

Excerpts From:

# REFORM ZIONISM

**AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

**MICHAEL LIVNI (LANGER)**

**Section 6 - Reform Zionist  
Youth Movement in Israel**

# The Idea Behind the Ma'amad<sup>1</sup>

## ***The Function of Religious Worship — Then and Now***

The offering of sacrifices during the period of the First Temple and prayer as it developed during the period of the Second Temple served three main functions. Our forefathers were aware of two of them.

1. The attempt to relate to a given state of affairs — whether in terms of a calculated attempt to influence them or whether in terms of the psychological need to express one's felt desires and yearnings before a greater power (Belief in a God that hears one's prayers).
2. A ritual expression of individual and community commitment to live a life focused on the divine purpose — obeying God's commandments (fulfilling Mitzvot) as a means to the end of Tikun Olam — i.e., perfecting the world (Prayer as fulfilling Mitzva).

Religious worship also served an additional function — in particular after the destruction of the Second Temple. *It served as the social focus for ritual activity in which the norms and values of Judaism were subsumed.*

In pre-modern times (before emancipation in terms of Jewish history) the norm of human social organization was a communal unit whose magnitude varied from tens to hundreds. Even cities were made up of communal units. The Jews constituted one community in the pre-modern city. The pre-modern communities — whether urban or rural — were characterized by inter-relationships of mutual responsibility between members which permeated all aspects of daily life.

Generally, the social basis for the community was the extended family, most often some variation of the patriarchal clan or groups of such clans. In the medieval cities the basis for the communal units could also be the guild — a kind of trade union. Carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths, etc., all had their guilds which were often based on family ties as well. Each guild had responsibility for determining standards for its particular vocation as well as maintaining a network of

1. In "Met'fila L'Ma'amad," *Tzofei-Telem*, 1982, revised 1987 (translated from the Hebrew).  
Ma'amad can be translated as a ritual including creative prayer and other cultural content.

mutual assistance for its members. In many cases the guild members and their families also worshiped together in the same church.

An integral part of the pre-modern community was its religious culture through which the community symbolically expressed its values. In this sense, the Jewish community in the pre-modern city also constituted a kind of “guild.”

In the last few hundred years mass society has emerged to take the place of the social-communal frameworks described above. Mass society is characterized by large numbers of people (masses) — individuals or nuclear families (father, mother, children) — living “together” in the modern city. But the “togetherness” is purely geographical — there is no communal network of mutual responsibility and caring which is the essence of community. To a large extent the culture of the mass society becomes mass culture — modulated by the means of mass communication. Such culture has been antithetical to the existence of a community of mutual responsibility and common life-goals.

It was always the “hidden” purpose of religious worship in Jewish society to constitute the social-communal situation in which spiritual togetherness and the shared sense of ultimate purpose found its daily expression. The passing of the pre-modern social-communal life style has meant the removal of the social basis for this cultural togetherness. The religious culture of Judaism, bereft of a base in communal togetherness, lost much of its vitality and meaning for the individual. This process was catalyzed by the inherent skepticism of modernity regarding traditional forms. Nor did Diaspora Judaism, in the absence of a national homeland, have the ability to partially compensate for this vacuum by substituting an element of national togetherness as a substitute for the lost communal togetherness.

### ***Ma’amad: The Renewal of Religious Worship in Community***

The Ma’amad constitutes both a means and an end.

In Tofei Telem the Ma’amad is a form of religious worship which seeks to confront the problem of religious worship and identity that faces Jews who do not have a commitment to Halacha.

1. For some, the Ma’amad takes the place of traditional prayer in the sense that its content and style reflect contemporary language and experiential situations and relates to the vision/s of our generation.
2. As an event, the Ma’amad constitutes the socio-cultural focus of being “together.” But the purpose of the Ma’amad is not just to bring movement members together, technically so to speak, in order to worship together.

Rather, the Ma'amad should be understood as both search and expression of the movement and its individual members for a Jewish identity relevant to themselves. Within the context of the present reality, the togetherness of the Ma'amad must also bridge the varieties of belief and commitment among members of the youth movement regarding the nature of God.

3. Within the broader historical context, the Ma'amad symbolizes the attempt to renew Jewish religious creativity within the context of a movement committed to reform in all aspects of Jewish life: ritual, communal and national. Hence one might hope that the content of the Ma'amad will be influenced by the movement's striving to develop and personally be a part of the comprehensive Reform Zionist communities of the future.

### ***The Ma'amad as Symbol and Primary Experience***

The Ma'amad is a religious-cultural symbol of the youth movement's commitment to reform and the renewal of a Jewish way of life where spiritual expression and commitment are congruent with the social content of the everyday life within the community.

