty of prosecution to keep kosher, nor should homosexuality be outlawed, let alone a capital offense. However, ethical commandments of the way that we treat others must be upheld; the verse of Torah that is read on Yom Kippur,

¹⁶ Howard A. Berman and Benjamin Zeidman, *The New Union Haggadah, Revised Edition*, (New York: CCAR Press, 2014), 70.

“Love your neighbor as yourself”¹⁷ must be central to the core of the Jewish State in order for Reform Jews to feel that it is a state that represents them. The vision of Reform Zionism is having a Jewish state with a society in which the prophetic ideas of Judaism will be integrated with the democratic idea of equality for all; the society must be Jewish and democratic. This ideology negates the idea of a state run by strict Jewish law, but at the same time, the state must be committed to Jewish values and maintain Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David in the flag to keep its Jewish component. For Reform Jews that truly follow Reform doctrine, Cultural Zionism is the only way. In Israel, most people identify themselves as secular rather than *Yehudim Khofshim*, and it is often the secular members of Knesset who attack the Reform rabbinate the most, going against the Leviticus quote by imposing rules that say that all must conform to one type of Judaism. It is distressing, but many in Israel feel as though they either need to advocate for a country completely free of religion, a country controlled by religious doctrine, or they are entirely apathetic. The Conservative American rabbi Arthur Herzberg referred to most Israelis as “Hebrew speaking *goyim*” for being uncommitted to some form of Cultural Zionism, despite many schools in Israel being named for Ahad Ha’am.¹⁸ In order for Reform and Cultural Zionism to take hold in Israel, it is essential that not only Reform Jews encounter Israelis, but that Israelis encounter Reform Jews, so that this ideology is not foreign, but rather, engrained into their own identities as Israelis and Jews. To accomplish this feat, the Reform movement needs to continue to build in Israel. IRAC and ARZA are making efforts to fulfill the Reform vision for what a Jewish state should look like, but they need more support from within Israel, rather than American donors. As of 2006, there were 25 Reform communities

¹⁷ Leviticus 19:18.

¹⁸ Michael Livni, "Reform Zionism and Its Implications." Union Progressiver Juden in Deutschland, Berlin, Germany, July 13 2006, address.

with 5000 members in Israel, compared to 900 congregations in North America.¹⁹ To accomplish the goal of building Reform Zionism, Reform Zionists must see themselves like the *Khalutzim*, the pioneers who came to Palestine and built a state based on their vision, persevering despite the seemingly infinite number of obstacles before them. For the past nearly fifty years, the settler movement has modeled the *khalutz* vision, and the Reform movement must as well, not seeing the situation as hopeless. Reform rabbis must keep in mind the biblical quote, “Without vision, the people become unruly.”²⁰ Without vision, the Reform movement in Israel will crumble, as will the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel.

Part of maintaining a vision as a movement connected to Israel and being a visionary leader means knowing when and how to speak out when disagreeing with the policies of the Israeli government. In today’s society and going forward, many disagree with Israel’s policies frequently from the pulpit. However, there are others who will openly criticize and disagree with Israel’s lack of recognition of Reform rabbis, as this affects our movement and the Diaspora, who are told that their Judaism is not part of what it means to be a Jewish state, yet they will not criticize other policies of Israel, such as defense. As American rabbis, who live in often nice American suburbs, the idea of living daily with the threat of terrorism or people who are trying to destroy our country is foreign to us. Since American Jews do not vote in Israeli elections, do not face the same day-to-day struggles as Israelis, and do not have to live with the consequences of the policies of the Israeli government, some see it as unfair to openly criticize these policies or Israeli leaders. Rabbi Rick Block of Cleveland was CCAR president from 2013 until 2015. In 2014, he gave a sermon that stirred controversy at the CCAR conference, which said:

As an American, I am profoundly aware of this country’s flaws and critical of policies and decisions of the current and prior administrations. Nonetheless, I love America wholeheartedly. I believe in its uniqueness and essential goodness.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Proverbs 29:18.

I feel the same way about Israel.... There are aspects of Israel I find annoying, demoralizing, even horrifying. I support ARZA, IRAC, IMPJ, and the World Union, and I urge you, especially, to promote and campaign actively for the ARZA slate in the forthcoming WZO elections, because our Movement's funding in Israel depends on it, and because there are things about Israeli law and society that absolutely *must* change. However, these feelings are manifestations of my bond with Israel, not impediments to it, and they are overwhelmed by the pride I feel at what is admirable, exemplary, even miraculous about the Jewish state. When I have a quarrel with Israel, it is a lover's quarrel.

But while criticism and attachment can surely co-exist, there are proper and improper times, places, and ways to critique others, if we want our admonitions to be heard and to do more good than harm. The Torah commands, "Reprove your neighbor, but incur no guilt because of him." Rashi explains: Rebuke him, but do not shame him publically. Going further, the Talmud likens those who embarrass others in public to shedders of blood.

Israel needs a many things, but one thing it does not need is more public criticism, which is ubiquitous. Some is legitimate, but lacks context. Much of it is exaggerated, unfair, uninformed, or plainly wrong. Increasingly, it lurches from offensive to anti-Semitic, rationalizing the shortcomings of Israel's adversaries and ignoring the worst abuses of others, focusing exclusively and obsessively on the Jewish State.

....I cannot, in good conscience, associate with organizations on the left, even those defining themselves as pro-Israel, that welcome and provide a forum to supporters of BDS, engage in public criticism of Israel heedless of how that criticism is exploited by her adversaries, prescribe policies its government should follow, and urge the US to pressure Israel to adopt them.

Where Israel is concerned, rabbis have a primary duty: to nurture *ahavat Yisrael* - love for, identification with, and attachment, loyalty and commitment to the Jewish state, its imperfections notwithstanding. The highest and best use of our pulpits and voices is not to focus on Israel's flaws, but on its virtues, to rebut distortions, oversimplifications, and falsehoods, to provide context and perspective, to inoculate those who will study on campuses rife with anti-Israel hostility and to support them once they get there.²¹

²¹ Richard A. Block, "Speaking of Israel: Rabbis and Freedom of the Pulpit," 125th Annual CCAR Convention, Chicago, Illinois, March 31, 2014, Sermon.

For Rabbi Block, it is important to remember the power that rabbis have over their congregations, and engaging in public criticism of Israel, will be counterproductive for a responsibility that rabbis have of loving Israel. Instead, rabbis should focus on ways not to point out, but rather showing how people should connect to Israel rather than disconnect. For all Jewish leaders, one's love of Israel should outweigh their criticism.

However, as Israel has become a more polarized topic, rabbis often feel a need to speak out for Israel when the government's policies do not align with their Jewish values, and at other times speak up for Israel when other faith communities, such as the Muslim and leftwing Christians, are calling on rabbis to condemn Israel. Reform Zionism differs from being pro-Israel in that the former requires one to be ideologically self-aware and committed to a movement of fulfilling a vision. In doing so, there are times when congregants are furious with rabbis for condemning Israel, while there are others who angry when the rabbi does not condemn actions by Israel. Unfortunately, this divisiveness has led to many rabbis being fearful of speaking about Israel from their pulpits. In the Cohen-Gitlin survey, 67.9% of rabbis said that at some point, they had not revealed their true feelings on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict out of fear of offending congregants; 10.5% of those surveyed said that they frequently avoided expressing their views on this topic. The total that said that they feared some sort of professional ramifications for their views on the conflict were 40.6%, with 5.3% fearing greatly. A lesser amount, 24.6%, but still nearly 1 of 4 rabbis, refrained from some sort of educational programming on Israel out of fear of creating controversy. With these fears in mind, 84.7% of respondents stated that it was important to some degree (55.1% very important) to sponsor

programs that promoted a range of views on Israel in order not to have a homogenous viewpoint in the congregation.²²

Finding a proper balance in criticizing and exalting Israel is a primary challenge for Reform rabbis going forward, and a lot of strategy and responsibility must go into choosing when and how to speak about Israel from the pulpit to promote a love of Israel, rather than demoralizing those who wish to love and connect with the state. It is important to recognize that the model for Israel advocacy has changed in the United States in three ways:

1. Personalization – American Jews increasingly relate to Israel personally and experientially rather than through communal organizations. Today’s American Jewish youth are more likely to travel to, study and volunteers in Israel. All ages are more likely to consume Israeli news and culture, and advocate on behalf of their own views.
2. Organizational diversification – Support for umbrella organizations (Jewish Agency, Federation, etc.) have declined, and are being replaced with numerous single-purpose organizations operating in philanthropy, tourism and advocacy fields (i.e., Israel Guide Dog Center for the Blind, or the LGBT Jewish organization that engages LGBT young Jewish adults with Israel called A Wider Bridge).
3. Polarization – American Jewish advocacy in relation to Israel has become increasingly polarized and contentious. The days of 1970’s centrist views are no longer dominant, and now there is greater diversity of groups to the right and left. It is unclear of what it means to be pro-Israel. Those on the right will say that J Street is anti-Israel because it criticizes Israel and undermines the prime minister, whereas J Street supporters say that they have Israel’s best interest at heart and those on the right are driving Israel off of a bridge.²³

Grappling with these changes, and in some ways, embracing them as successes and natural evolutions of the relationship between American Jews and Israel, will be an important way that Reform rabbis will dictate the future of the relationship between them, their movement and Israel. Cultural Zionism itself resulted from the collapse of the organic Jewish community as a result of emancipation, with the goal not of saving Jews but saving Judaism. Convincing every Reform Jew to be invested in Israel is an impossible task, but saving the Reform movement’s

²² Cohen and Gitlin, “Reluctant or Repressed?”

²³ Sasson, *The New American Zionism*, 5.

sacred relationship with Israel in the midst of challenging times ahead and a normalized diaspora will be the purpose of the Reform rabbinate's mission in terms of relating to their lay people.

The future of Reform Zionism as a movement, lead both by lay people and rabbis, will be to affirm a path to foster the synthesis between Judaism and democracy, which is dedicated to looking ahead to a day when this ideology is the way of life in Israel. Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid Party gave people this hope in the 2013 elections with its vision for religious pluralism, shown by its inclusion of ultra-Orthodox, secular, Reform, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Ethiopian, disabled, men and women members of Knesset, all promoting religious pluralism and peace, while maintaining a strong Jewish identity. Yesh Atid means "there is a future" and the future for them and for the Israelis who helped it become the second largest party in the Knesset in its first election was that of Reform Zionism.

Political Zionism ended in May 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, and now the state rather than a movement is responsible for the politics of the country. However, Cultural Zionism and Reform Zionism have a never ending goal of creating a Jewish national home in the Land of Israel in order to ensure the survival of the Jewish people. As there always have and will always be challenges for maintaining the survival of the Jewish people and religion, the Zionist movement will have to adapt along with those challenges in order to carry on. It was through this philosophy that the Reform movement as a religious stream came into being. The writing of this thesis, too, seems incomplete no matter how much information it contains, because as the times change the ways in which Reform rabbis interact with Israel for the sake of the Jewish people will need to change too. Just in the past weeks, as this conclusion alludes to, the relationship of the nearly 200 year history between Zionism and progressive Judaism has changed. The vision for what the Jewish State should look like will continue to be

discussed and debated, but the one constant that must always remain for the Reform rabbinate is the duty to love and promote love of Israel.

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