But what is the importance of the Ma'amad as a symbol? (What, in general, is the importance of symbols?) Symbols have a direct physical impact on our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Our ability to learn, to absorb ideas, develops gradually. We begin with our senses. It is only in the last few hundred years that we have become relatively cut off from our senses and emotions by the rational and scientific modern world. It has not necessarily made us more human.

The primary grasp of people and things via the senses stands in contrast to (but not necessarily in opposition to) our grasp of things by secondary processes of the intellect. For example, rational and ideological explanations of Judaism and/or movement are all secondary process. A major innovation of pioneering Zionism was the rejection of national experience mediated almost exclusively by secondary process.

A.D. Gordon demanded that the Jewish people return to their historical base of primary experience (Eretz Israel) and to primary occupations (such as agriculture and other fields involving manual labor) as a prerequisite for the renewal of Jewish creativity. Living national culture must have its roots in primary process (Chavaya) as distinct from secondary process (Hakara).

Unfortunately, in their rejection of the orthodox Judaism of Eastern Europe, the Labor Zionist pioneers who founded the Kibbutzim rejected all religious

ritual outright. It has only been now, some three generations later, that a particular school of thought and action has developed within Reform Zionism (in itself a newcomer to the Zionist scene) which has seen the necessity of translating synagogue-bound ritual into primary experience within the comprehensive togetherness of existence within community.

Our emotional attachments and beliefs relate first of all to symbols — the rational explanation comes afterwards. An instinctive understanding of this idea as an educational principle is evidenced by the recommendations of Tzofei Telem's Educational Council regarding the setting of the Ma'amad (in a natural setting, in a circle where everyone faces each other and possibly holds hands, with dramatic sketches and even dance). At present the Ma'amad does not fully exploit all of these possibilities.

The idea of the Ma'amad is still too new for us to predict its future. Can the innovation of the youth movement become a norm — not a static norm but one in on-going developmental tension — in the adult Reform Zionist communities that will emerge in the next generation? Only then will we be able to evaluate the significance of the Ma'amad as a phenomenon in Reform Judaism and Cultural Zionism.

## Appendix

### EXCERPTS FROM THE DECISIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL COUNCIL OF TZOFEI TELEM

#### 3rd Council, Kibbutz Yahel, Pesach 1981

#### *Discussion on Prayer*

Whereas in our opinion the term "t'fila" (prayer) in and of itself is not comprehensive enough, it was decided to introduce the term Ma'amad.

Ma'amad designates any gathering characterized by excerpts from prayer, poems, music prayer-study, individual meditation or any other form of expression by the gathering that emphasizes values.

1. A member of Telem Noar accepts the obligation to be present at the Ma'amadim (of movement events that he/she attends)
2. The Obligation Regarding Prayer at Conclaves
  1. At national conclaves there will be at least two Ma'amadim per day. One of them will be either evening prayer (arvit), morning prayer (shacharit) or afternoon prayer (mincha). The second can be as the first, prayer-study or some other Ma'amad.
  2. In Tzofei-Telem the friendship circle substitutes for scouting drill.<sup>1</sup>
3. On the Nature of the Ma'amad
  - Singing and playing musical instruments are to be emphasized.
  - The Ma'amad is to be held in natural settings as much as possible.
  - It is recommended to have the Ma'amad relate to events and situations reflecting current reality.
  - We view the inclusion of dance, drama and the arts in the Ma'amad with favor on the understanding that the purpose is to reinforce the specialness (holiness) of the Ma'amad.
  - We favor the reasonable balance of the traditional and the creative in the Ma'amad.
  - Regarding the text of prayers we direct:
    1. Changing all negative allusions to women, non-Jews, slaves.
    2. Change passages dealing with revival of the dead.

1. See Section 6:4.

3. Elimination of passages referring to Satan.
4. Introduction of the idea of the State of Israel.
5. Sidur: All Sidurim are a possible source for the Ma'amad but we recommend the use of Hebrew Sidurim that reflect the spirit of our decisions regarding text as detailed above.

### **4th Council, Leo Baeck High School, Haifa, Succot, 1981**

The subject of the nature of the Ma'amad was brought up for an additional discussion because it was felt that the guidelines of the previous council were inadequate. The discussion below deals with the Ma'amad which is to have the format of prayer.

#### ***Innovation and tradition in the Ma'amad T'fila***

1. We recommend that the daily Ma'amad T'fila be built according to the outline of the traditional prayer:

*Shachrit:* Morning Blessings, Psalms, the Shema and its Blessings, Amida, Torah Portion if indicated, Aleynu, Kaddish.

*Arvit:* The Shema and its blessings, Amida, Aleynu and Kaddish.

*Mincha:* Amida, Aleynu, Kaddish plus additions for Chagim.

2. In the Ma'amad T'fila the first Parasha of Kriat Shema is to be included as well as Amida – full or shortened version. All other parts can be substituted for by a creative passage reflecting similar content.
3. Regarding creativity, we recommend that members of Tzofei Telem compose prayers.